

**OPINION 6**  
DELHI SINKS IN CESSPOOL  
OF GOVERNMENT APATHY

**WORLD 8**  
'CHINA BEHIND 2021  
CYBERATTACK ON GOVT AGENCY'

**MONEY 10**  
STOCK MARKETS RISE  
FOR 4TH DAY

Published From  
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR  
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH  
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 20 Issue 209  
\*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable

BHUBANESWAR, THURSDAY AUGUST 1, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

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## CM refutes Shah's alert claim on Wayanad tragedy



Rescue operation underway following landslides triggered by heavy rain in the hilly areas of Wayanad district, on Wednesday

**KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■**  
NEW DELHI/KOCHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Wednesday asserted that advance warnings on heavy rainfall in Kerala were issued to the State Government at least a week ahead of the deadly landslides in Wayanad that have left a trail of death and destruction. Meanwhile, the Kerala Government alleged the Central Government agencies like Meteorological Department, Geological Survey of India failed miserably in issuing early warnings about the rainfall and landslides that struck the Wayanad district. "On July 18, it was forecast that Kerala's western coast



would experience above-normal rainfall. On July 25, it was forecast that there would be heavy rain. On July 23 itself, eight teams of the NDRF were sent to the region," Shah said. He informed Parliament that the Centre had sent eight teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) on July 23 to assist the Kerala Government in the

eventuality of any disaster. "When the landslides struck Wayanad, the NDRF teams got the green signal from the Collector and relief operations were launched immediately," the Home Minister said. Shah said about six years ago, experts from IIT-Delhi had suggested relocating people from the landslide-affected areas, but their advice was not heeded to. Even as the death toll in Tuesday's massive landslides crossed the 200 mark by Wednesday evening, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, reacted to Shah's statement. "This is not the time for blame game. There are 91 people undergoing treatment in various hospitals in the

district while 240 persons are missing. My Government has put 8,107 people in 82 relief camps in the district. The Meteorological Department had not issued any red alert about the rainfall or landslides. The red alert was issued by the GSI at 6 am on Tuesday hours after the landslide at Mundakkai. The landslides occurred at 2 am and 4.30 am on Tuesday. The Central Water Commission, which is the agency responsible for issuing flood warning, did not issue any such warning," alleged Vijayan. He said though the Central agencies had forecast 404 mm rainfall for a period of 48 hours, the region recorded 572 mm rainfall during the period.

## Crackdown on coaching centres mooted in Delhi

**RAJESH KUMAR ■** NEW DELHI

After the tragic death of three IAS aspirants by drowning in the basement of Rau's IAS study centre in Old Rajinder Nagar area, the Delhi Government is planning to relocate coaching centres in Narela and Rohini and develop it as an education hub. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has formed a high-level committee headed by Chief Secretary to address issues related to the regulation of coaching centres. The committee will prepare an action plan for shifting coaching institutes from various places to well-planned areas. Amid the IAS aspirants' protest for fourth day in a row against civic authorities and 'coaching mafia' near the Rau's coaching centre, braving scorching heat with their Mains exams less than one and a half months away, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) Additional Commissioner Tariq Thomas on Wednesday admitted the civic body's responsibility in the death of three students, stating that there are serious structural issues, which need to be addressed. Interacting with the protesting students at UPSC coaching hub in old Rajinder Nagar, the senior civic body official said there can be no



A police personnel interacts with students during a protest over the deaths of three civil services aspirants due to drowning at a coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar area, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

excuses for the incident and the agency should have done its duty better. Students who started their indefinite hunger strike on Tuesday ended it on Wednesday morning after their meeting with Thomas. Saxena has directed the Delhi Police Commissioner for cracking down on coaching institutes which take exorbitant rentals in cash transactions to evade tax. Besides, the Lieutenant Governor has directed that a portal be established, with Aadhar based log-in credentials of all coaching institutes in the city and the enrolled students. This would help create a transparent database which would help the Government in shaping the policy framework from time to time.

## Students' safety guidelines issued

**PNS ■** NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government on Wednesday issued guidelines for safety and security of school students in the aftermath of the Rajinder Nagar coaching centre flooding incident, which claimed the lives of three UPSC aspirants. According to the guidelines issued by the Directorate of Education (DoE), the schools — both private and government run — have to follow the provisions of Master Plan for Delhi, 2021 regarding use of basement in public buildings.



## Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh killed in Iran

**AP ■** BEIRUT

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed by a pre-dawn airstrike in the Iranian capital on Wednesday, Iran and the militant group said, blaming Israel for a shock assassination that risks escalating the conflict even as the US and other nations were scrambling to prevent an all-out regional war. Iran's supreme leader vowed revenge against Israel. There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has pledged to kill Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's October 7 attack on southern Israel. The strike came just after Haniyeh had attended the inauguration of Iran's new president in Tehran — and only hours after Israel targeted a top commander in Iran's ally Hezbollah in the Lebanese capital Beirut. The assassination of Hamas' top political leader was potentially explosive amid the region's volatile, intertwined conflicts — because of its target, its timing and the decision to carry it out in Tehran.

Detailed report on Page 8

## Khedkar's IAS career over

**PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■**  
NEW DELHI

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Wednesday cancelled a trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Pujja Manorama Dilip Khedkar's candidature in the 2022 Civil Services Examination (CSE) and barred her from appearing for any future examinations of the commission, after finding she had violated rules by appearing for the exam more times than what was allowed. It said her provisional candidature for the CSE-2022 (Civil Services Examination-2022) has been "cancelled" and she has also been "debarred permanently" from all future UPSC examinations or selections. The UPSC had issued Khedkar a show-cause notice on July 18 for "fraudulently availing attempts beyond the permissible limit provided for in the Examination Rules by faking her identity". She was asked to submit her response to the notice by July 25, but she asked for further time till August 4. The UPSC allowed her till



## UPSC gets new chief

**PNS ■** NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday appointed former Health Secretary Preeti Sudan chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission after Manoj Soni resigned from the UPSC's top post early this month, according to an official order. Sudan, currently a member of the UPSC, will take charge on Thursday. A 1983-batch IAS officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre, Sudan has served in various capacities.

3.30 pm on July 30 to make her submissions. According to a statement, the UPSC said it has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules. It said the 34-year-old was told to submit her response to the notice by July 25, but she requested for time till August 4. The UPSC granted her time till July 30 and made it clear that it was the "final opportunity" and "no further extension in time" would be allowed. She was also told that if no response is received by the deadline, UPSC would take action. "Despite extension in time allowed to her, she failed to submit her explanation within the prescribed time," the panel has said in the statement. "The UPSC has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules. Her provisional candidature for the CSE-2022 has been cancelled and she has also been debarred permanently from all the future Examinations/Selections of the UPSC," it said.



## Remove 18% GST on life, medical insurance: Gadkari to FM

**PNS ■** NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Road Transport and Highways Nitin Gadkari has requested Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to withdraw the 18 per cent goods and services tax (GST) on life and medical insurance premiums. In his letter to the Finance Minister, Gadkari raised concerns of the Nagpur Division Life Insurance Corporation Employees Union, which had submitted to him a memorandum regarding the issues of the insurance industry. Referring to the memo, the Minister said, "Levying GST on life insurance premiums amounts to levying tax on the

uncertainties of life. The Union feels that the person who covers the risk of life's uncertainties to give protection to the family should not be levied tax on the premium to purchase cover against this risk." Further, he said the main issue raised by the Union is related to the withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance premiums. Both life insurance and medical insurance premiums are subject to an 18 per cent GST. "In view of the above, you are requested to consider the suggestion of withdrawal of GST on life and medical insurance premium on priority as it becomes cumbersome for senior citizens as per rules with due verification," he said.

## Missing Odia doc dead in Wayanad

**CM expresses grief**

**PNS ■** BHUBANESWAR

Bishnu Prasad Chinara, the missing doctor from Odisha, died in the massive landslides in Wayanad in Kerala that killed more than 150 persons, said Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari on Wednesday. According to Pujari, four persons from Odisha including Dr Chinara and Dr Swadhini Panda were stranded by the landslides in Kerala.

Dr Chinara hailed from Choudwar of Cuttack district. He along with his wife Priyadarshini Pal had gone on a trip to the region in Kerala which was hit by a landslide. "Dr Chinara's wife is undergoing treatment at a hospital and her condition is stable. Dr Chinara's body will be brought to Odisha," Pujari said. Another person from Odisha, Swikruti Mohapatra, is undergoing treatment at a hospital. The two other persons from Odisha, who are undergoing treatment at hospitals, are expected to recover soon, he said.

"There is no information about Dr Swadhini Panda so far. The Odisha Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) is keeping close contact with his Kerala counterpart. Timely updates are being provided to respective family members," said the Minister. Chief Minister Mohan Majhi expressed deep grief over the death of Dr Chinara. He said two senior officials including a doctor have been sent to Kerala to help the families of those who are missing or dead.

## 'Lady engineer was also demanding mutton, Hilsa'

**Vigilance arrests Nibedita for taking Rs 50K bribe**

**PNS ■** BHUBANESWAR

Shocking revelations have come to the fore a day after the Vigilance police arrested Nibedita Mohanty, Assistant Engineer of Jatni block in Khordha district, while allegedly taking a bribe of Rs 50,000. Multiple contractors on Wednesday alleged that Mohanty was asking bribe to pass their bills. Apart from this, the lady



engineer was allegedly demanding mutton, Hilsa fish, Paradip prawn and other items on a regular basis from contractors. "Whenever I used to meet the BDO regarding any work or programme, the officer used to ask us to meet Assistant Engineer Nibedita Mohanty. I had accompanied several agencies, and the assistant en-

gineer used to demand vegetables and non-vegetarian items including fish, mutton and others," alleged a contractor. On Tuesday, Mohanty was apprehended by the Vigilance while allegedly taking the bribe at her residence in Khandagiri from a contractor for clearing his pending bill. "When the contractor lodged a complaint, we laid a trap and nabbed the lady Assistant Engineer. Further investigation is underway," said the Vigilance SP. On Wednesday also, Vigilance sleuths carried out further raids at several places linked to Mohanty.

## In Kendrapada Girl forces girl for sex, makes video viral

**Arrested RAJESH BEHERA ■**  
KENDRAPADA

The Kendrapada Sadar police on Wednesday arrested a 22-year-old girl for allegedly forcing a 20-year-old girl-friend to keep lesbian relationship with her by threatening to kill her with a knife. Later, she allegedly made the obscene photos and posted them on social media, informed Kendrapada Sadar police station IIC Saroj Sahoo. According to police, the victim girl Smita (name changed), who belongs to Bhagabatpur area under Sadar police limits, lodged an FIR

alleging that she developed friendship with Mona (name changed) of Jajanga area under Sadar police station four years back. Later, both of them got admission at a Tinimuhani-based computer institute to learn computers. After 20 days of their administration at the computer institute, she was invited by Mona to visit her house at Jajanga. Even Mona allegedly took her boyfriend to her house with them. The trio remained confined to a room and the lover of Mona by putting a knife on her neck forced her to keep lesbian relationship with Mona, else he threatened to kill her. Mona and her boy-

friend allegedly clicked photos and made videos by forcibly undressing her. She later came out of the room crying and returned to her house, alleged Smita in her complaint. Later, Mona started blackmailing her by keeping obscene photos and videos of her and forced her to keep lesbian relations with her. When she denied, Mona allegedly posted them in social media and made them viral, Smita alleged. Acting on the complaint lodged by Smita, police lodged against Mona. Later, the police seized the mobile and arrested Mona on Wednesday. She was produced before the local court on the day, stated IIC Sahoo.

## Appropriation Bill passed

■ Opposition walks out of Assembly  
■ House adjourned till Aug 20

**PNS ■** BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Appropriation (Vote On Account No.2) Bill 2024 was passed in the State Assembly on Wednesday amid walkout by Opposition BJD and Congress. The Assembly passed an Appropriation Bill of Rs 95,000,00,00,000. Seeking House's support to pass the Bill, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi stated that the Budget presented by him for the year 2024-25 was a progressive document which envisages social justice and

infrastructural development as the main goals for achieving progress. "As the Prime Minister aims a Viksit Bharat and our vision to achieve Viksit Odisha by 2036, we have to achieve major milestones through our work and interventions in next few years," Majhi said. He further said that in the Budget, the State Government has prioritised development of all sections of society including women, youths, divyangs, SC and ST and minorities. The Assembly was adjourned till August 20 when its second-phase session would begin.

## Cuttack Dahibara Aloodum entitled for GI tag

**Says MSME Minister**

**PNS ■** BHUBANESWAR

Cuttack's renowned dish Dahibara Aloodum is a potential product for Geographical Indication (GI) tagging, said Micro, Small & Medium Enterprises (MSME) Minister Gokulananda Mallick in the State Assembly on Wednesday. He was replying to a question by Barabati-Cuttack MLA Sofia Firdous about the government's plan to promote and preserve the cultural significance of



Cuttack's renowned dish and pursue a GI tag for it. She also sought to know the timeline for the submission and processing of the GI tag application. The Minister said the dish can be popularised benefitting the concerned people once it gets the GI tag. "The MSME department can facilitate any individual or organisation to apply for GI for a product but

cannot apply for GI tag as there is no provision of government as applicant in The Geographical Indication of Goods (Registration and Protection) Act, 1999," he said. He further informed that the department recently floated an Expression of Interest (Eoi) to empanel/hire consultants who will help and facilitate the individual applicants/associations regarding GI registration process for products of Odisha. "The process of GI tagging for a product depends on the complexity of the application and whether any opposition is filed," he added.

# 16 lakh ghost ration card holders in State

**KYC norms implemented, new cards soon**  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

There are over 16 lakh ghost ration card holders under the food security scheme in Odisha. This information was shared by Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister

Krushna Chandra Patra in the State Assembly on Wednesday. While replying to a question by MLA Durga Prasanna Nayak, Patra informed that 6,19,836 persons have applied for new ration cards. "We want the beneficiaries, whose names were deleted due to political rivalry or some other issues, to apply again and the government will

consider such applications," said Patra. According to Patra, already the government has started the process for updation of KYC to check original beneficiaries. "Biometrics and other details of the beneficiaries will be taken for ration cards. Those beneficiaries, who have died, their names will be de-

leted and new cards will be issued to eligible beneficiaries," Patra added. Sources said that already there are 10 parameters for enrolment and issuing new ration cards. The process has already started to delete the ghost ration card holders and addition of eligible beneficiaries. This will be done through updation of KYC norms.

## MONNA president meets CM

**Pleads for liquor-free Odisha**  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Milita Odisha Nisha Nibarana Abhiyan (MONNA) president Padma Charan Nayak on Wednesday met Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and held discussions for a liquor-free Odisha. Some of the liquor shops, which were provided licences by the BJD government from April 2024 for one

year, were shut down because they could not lift the minimum guaranteed stocks. But the district Collectors have again called for auction on July 31 for those shops at the same places. The BJP in its election manifesto had promised to make Odisha liquor-free by 2029. So, the State Government should not open the liquor shops which were closed, requested Nayak to the Chief Minister. Majhi assured to look into the matter.

## Illegal city apartments to be demolished

**Action to be taken if govt issues orders: Mayor**  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Concerns are now being expressed over illegal constructions, particularly apartments, which are mushrooming in different parts of Odisha. A day after the State Urban and Housing Development Minister Krushna Chandra Mohapatra informed the State Assembly that there are approximately over 700 illegal apartments and maximum violations are in the capital city, Bhubaneswar Mayor Sulochana Das on Wednesday asserted that such illegal constructions would be demolished.



While talking to reporters, Das said that once the BMC receives any formal directive from the government, necessary steps would be taken in this regard. According to Das, there are several housing projects which have come up on agricultural land. In many places, builders have sold properties and there is no control over several aspects including encroachment on drainage channels which were earlier part of panchayats. "In panchayats, BMC was not issuing any permission. Whatever the government decides, we will take appropriate action. If the government wants to demolish such constructions, we will do it. There is no problem in executing any direction," said Das. "Only after we get any letter from the Urban and Housing Development Department, we will take action as we also want no one to encroach upon government land and there are no illegal constructions. If an apartment is demolished, compensation needs to be paid. BMC does not have adequate funds. But BMC will definitely take action as per the directions of the government," she added.

## Jagannath Temple managing committee to be revamped

**Focus on transparency; govt issues guidelines**  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a major decision, the Odisha Government has decided to go for a major overhaul of the Puri Jagannath Temple's Managing Committee with a focus on maintaining transparency. The Law Department has also issued guidelines for recommending names of persons for nomination as members of the Shree Jagannath Temple Managing Committee under the SJTA Act, 1955. Usually, the Managing Committee has 18 members and the names of seven persons are selected from sevayats and mutts. The government recommends the names of two persons, who have brought laurels in social service. The Managing Committee is headed by the Puri Gajapati Maharaja as the permanent chairman.

**Guidelines:** The Chief Administrator shall request the Nijogas to send the names of at least two of its members. The Chief Administrator shall prepare a list of 10 members out of the names, taking into account their past conduct, sincerity in conducting rituals and their relationship with other servitors within and outside his nijoga. There shall be a provision for the conduct of a lottery if the Chief Administrator is unable to select the names. The guidelines clearly speak about a rotation system to enhance the chance of representation and the rotation would be limited to the Nijogas having a major stake in sevapuja. Similarly, while selecting names, it will be ensured that two persons of the same Nijogas are not recommended. No person shall be recommended for two consecutive terms and no one would be recommended for more than two terms.

## Concern over rising trend of paediatric blindness

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The rising trend of paediatric blindness due to decreased infant mortality rates and various risk factors such as prematurity, hypoxia and nutritional deficiencies is a growing concern. Experts emphasized the need to enhance state-of-the-art ophthalmology services at peripheral centers and to train more ophthalmologists to address eye health issues and reduce the blindness burden. These discussions took place at the mid-term conference of the Odisha State Ophthalmological Society held at AIIMS Bhubaneswar. The one-day scientific programme saw the participation of 230 eye specialists, including postgraduate doctors from various medical colleges across Odisha. Key discussion points included the urgent need for awareness about glaucoma, which can cause irreversible blindness and is seen



in every fourth patient visiting eye OPDs. Senior ophthalmologists highlighted the importance of spreading awareness about its causes and management. Distinguished attendees included Padma Shri Prof Jeewan S Titiyal from AIIMS, New Delhi, and Dr Ajit Babu Majji, former president of the All India Ophthalmological Society from Hyderabad. On the significant day, which coincides with Gurupurnima, Prof

Biswambhar Rajguru, a 97-year-old senior eye specialist and esteemed teacher, was honored with the Lifetime Achievement Award. Prof Rajguru, the second Ophthalmologist in Odisha, was recognized for his lifelong dedication to the development of Ophthalmological science and society in the State. In his acceptance speech, he expressed his happiness about the progress made in ophthalmological science in Odisha and reflected on the challenges he faced during his early years, around the British era and the era of the Kings, while earning his Ophthalmology degrees from Madras Medical College and Andhra Medical College. AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Dr Ashutosh Biswas conveyed his best wishes for the programme. The inauguration ceremony was graced by Dr N Deep Bag and Dr PR Mohapatra, Dean of AIIMS Bhubaneswar. Both emphasized the importance of eye health.

## MP Mamata quits BJD, RS

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

In an unexpected turn of events, Mamata Mohanta, a prominent leader of the Kudumi community in Odisha, has resigned from the Rajya Sabha. Apart from this, she has also resigned from the primary membership of the BJD. Taking to her social media handle, Mohanta tweeted, "I sincerely express my gratitude for giving me an opportunity to serve the people of

Mayurbhanj and also take the cause of Odisha to the national level. However, I feel that there is no requirement for the services of myself as well as my community in the BJD. Therefore, I have taken this hard decision in the public interest." Mamata Mohanta was elected to the Upper House of Parliament. She was elected unopposed among the four candidates for the four seats from Odisha in 2020.



## 4K undergo head, neck cancer surgery per year at AIIMS BBS

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The AIIMS Bhubaneswar reported a significant influx of cancer patients, with more than 10,000 individuals visiting the ENT and Radiotherapy OPD annually. Among these, 3,500 to 4,000 patients undergo head and neck cancer surgery every year. Additionally, nearly 1,200 patients receive radiotherapy and chemotherapy. AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Dr Ashutosh Biswas highlighted the alarming rise in head and neck cancer cases due to increased alcohol and tobacco consumption. He emphasized the pre-

ventability of cancer through lifestyle changes such as quitting tobacco use, smoking, and alcohol. "Once diagnosed, cancer can be treated and cured with surgery, radiotherapy, and chemotherapy. Early treatment significantly extends patient survival," Dr Biswas remarked. He also noted that all treatment facilities are provided free of cost at AIIMS Bhubaneswar. Head and neck cancers, particularly affecting the oral cavity, are the most prevalent cancers among the Indian population, with males being more frequently affected. Dr Pradipta Kumar Parida, Head

of the Department of ENT and Head and Neck Surgery, urged individuals with symptoms such as decreased mouth opening, oral ulcers, loose teeth, and neck swelling to seek medical advice promptly. To mark the International Head and Neck Cancer Day, the AIIMS Bhubaneswar's Department of ENT and Head and Neck Surgery, in collaboration with the Department of Radiation Oncology, organised an awareness programme. The event, attended by Dean Dr Prasanta R Mohapatra, Medical Superintendent Dr Dillip Kumar Parida, Dr Ashok Kumar Jena, faculty, students, and the public, aimed to edu-

cate about the risks of tobacco and alcohol consumption and the importance of early cancer detection and treatment. Dr Dillip Kumar Samal, Associate Professor from the Department of ENT and Head Neck Surgery, informed that the institute runs a head neck cancer clinic every Monday. As part of the awareness programme, free screening for oral cancer and other head and neck cancers was conducted. The comprehensive care provided by AIIMS Bhubaneswar, which includes surgery, post-operative radiotherapy, and chemotherapy under one roof, was also highlighted during the event.

## Woman teacher found missing in Cuttack



**Scooty, slippers found on bridge**  
PNS ■ CUTTACK

A woman, Mamata Sahu, is suspected to have jumped into the Mahanadi river from the Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Setu at Trisulia in Cuttack on Wednesday. The incident came to light after morning walkers found a scooty parked on the bridge and a pair of slippers near it. Getting information, a police team reached the spot and after a probe traced the vehicle owner to Nua Bazaar in Cuttack city.

Family sources said Mamata (62) works as a teacher in a private school near the Barabati Stadium. She left home at late night on her scooty without informing her family and was untraceable since then. She also left her mobile phone at home. She had attended her father's death rituals with her husband the previous day. She is mother of two daughters. Her family members added that they were unaware of any stress in her life. Later, Fire Service personnel reached the spot and lunched an operation to trace her.

# HITTING THE BULL'S EYE

## New CM needs to learn from BJD's grave blunders

The BJP could manage to dislodge the BJD only because the green-hue gang bosses had turned arrogant in the last six months before the polls. Most of the BJD biggies had convinced themselves that party invincibility would remain intact as long as Naveen was leader. Most of the poll masters too had thought similarly. But the few that had delved deep into the situation had known big disaster was going to befall the ill-fated political outfit. The frighteningly ignorant party media fellows kept guiding the front-liners, which resulted in the huge fall. Six months before the elections, the masses had begun murmuring disapproval of the BJD as a failed outfit making too many false promises. Not a single sane soul in the fold sent out warning signals to force the errant biggies to correct course. The disgusted candidates too imagined they would lose as an unseen anti-establishment undercurrent of intense magnitude was flowing. The self-styled party strategists includ-



**BISWARAJ PATNAIK**

ing Manoj Mishra and the hidden ones like Nilamadhab Panda kept damaging the party image. It appears as if there has been no serious review exercises undertaken until now as the guys and girls that enraged the masses on media are still being fielded as spokespersons at talk battles in the media and elsewhere. The once-invincible party, now broken into pieces, is not really finding it easy to revamp the fold with new, fresh blood to lead

from the front. Despite Naveen still being a widely popular statesman-politician, the social media outfits have not ceased causing damage to his team. Some of the agencies now portray him as an ineffective political master who has lost wits. The only way the BJD can regain glory is by wooing 12-15 former BJD winners from the BJP fold, no matter what the cost. The prospects of this are not very bleak as Modi has been proven to be somewhat an unpopular BJP figure in the 2024 elections. The 14 Odisha Congress MLAs will too gladly play ally in the toppling game if once is played cautiously by the BJD fellows with some brains. Mohan Majhi is a decent, well-meaning person. But he is inexperienced in managing colleagues and running the State smoothly as the art and craft of power politics are not known enough to him. The top guys at the Centre seem to be pulling the strings of Majhi. His Deputy CMs, one male and the

other female, are only keeping him company as shadows without much contribution in administration. Pravati Parida is still in daze; Kanakvardhan is obviously struggling to recall his ministerial days of yore to pick the lost executive skills. Majhi most certainly has not chosen the two deputies. They have been suggested to him. His other ministers too are pretty much confused though over-excited with berths of power. All that is being said here is that the Majhi administration so far has proven to be a populist regime, mainly for having been oblivious of the fact that the BJD creatures lost the battle for being arrogantly foolish in dabbling with a few populist schemes at the ending time. They never once realised that their frontliners only kept irritating the masses with hyperbolic promises of 'grand giveaways' without being aware of the stupidly coined project names that the masses kept laughing at for being placed too late. Mohanbabu too has not been

sensitive to silly errors that irritate quality people. He opened up temple doors, broke open the temple trove, which are just plain, ordinary things by any standard or count. Majhi is not going to be forgiven for taking 5,000 million rupees from the public exchequer for a fairly wealthy Jagannath Temple as that is a social sin. He may have done this only to make a big grant of 500 million rupees for the much smaller Goddess Tarini temple in his native district, which too makes quite some money by selling thousands of coconuts sent by devotees everyday. Besides, the footfall at the temple is not so huge as to require the big sum of money from the public treasury. A significant grant for the world-famous Lingaraj Temple in Bhubaneswar may have made the people happy, perhaps as that grand temple hardly has any steady source of income. Besides, Majhi's love for Hindu temples shows him in poor light as he is a revered tribal individual expected to worship only objects of nature. Majhi better with-

draw the 5000 million-rupee grant to the Jagannath Temple at which the public contributions exceed 2 million rupees on a single big festival day. Incidentally, the Jagannath Temple is one of the 10 wealthiest shrines in India with hefty fixed deposits and huge properties across the country. The gravest blunder Majhi has done is having changed names of schemes made after great sons of the soil. The immensely popular BSKY health insurance scheme having been renamed has not been taken well by the beneficiary communities. For immortal sons like Gopabandhu and Madhusudan, the Majhi administration could have floated several other schemes. But dropping 'Biju' is going to give him headache for certain. Then again, the new BJP government has stripped the DGP's authority to have total control over officers in and above the rank of Deputy Superintendents of Police, which top cops have not appreciated though the mid-level officers

are happy that a single individual's whims and fancies will now not put them to trouble. Lastly, the make-believe concept of 'Odia Ashmita' meaning something like 'parochial community pride' has attracted a big sum of money for keeping the hazy idea live. This gesture by the Majhi administration will eventually cost it dearly. In a superbly harmonious democracy like India, that is 'Bharat', any funding for community pride is unconstitutional and bad in taste. The CM seems to be oblivious of the fact that highly efficient non-Odia officials at the top including Manoj Ahuja, Surendra Kumar, Anu Gang, Usha Padhi, Vishal Dev, Sanjay Singh et al will lose heart over the matter. India is one beautiful sovereign region across which the very perception of a language-based supremacy does not have any sanctity. So, funding for such anti-national schemes should be dropped from the agenda prepared by some without thinking heads.

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# In Balangir Girl poisoned to death by lover in mother's presence

**PNS ■ BALANGIR**  
A minor girl was poisoned to death allegedly by her lover at Banjhipali village under the Agalpur police station in Balangir district on Wednesday.

The accused was identified as Pranay Pradhan, who is a resident of Insa village.

As per reports, the victim was forcefully fed poison at her home by Pradhan in the presence of her mother. The accused fled from the spot immediately after the incident.

Following the development, the family members rushed the victim to the Loisingha hospital. Later, she was shifted to the District Headquarters Hospital as her condition deteriorated. However, she died while undergoing treatment at the hospital.

Family members of the deceased lodged a complaint in connection with the incident at the Agalpur police station. Subsequently, police reached the spot and started an investigation into the incident. The body was sent for postmortem.

# In Bargarh Mystery shrouds student's death in hostel

**Kin alleges murder**

**PNS ■ BARGARH**

Mystery shrouded the death of a Class-IX student, whose body was found hanging in a hostel of a private school in the Padampur area

in Bargarh district on Tuesday night.

The deceased was identified as Prince Kumbhar. His body was found hanging from a rod in the hostel.

The hostel authorities said Prince had gone to his room after carrying the dinner with him. Later, his body was found

hanging in a toilet. Following the incident, hostel staffs rushed the student to a hospital, where he was declared dead on arrival by the doctor.

However, the deceased's uncle said he suspected that someone killed his nephew and tried to make it look like a suicide,

According to the family members, parents of Prince had met him at the hostel some days back. On Tuesday also, they had talked with him over phone and they did not suspect anything wrong. Similarly, Prince had also not shared anything troubling him.

# Electrocution of man, son NHRC asks Energy Secy, Jaipur SP to file ATR

**RAJESH BEHERA ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) recently directed to the Principal Secretary, Department of Energy, Government of Odisha and the SP Jaipur to submit an Action Taken Report (ATR) within four weeks over electrocution of a man and his son on May 5 while these ill-fated persons were going to their farmland.

The apex rights panel gave such a direction while acting on a petition filed by Sagar Jena, a rights activist of Endor village.

The petitioner Jena alleged that Ganesh Mandal, a sexagenarian and his 29-year-old son, Ashutosh Mandal, a resident of Bengapatia village under Danagadi block on May 5 got electrocuted following

they came in contact with a high tension live electric wire that had snapped off on the ground, while they were going to their farmland to collect vegetables in the morning.

Jena alleged before the Commission that the unfortunate incident took place due to the negligence of the Energy Department. He requested payment of compensation of Rs 10 lakh each to the next of kin (NoK) of the duo deceased persons along with directing to the SP of Jaipur to carry out an impartial inquiry into the matter.

Acting on the petition, the NHRC asked the Principal Secretary, Energy and the SP Jaipur through online mode to have the allegations inquired and to ensure needful action along with submitting their ATR to the commission within four weeks.

# Tiger conservation awareness held at B'pur

Various competitions held among school students

**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR**

On the occasion of the International Tiger Day, the Brahmampur Sabuj Bahini hosted an awareness and competition programme at Rainbow Play School on Monday here.

The event aimed at educating the young students about the significance of tigers in biodiversity and to foster a sense of responsibility towards their conservation.

The programme featured various activities to engage the students, including speeches, poetry, mask-making, and ti-



ger drawing competitions. These activities aimed to spark the children's interest in tigers and highlight their critical role in the ecosystem.

Habitat loss, natural disasters, and the greed of poachers

for tiger parts such as claws, teeth, and skin have significantly contributed to their dwindling numbers, senior journalist Sudip Kumar Sahu said.

The event also featured a

discussion on the urgent need for Government intervention to protect tigers. The attendees stressed that timely and effective measures are essential to ensure the survival of the majestic species.

Rabindra Sahani moderated the event, and Sagar Prasad Patra coordinated the activities. Other notable attendees included P Binod, Sujit Kumar Gauda, Prasanna Swain, school's principal Asmita Kumari Mohanty, Manoj Kumar Mahapatra, Padmini Nayak, and several teachers.

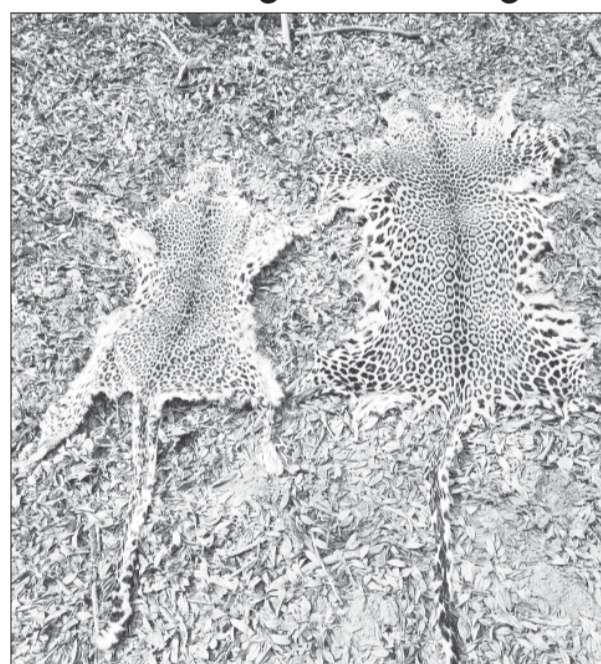
The event concluded with a renewed commitment to raising awareness about tiger conservation and the steps necessary to protect these vital creatures for future generations.

# 3-yr jail to man for illegal trading of leopard skin

**NIMAI CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR**

The Sub-Divisional Judicial Magistrate of Kuchinda in Sambalpur district convicted a man in a leopard skin trading case and sentenced him to three years' rigorous imprisonment on Monday. The accused had been arrested by the STF, Bhubaneswar while he was waiting for the customer to deliver two leopard skin.

The accused, identified as Sankirtan Munda (45), a resident of Pahadamara village under the Laimura police limits in Deogarh district, had been apprehended on February 15 this year while he, along with another person, was waiting for their customer to deliver the leopard skins and other wildlife products at Kuchinda Bonaigarh road near the office of Forest Guard. The leopard skins and other wildlife prod-



ucts were seized by the STF. The accused was convicted under various Sections of the Wild Life Act, 1972.

"STF Odisha has taken spe-

cial efforts to ensure that our investigation is of the highest standards and we meticulously follow our prosecution in the courts so that the cases are

brought to logical conclusion/conviction," said Bhubaneswar STF Inspector Sarita Beuria.

The seized leopard skins were sent to the Wild Life Institute of India, Dehradun, for biological chemical examination to ascertain the gender, age and habitat of the leopards.

The STF official, in a release, said six wild life cases, including this, have ended in conviction since the STF got authority to investigate wildlife cases in 2018. The number of convictions in India in wildlife crimes is less than five per cent. Since 2018, the STF has registered 101 cases and arrested 232 wildlife criminals.

Since 2018, the STF has seized 59 leopard hides, 27 elephant tusks, 23 live pangolins, 42 kgs of pangolin scales, two tiger hides and 11 deer hides.

## INBRIEF

### MAHTAB BATS FOR RAVENSHAW AS CENTRAL UNIVERSITY

Bhubaneswar: Cuttack BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab on Tuesday in Parliament demanded that the Ravenshaw University be declared as a Central University as it symbolises national unity. He said the history of this great institution resembles the history of modern Odisha. He pointed out that the institution, which founded in 1868, became a Unitary University in 2006. Later, it was transformed as an 'Institute of Excellency'. He urged the Union Government to develop Ravenshaw at par with other Central institutions.

### NABARANGPUR CIVIC BODY EX-CHIEF PASSES AWAY

Nabarangpur: Former Nabarangpur Municipality Chairperson and president of Karan Samaj Pramila Patnaik passed away at the age of 77 here following a cardiac arrest late on Monday night at her residence. She was Chairperson of Nabarangpur Municipality during the year 1998. Nabarangpur Municipality Chairman Kunu Naik, all Councillors and legal advisor of Karan Samaj Arvind Patnaik, vice-president Kishore Patnaik, general secretary Mahesh Patnaik and joint secretary Patnaik, and Ravi Patnaik were present during the cremation.



### Kakatpur-Nimapada PWD road in tatters



**PNS ■ KAKATPUR**

The condition of the main road from Nuagarh to Astarang, Kakatpur, Nimapada through Charichak has become deplorable.

The potholes created on the road are filled with rainwater on rainy days, causing accidents among the drivers. The road was constructed by spending more than Rs 40 crore.

But now the road has developed cracks. Similarly, it is filled with craters. In most parts of the road, the rain wa-

ter level is 1 to 2 feet high in rainy days. It is alleged that huge irregularities were committed while building the road.

The Kakatpur Section Engineer was suspended from his job for lapses in the road constructions.

Plying of vehicles on the main road from Nuagadh to Nimapada in heavy rains is becoming a difficult affair. Despite repeated demands from local residents to repair the potholes on the road, it is overlooked. The Public Works Department is not paying any attention to the repair of the road.

# CUO hosts lecture on Sanskrit grammar

**PNS ■ KORAPUT**

The Department of Sanskrit of the Central University of Odisha (CUO) here hosted a special lecture on 'Sanskrit Grammar' at its Sunabeda campus on Tuesday.

The event featured distinguished speakers, including Prof Anupama Prusty, Head of the Department of Navya Vyakarana at Central Sanskrit University, Puri, and Prof Yudhishthira Sahoo, Head of the Department of Sanskrit at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack.

CUO Vice-Chancellor Prof Chakradhar Tripathi extended his best wishes for a successful programme. The event was in-



augurated by Prof NC Panda, Registrar (I/C) and Dean of the School of Languages, who also addressed the gathering.

Prof Prusty delivered an insightful lecture on 'Sabdabodha,' emphasising the significance of sound and its interpretation within the Sanskrit language. Prof Sahoo engaged with the audience on the application and importance of Sanskrit grammar, illustrating his points with various examples.

# Inaugurated since 2018 J'suguda DHH new bldg yet to get fire safety cert

**RAJKUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA**

Following the Orissa High Court's judgment on July 18 regarding fire safety at SCB Medical College and Hospital, concerns have been raised about similar situations at the District Headquarters Hospitals (DHH) across the State.

The Jharsuguda DHH has come under scrutiny for operating without fire safety certificate for six years since its inauguration in 2018.

Assistant Fire Officer Arun Topno confirmed that while the Jharsuguda DHH had applied for the fire safety certificate, the hospital management has yet to receive it. Chief Medical Officer of Jharsuguda DHH cited objections raised by the Fire Department as the reason for the delay.

The new hospital building at Malimunda, inaugurated on January 4 2018, spans 30,000 square feet. It was constructed at a cost Rs 50 crore. The seven-story facility, with a capacity of 300 beds, is equipped with modern infrastructure and equipment, including str-



ategically placed fire extinguishers. However, during its construction, no fire safety permission was sought from the Odisha Fire Department, nor were the fire safety arrangements made in consultation with them.

The issue has become more pressing in light of fire safety discussions at other hospitals, with the DHH frequently cited as a case in point. The District Health Department's applications for fire safety certification have been repeatedly returned with objections. Crucially, the hospital cannot report how many fire safety sys-

tems are operational within the building, and no audit of these systems has been conducted.

More than 700 patients visit the hospital monthly, yet the lack of a fire safety certificate leaves the facility vulnerable to potential mishaps. The situation underscores the importance of mandatory fire safety arrangements for all hospitals, especially those over 12 meters tall and with more than 30 beds, including ICU facilities.

The Samaleswari Hospital and other local facilities also lack fire safety certification, highlighting a broader issue that needs urgent attention.

# FM Univ holds talk on Union Budget



**PNS ■ BALESWAR**

Under the chairmanship of the Vice-Chancellor of FM University Prof Santosh Kumar Tripathy, a National Debate on the topic "Union Budget 2024-25: An Analysis" was organised by the Department of Social Science.

The debate session was carried out by CEO, EGROW Foundation, New Delhi Prof Charan Singh, with esteemed speaker former Professor of Economics, KIIT University, Bhubaneswar Prof SN Misra and Professor of Economics,

Tripura University Prof Indraneel Bhowmik.

In a vivid discussion, Prof Charan Singh highlighted the conceptual framework of macroeconomic instruments. He also focused on the importance of fiscal consolidation and economic growth for Indian economic status. He expressed an optimistic approach to the current budget implications for the Indian economy as well.

Vice-Chancellor Prof Tripathy congratulated the department for arranging such an important topic for debate

at the right point in time.

He expressed his interest in making students, teachers, and everyone understand the budget from the invited speakers with valuable knowledge gain.

Prof SN Misra highlighted the trends of employment, education, nutrition, and unorganized sectors. He emphasised the relation between growth and employment, improving poor healthcare and educational outcomes. He also highlighted the formalisation of informal sectors and expansions of

MSMEs. He brought to notice the importance of distribution justice and inequality for economically underdeveloped and underprivileged sections of society.

Prof Bhowmik enlightened on the future of agriculture and, uses of natural energy resources in farming to boost the Indian economy. He discussed the challenges for urbanisation and informal sectors. He briefed the status of higher education and intensive programme executions for employment. He concluded with an analysis of

the allocation and provisions for northeastern States and highlighted the gap between exact allocation and utilisation around those States.

Chairman PG Council Prof Bhaskar Behera, HoD of Social Science Dept Dr Pabitra Mohan Nayak, coordinator of the programme, Professor Sunil Kumar Padhi, Associate Professor of Economics, Dr Gitanjali Panda with all faculty members, non-teaching staff, research scholars and students participated in the debate.

# Budget balances growth, livelihood, cooperative federalism: FM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Wednesday said the Union Budget strikes a fine balance between growth, employment, and fiscal consolidation, and promotes cooperative federalism.

Replying to the discussion on the Union Budget 2024-25 and Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir Budget in Rajya Sabha, the Minister said the Government is on track to achieve the pre-announced fiscal deficit target of 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.

In her reply, Sitharaman also talked about high inflation during the UPA rule while highlighting the measures taken by the Modi Government on price front. Sitharaman, also a Former Defence Minister, said the Agniveer Scheme to recruit people in the age group of 17.5 to 21 years, is aimed at keeping the armed forces fit, young and battle-ready.

The Minister, who presented her seventh Union Budget, also said the economic document proposes unflinching support for cooperative federalism. "I would like to underline that our unflinching commitment



to cooperative federalism. The total resources proposed to be transferred to the States in 2024-25 are estimated at ₹22.91 lakh crore. This actually entails an increase of ₹2.49 lakh crore over 2023-24," the Minister said.

She said capital expenditure is pegged at ₹11.11 lakh crore. "This is the biggest ever allocation for Capital expenditure and it shows increase of about 17 per cent over the RE and provisional actuals of the FY 2023-24,"

she said, adding that during the Congress-led UPA era, the capex allocation was ₹13.19 lakh crore between 2004-05 to 2013-14. "Whereas during our tenure from 2014 to 2024, the allocation for capex has been ₹43.82 lakh crore from 2014-15 to 2023-24," she said.

On criticism that she only referred to two States in her Budget speech and ignored the rest, Sitharaman said the Budget is for all States, in past also, including the UPA era, the names of all States were not mentioned. She emphasised that if a State has not been mentioned in the speech, it does not mean there is no allocation for it.

Several Opposition members had raised issues related to the devolution of taxes to States. To this, Sitharaman it is wrong to calculate devolution based on gross tax receipts, and then claim that the Centre is devolving less than what is suggested by the Finance Commission.

The Finance Minister highlighted that for agriculture and allied sectors the Budget has allocated ₹1.52 lakh crore, which is ₹8,000 crore more than the previous year. For comparison, in 2013-14, the last year of Congress-led UPA, only ₹30,000 crore was allocated for agriculture.

She also took on Congress leader and former Finance Minister P Chidambaram for misleading statement regarding appointment of DGPs in States. Sitharaman countered Chidambaram's contention by asserting that the scheme "is a very reformative step to enhance the capabilities and battle readiness of our armed forces".

# Rescue operations continue in landslides-ravaged Wayanad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Military personnel on Wednesday intensified search and rescue operations in Kerala's Wayanad district, where landslides have claimed more than 167 lives, with the Army saying that it has recovered around 70 bodies and rescued nearly 1,000 people so far. Extremely heavy rain triggered the landslides in the hilly areas of Wayanad early Tuesday, leaving at least 167 people dead and more than 200 injured.

Four columns from the Defence Security Corps (DSC) Centre, Kannur, and 122 TA Battalion are conducting combined rescue operations along with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and State rescue teams, a senior army official said. Around 70 bodies have been recovered by the Army so far and approximately 1,000 people have been rescued, the official said.

Two Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) columns, including two medical teams, were airlifted from Trivandrum to Kozhikode by AN32 and C-130 aircraft. They arrived at Kozhikode airport late Tuesday night and stayed overnight, the army said. Movement of fuel and other administrative stores is



planned by road, the officials said. Brig Arjun Seagan, Commandant of the PARA Regiment Training Centre, arrived with his team late Tuesday night. They conducted a reconnaissance of a potential bridge site and established a control centre for coordinating the Army's HADR efforts, supported by the commandant of the DSC Centre, they said.

Heavy engineering equipment and rescue dog teams were airlifted and disaster relief teams were dispatched by the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) on Tuesday. The State Government has requested the deployment of a 690-ft Bailey bridge. Currently, up to 330 feet of the bridge is being moved from the Madras Engineer Group Centre, Bengaluru, by road. The

remaining parts are being airlifted from Delhi Cantonment, the Army had said late on Tuesday. The Indian Army is coordinating closely with state authorities to ensure swift and effective relief efforts, the officials said. "Construction of a bridge on the Meepadi-Chooraimala Road will commence, including the induction of certain earthmoving equipment to the other side of the stream utilising air effort," the army said on Wednesday. A navy spokesperson here said that on a request from the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), the Kochi-based Southern Naval Command (SNC) dispatched a disaster relief team comprising 68 personnel from INS Zamorin at Ezhimala to the landslide-

hit site on Tuesday. The rescue team comprising skilled personnel along with a medical team and necessary equipment reached the site at 10 pm on Tuesday. Additional teams have been kept on standby for deployment at short notice and will be mobilised as required, he said. An advanced light helicopter (ALH) detachment in search and rescue (SAR) configuration was deployed from Kochi to Calicut at 7.30 am on Wednesday to augment the rescue efforts, the spokesperson said. The adverse weather conditions due to incessant rains pose challenges in the area. All-out efforts are underway to provide immediate relief and support to the local populace impacted by the disaster, the official said.

# SC confirms staying premature release of Gawli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

"So ja beta, nahi toh Gabbar aa jayega." Quoting the oft-remembered dialogue from the blockbuster "Sholay", the Supreme Court on Wednesday "confirmed" its earlier order staying the premature release of gangster-turned-politician Arun Gawli who is serving life imprisonment in a murder case. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Dipankar Datta made absolute its June 3 order staying the operation of the April 5 order of the Bombay High Court's Nagpur bench and posted the appeals for hearing on November 20.

The High Court had directed State authorities to consider Gawli's application for premature release under the 2006 remission policy. "We are not inclined to grant any interim relief. The interim stay granted by us is confirmed. Post the appeals for hearing on November 20," the bench said. At the outset, senior advocate Raja Thakare, appearing for the Maharashtra Government, submitted that Gawli has over 46 cases, including around 10 cases of murder, against him.

The apex court asked the senior lawyer whether Gawli had done anything in last five to eight years. Thakare replied that the gangster has been behind bars for over 17 years. Asking whether Gawli is reformed or not, the bench asked, "How society will know that when he is behind the bars? He is 72 years old." Challenging the High Court order, Thakare said there is a requirement under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act



(MCOCA) for convicts to undergo imprisonment for at least 40 years for remission. This is as per the policy of 2015. Senior advocate Nitya Ramakrishnan, appearing for Gawli, said other co-accused had been given bail in the matter and the Bombay High Court was right in granting premature release. "The State Government has changed its remission policy (in 2015) but your lordships have held that the policy will apply which was applicable when he was convicted. The 2006 policy will apply since he was convicted in 2009. This policy allows remission on account of age and infirmity," she said.

At this juncture, the bench observed, "But madam you should know that not everybody is Arun Gawli. In the movie 'Sholay', there is an iconic dialogue, 'So ja beta, nahi toh Gabbar aa jayega. This can be a case here'."

Elaborating on Gawli's health condition, Ramakrishnan told the court that he is suffering from heart disease and has a lung defect. To this, the counsel for the Maharashtra Government said this was so because of continuous smoking for 40 years.

# Public mood in party's favour, caution needed against complacency: Sonia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday said the "mahaul (public mood)" is in the party's favour but cautioned against complacency and over confidence after the goodwill generated for it in the Lok Sabha elections. Noting that elections will be held in four States, the longest serving Congress's former President said leaders to sustain the momentum and goodwill that had been generated for the party in the Lok Sabha elections. Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand as well as Jammu and Kashmir are scheduled this year.

"We must not become complacent and over confident. The 'mahaul' does favour us, but we have to work unitedly with a sense of purpose. I dare say that if we perform well, reflecting the



trend that we witnessed in the Lok Sabha elections, national politics will undergo a transformation," Sonia said at the CPP meet in Parliament. During the general body meeting of the CPP in Central Hall, Samvidhan Sadan, a resolution authorising Sonia Gandhi to appoint other office-bearers of the CPP was also passed. Sonia claimed that the Modi Government had not drawn the right lessons from "their significant decline" in the Lok

Sabha elections and alleged that it was persisting with its policy of "dividing communities and spreading an atmosphere of fear and animosity". "Fortunately, the Supreme Court intervened at the right time," she said in an apparent reference to the stay on the orders passed by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Government asking eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display the name of owners."

But this can only be a temporary respite. Look at how the rules have been suddenly changed to permit the bureaucracy to participate in the activities of the RSS. It calls itself a cultural organisation but the whole world knows that it is the BJP's political and ideological base," she said. She also slammed the Union Budget, saying that the pressing demands of farmers and youth in particular, have been totally ignored.

# Northeast reports 196 landslides from April to July: Minister in LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The northeastern region has reported 196 landslides from April-July this year, accounting for one-third of the total 592 landslides recorded since 2017, according to data shared in Parliament on Wednesday.

In response to a question by BJP MP Kamakhya Prasad Tasa, Union Earth Sciences Minister Jitendra Singh told the Lok Sabha that the Geological Survey of India (GSI) has collected data on 592 landslides that occurred between April 2017 and July 2024 in different northeastern States, impacting lives and infrastructure. He said the analysis of the data shows a "mixed trend with periodic ups and downs" in the occurrences of landslides.

"To infer conclusively about the exact nature of the trend of landslide incidents, long-range (at least 20 years of) data with exact date of occurrence is required," the minister said. According to the data presented in Parliament, the northeastern region reported 28 landslides in 2017-18; 49 in 2018-19; 45 in 2019-20; 65 in 2020-21; 78 in 2021-22; 102 in 2022-23; 29 in 2023-24; and 196 in 2024-25 so far.

According to the landslide atlas released by the Indian Space Research Organisation's (ISRO) National Remote Sensing Centre last year, the Northwest Himalayas account for 66.5 per cent of the landslides in India, followed by the Northeast Himalayas (18.8 per cent) and the Western Ghats (14.7 per cent).



# Railways have sanctioned 9,784 bridges for repairs: Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav informed the Lok Sabha in a written reply on Wednesday that the Indian Railways sanctioned 9,784 railway bridges for repairs, strengthening, rehabilitation or rebuilding. Vaishnav responded to questions raised by nine MPs on whether the Government has identified old railway bridges in Maharashtra which are in dilapidated conditions and the details of the repair work undertaken in the last three years.

These members were concerned about the status of collapse of railway bridges in the last three years and the number of persons killed and injured as a result of that. They also wanted to know the steps taken by the Government to repair all the old railway bridges across the country. "There is a well established system of inspection of railway bridges on Indian Railways. All the railway bridges are inspected twice a year, one before the onset of monsoon and one detailed inspection after the monsoon," Vaishnav said.

# Govt's helpline got 1.94L child pornography complaints: Min

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over 76.02 lakh women had sought helpline assistance till May 31 on Government's helpline number while about 1.94 lakh complaints regarding child pornography and rape or gang rape have been registered on the Government's National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) till April 30, Union Minister Annapurna Devi said on Wednesday in Parliament. In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, the Women and Child Development Minister said since its inception, the NCRP has received over 16.18 crore

visitors. "As of April 30, 2024, approximately 1.94 lakh complaints regarding child pornography and rape or gang rape have been registered. Till March 31, more than 69.05 lakh cyber tipline reports had been shared with the relevant States and union territories, she said. According to the Minister, the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112) is operational in all 36 States and Union Territories and had handled more than 36.29 crore calls till April 30, with more than 14.36 lakh downloads of the '112 India'



mobile app. The integration of the Women's Helpline (WHL-181) with ERSS is functional in 35 States and Union Territories. Monitoring centres for the

Vehicle Tracking Platform (VTP) have been commissioned in 11 States and union territories, enhancing the tracking and safety of public transport, Devi said.

Under the Integrated Emergency Response Management System (IERMS) project, CCTV systems have been installed in 489 railway stations nationwide. Additionally, 2,034 tabs have been procured and distributed to Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel to assist women travelling alone or those in need of help on trains, she said. An AI-based Facial Recognition System (FRS) has been integrated with video surveillance systems at seven major railway stations for a pilot project, the Minister said.

# Blind's brain connectivity patterns boost non-visual senses: Neuroscientists

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ever wondered what enables the blind to develop and refine a "sixth sense"? A groundbreaking study led by Georgetown University neuroscientists has shed light on this remarkable phenomenon, revealing that individuals with blindness exhibit distinctive brain connectivity patterns that enhance their non-visual senses, such as spatial awareness, sound localisation, and tactile perception.

The study demonstrated that brain regions typically associated with sight in sighted individuals are

repurposed in the blind to strengthen these other senses. This reorganisation allows the blind to develop extraordinary abilities to navigate and interpret their environment through alternative sensory inputs. By mapping these unique brain connectivity patterns, researchers aim to advance our understanding of sensory adaptation and brain plasticity.

Led by postdoctoral researcher Dr Lenia Amaral and Assistant Professor Dr Ella Striem-Amit, the study provides insight into individual differences in brain

organisation. "We don't see this level of variation in the visual cortex connectivity among individuals who can see," said Dr Striem-Amit, who heads the Sensory and Motor Plasticity Lab at Georgetown. "The connectivity pattern in people born blind is more distinct across individuals, like a fingerprint, and remains stable over time."

The study involved a small sample of individuals born blind who underwent repeated functional MRI scans over two years. Researchers used neuroimaging techniques to



analyse neural connectivity and found that the visual

cortex in these individuals exhibited remarkable stability

in its connectivity patterns, regardless of the task.

"Our study found that these patterns did not change significantly based on the task-whether participants were localising sounds, identifying shapes, or resting," explained Dr Amaral. "Instead, the connectivity patterns were unique to each individual and remained stable over the two-year period. Dr Striem-Amit emphasised that these findings highlight the brain's plasticity and its ability to develop in diverse ways, especially in the absence of sight. "Our findings suggest that experiences after birth shape

the diverse ways our brains can develop, potentially even for different uses of the visual cortex among those born blind," she said. The implications of this discovery are significant. It suggests that personalised approaches to rehabilitation and sight restoration could be developed based on an individual's specific brain connectivity profile, potentially optimising sensory and cognitive functions for those with visual impairments. The study is published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

# Karnataka Gov seeks response from CM on MUDA 'scam'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Governor Thawar Chand Gehlot has sought a "response" from Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to allegations relating to the distribution of sites by the Mysuru Urban Development Authority, including to his wife Parvathi, sources in the Congress government said on Wednesday.

The move comes after a delegation of BJP Legislators met the Governor on July 25 and submitted to him a memorandum seeking transfer of the MUDA case to CBI for a probe and resignation of the Chief Minister. "Since a memorandum is submitted, it is imperative for the Governor to seek a reply from the Chief Minister. Accordingly, the Governor has asked the Chief Minister to respond to it," sources in Raj Bhavan said.

Referring to the Governor's action, Home Minister G Parameshwara said there is reason to believe that it was politically motivated.

"He (Gehlot) has been given some Constitutional powers. He should function within its framework. It will give rise to



doubts if he crosses the threshold. There are suspicions that politics is happening," Parameshwara told reporters in the district headquarters town of Bagalkote. "The Governor has moved further to issue a show cause notice. We will have to consider it as politically-motivated," he added. Karnataka Information Technology and Biotechnology Minister Priyank Kharge alleged that the Governor is being "misused" by the BJP. "You have seen Governors in

Tamil Nadu, earlier in Maharashtra and West Bengal. In some places these Governors are misusing their Constitutional position. Even the Supreme Court has made its observations. Several articles have also appeared on how the Governors are interfering in the functioning of the Government exceeding their limits," Kharge told reporters. "It appears, here too, the same thing is happening. Already we have said that I-T (Income Tax Department) and ED (the Enforcement Directorate) are

being used. Isn't it that they (BJP) are using them (Governors)," the Minister said. According to him, there are no instances of the Governor immediately asking for a reply soon after a memorandum is submitted. "During the Ballari mining scam there were strong evidences for the Governor to act but in MUDA case there is nothing," he said. "The BJP has got a standard operating procedure to let the I-T, ED loose (on its opponents) and misusing the Governors," Kharge alleged.

## Villages in South Goa oppose Sunburn fest for promoting drug culture

PTI ■ PANAJI

Several villages in South Goa district have passed resolutions against the Electronic Dance Music (EDM) Sunburn Festival, which is likely to be held by the end of this year, alleging that it promotes drug culture.

The stakeholders of the tourism industry, however, came out in support of the festival, saying that such events generate revenue for the state. Seven villages in South Goa — Chicalim, Carmona, Nuvem, Varca, Sarzora, Chinchinim and Camorlim — during their Gram Sabha meetings held on Sunday decided to oppose the Sunburn Festival 2024.

These villages passed the resolutions, in which they decided not to give permission for the festival, claiming that it fuels drug culture in the State. The resolution mentioned that the Sunburn Festival should not be held in Goa as it is a "hub for sale of drugs and also results in several problems for locals including traffic congestion".

This festival was traditionally held in North Goa, but it is likely to be held in South Goa this year. When contacted, state Tourism Minister Rohan Khaunte said the Sunburn Festival organisers were yet to apply for permission.

"We will be able to make any statement on the festival only after they apply for it," he said. Meanwhile, Travel and Tourism Association of Goa (TTAG), an umbrella organisation of tourism stakeholders, supported the festival, saying such events generate revenue to the scale of around ₹200 crore.

## Zika virus testing can now be done at Rajkot's AIIMS



PTI ■ RAJKOT

The All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in Gujarat's Rajkot has been recognised as a facility for the screening of Zika virus, cutting down on the need for swab samples to be sent to the National Institute of Virology (NIV) at Pune in adjoining Maharashtra, an official said on Wednesday.

"Our centre has been recognised for the screening of Zika virus (by Indian Council of Medical Research). We have received kits from the NIV, and are going to begin the tests very soon," said Ashwini Agarwal, professor and head of the department of microbiology at AIIMS Rajkot.

He said the new testing centre at AIIMS will become operational next week. Agarwal informed that the central government has also sanctioned a biosafety laboratory at AIIMS Rajkot that deals with highly infectious and pathogenic organisms. "BSL 3 (biosafety level 3) lab has been sanctioned, and its construction will begin next month," he said.

After the centre for Zika virus testing at AIIMS Rajkot becomes operational, results of samples of suspected cases will be known within 24 hours.

When samples from Gujarat were sent to the Pune-based NIV, it took from one week to up to a month for confirmation.

"The centre will make the test results of suspected Zika virus patients known within 24 hours. Samples collected for surveillance purpose will take some time," he said.

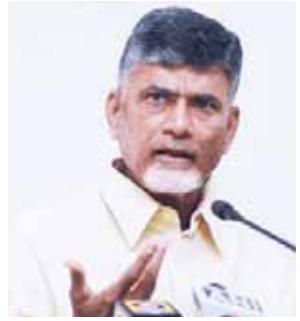
The Zika virus disease is transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, which is also known to transmit infections like dengue and chikungunya. The virus was first identified in Uganda in 1947. Thirteen cases of Zika virus — three from Karnataka and 10 from Maharashtra — were reported till July 22 this year, Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel had said in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday.

In 2023, the country had witnessed 23 cases of Zika virus, while two infections were seen in 2022 and 234 in 2021.

Gujarat had last reported three cases of the disease in 2017. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated Gujarat's first AIIMS at Rajkot on February 25 this year.

Spread across 201 acres, Rajkot AIIMS is a world-class hospital with 720 beds, including the ICU. The multispecialty medical facility was built at a cost of Rs 1,195 crore.

## CM: Reach out to investors, industrialists who gave up on Andhra



PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Wednesday directed officials to reach out to industrialists and investors who had forged agreements with the state but later abandoned them due to alleged mishandling by the erstwhile YSRCP government.

The Chief Minister highlighted that he himself will step in to woo them back if needed during a review of the Department of Industries today, which delved on the deals signed in the past 10 years. "Negotiate with the industrialists who turned their backs on the state even after forging agreements with it due to the policies of the YSRCP government. If needed, I will personally talk to them," Naidu said in an official press release.

According to the CM, the erstwhile TDP government between 2014 and 2019 had signed agreements worth Rs 16 lakh crore and alleged that the YS Jagan Mohan Reddy-led government had later driven them away with its policies.

Officials informed the CM that land pooling for industrial needs was allegedly diverted for other purposes during the YSRCP regime, which included setting aside 1,382 acres of land for welfare house sites.

The TDP chief underscored that 14,125 acres of land was made available through 64 industrial parks between 2014 and 2019 and observed that only 31 such parks were made available by the YSRCP government.

Noting that this kind of discouraging developments dampened the spirit of investors, Naidu exhorted that there is a new need to instill confidence in industrialists.

Instructing officials to speed up work in the projects which have already taken off, the CM called for the completion of projects worth Rs 1 lakh crore within this year to enable the employment of over 1.3 lakh people. Further, he directed officials to come up with five new policies on industries, MSMEs, food processing, electronics, IT and cloud and textiles within the next 100 days.

Naidu emphasised that the policies should be good enough to attract investments with a conducive environment.

Moreover, he also directed officials to design policies to turn the southern state into a green hydrogen and green energy hub. Similarly, he called for the drafting of proposals to create four new industrial clusters and procure Central Government approvals, adding that the clusters could come up at Kuppam, Mulapeta, Chilamathuru and Donakonda or Pamuru.

Naidu also deliberated on the Rs 11,542 crore bulk drug park at Nakkapalli, Rs 60,000 crore NTPC green hydrogen hub and others.

# Gutkha row: HC seeks CM, MLAs' response to privilege breach notice

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday asked Chief Minister M K Stalin and a few other DMK MLAs to submit their respective explanation to the show cause notices issued by the Privilege Committee in 2017 for displaying banned gutkha sachets in the Tamil Nadu Assembly, when they were in the opposition.

The DMK MLAs had then displayed the sachets to claim they were available freely during the then AIADMK regime.

Allowing a batch of appeals from the Secretary, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a division bench comprising Justices S M Subramaniam and C Kumarappan set aside the order of a single judge, which set aside the show cause notices issued by the Privilege Committee.

"The Secretary of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, the Speaker of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly and the Privilege Committee of Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly shall proceed with the show cause notice (SCN), issued to the contesting respondents, by following the due process under the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Rules and take final decision on merits and in accordance with law as expeditiously as possible", the bench added.

The bench said in view of the legal position and having not convinced with the reasoning given by the single judge for setting aside the show cause notice, it was of the firm opinion that the 'SCN' issued must reach its logical conclusion by following the due process as contemplated under the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Rules.

The bench said the powers of the Committee of Privileges and the powers of the Speaker of the House would not lapse merely on account of change of Government. The notice issued by the Privilege Committee was relating to disciplinary affairs of the House. Therefore, the proceedings will not lapse merely for the reason that the opposition party turned to be the ruling party.

The nature of proceedings require a decision to be taken on merits by following due process contemplated under the Assembly Rules.



Therefore, by setting aside the 'SCN', issues relating to disciplinary matters inside the House, cannot be buried, the bench added.

The bench said, "it is we the people of India who constituted the Assembly under the Indian Constitution.

The assembly proceedings are to be conducted in the manner prescribed. Actions initiated must be concluded by following the procedures as stipulated under the rules", the bench added.

It said issues such as breach of privileges cannot be washed away after dissolution of each and every assembly.

The Assembly and the Committee of Privileges constituted thereunder must deliberate on the issues relating to privilege breach and arrive at conclusions in the best interest of the Assembly representing the people of Tamil Nadu, the bench added.

The sovereign nature of the Assembly must be respected under all circumstances and the internal conduct should be carried on smoothly for which Rules and privileges have been formulated. And any such breach of the same must be dealt with in accordance with the principles enshrined under the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly Rules and the Constitution of India, the bench added. It further said the legislative assembly was a floor to voice out the concerns of the people and the privileges were extended to the members representing the people in the Assembly to perform their functions without any

undue interference and to carry on the legislative affairs of the House in a smooth manner.

Such privileges were to be valued in the interest of the people for whom the legislative assembly functions.

In a democracy, people were always supreme and the assembly functioning in the interest of the people must ensure that its sovereignty and dignity remain protected under all circumstances, the bench added.

The bench said the privileges were a part of the inherent nature of the House and the dissolution of an assembly does not dissolve the privileges of its members once it was reconstituted.

Similarly, breach of the privileges, if any, does not lapse with the dissolution of the assembly.

It gets carried forward to the new Committee of Privileges to be constituted by the Speaker and was left before them for further deliberations.

If the argument of senior counsel N R Elango was adopted, that breach of privilege lapses with dissolution of an assembly, the very purpose behind privileges granted to the members of the assembly become meaningless.

Utter chaos may ensue where every member will be motivated to not take the privileges seriously thereby leading to breaches and after the end of the term, on dissolution of assembly, all such proceedings lapse and this shall go on in an endless fashion, the bench added.

## ED raids Himachal Cong MLA, CM's associate in fraud case

PTI ■ SHIMLA

The Enforcement Directorate on Wednesday raided the premises of Himachal Pradesh Congress MLA R S Bali, some private hospitals and their promoters as part of a money laundering probe linked to the alleged Ayushman Bharat scheme fraud, officials said.

About 19 locations in Shimla, Kangra, Una, Mandi and Kullu districts of the state apart from those in Delhi, Chandigarh and Punjab are being searched since morning, they said.

The premises of Bali, a legislator from Nagrota assembly seat, Fortis Hospital in Kangra (promoted by Bali's company Himachal Healthcare Pvt Ltd.), Balaji Hospital in Kangra and its promoter Rajesh Sharma are being raided. Sharma, according to the officials, is a "close associate" of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. He gave up his ticket for the recent Dehra assembly bypoll for Sukhu's wife Kamlesh Thakur. She won the bypoll.

Bali is also the chairman of Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Corporation and the vice-chairman of the Himachal Pradesh Tourism Development Board.

The money laundering case filed on July 16 stems from a January 2023 FIR registered by the state vigilance and anti-corruption bureau against one Kiran Soni, Una-based Shri



Banke Bihari Hospital and others for allegedly generating "fake" AB-PMJAY (Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojna) cards.

The ED has alleged that many medical bills were generated on such "fake" cards, causing a loss to the exchequer and the public with the total "proceeds of crime" in this case estimated to be around Rs 25 crore.

The agency found that a total of 8,937 Ayushman Bharat golden cards have been scrapped in the state for alleged violation of the AB-PMJAY scheme till now. It alleged that Bankey Bihari Hospital, Fortis Hospital, Shri Balaji Hospital, Sood Nursing Home and Sri Harihar Hospital among others aided "illegal benefits" under the AB-PMJAY scheme.

As many as 373 fake Ayushman cards have been identified and claims of ₹40,68,150 were made for reimbursement from

the government in the name of treatment given to some Ayushman Bharat beneficiaries, the agency found.

List of such "fake" beneficiaries included one Rajnish Kumar and Pooja Dhiman who "denied" possession or any information of a PMJAY card issued to them, the ED found.

They never underwent any such treatment in any of these hospitals, the ED claimed. The accused hospitals made claims for treatments, surgery, admission which were actually never given or performed upon the patients, it said.

In another instance, Raksha Devi was "denied" admission in the hospital and her package was "dishonestly and illegally" blocked. The accused hospitals were "de-empanelled" from the Ayushman Bharat scheme for illegal practices and non-compliance of procedures and guidelines, the agency claimed.

# Gujarat court orders FIR for group's Muslim boycott call

PTI ■ PATAN (GUJ)

A court in Gujarat's Patan district has ordered the registration of an FIR against a group of people for allegedly calling for an economic boycott of Muslims in a village after communal violence in July last year.

In a recent order, the court of Judicial Magistrate First Class HP Joshi directed the sub-inspector of Balisana police station to register a case on the basis of a complaint by petitioner Makbul Husen Sheikh and complete the investigation in a time-bound manner. The petitioner had moved the court alleging that some persons

in Balisana misused the "unfortunate incident of a communal riot" on July 16, 2023, to incite locals to boycott Muslims and force them out of business by cancelling the rent agreement of their shops. The move has affected the businesses and livelihood of Muslims living in the area, and some have even been compelled to leave the place, he said in the petition. The court directed that the group be booked under the Indian Penal Code for promoting enmity between different groups (153-B) and circulating or publishing statements containing rumour or alarming news with intent to create or promote the feeling of enmity - 505 (2). At the same time, the court also



observed that no offence was made out under the IPC section concerning hate speech - 295 (A) - gave up the petitioner sought to add it to the FIR.

Nearly two months after the riot, Sheikh told the court, he approached the district superintendent of police (SP) with videos being shared on social media showing some villagers inciting others for an economic boycott of Muslims and forcing them out of rented shops in the village market and other places.

The petitioner said he moved the court after the police did not initiate action against those calling for the economic boycott of Muslims in the village. In an earlier order, the court had

directed the police to inquire into the matter and submit a report. The police subsequently submitted a report saying no crime appeared to have been committed.

The court, however, refused to accept the report after considering the video clips and statements of affected persons submitted by the petitioner and directed the police to register an FIR in an order passed on July 26. Two groups of villagers had clashed in Balisana on the night of July 16, 2023, over a social media post. Mobs targeted one another with iron rods, pipes and stones, leaving several injured, after which cross-FIRs were registered for rioting, resulting in the arrest of several persons.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Halwa politics

Rahul Gandhi raises the issue of the caste census in Parliament using halwa as a metaphor

It all began when Leader of the Opposition of Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi used the traditional 'halwa' preparation ceremony following the budget presentation to question the involvement of marginalised community members in the budget process. He extended the metaphor by noting that only high caste people are involved in making the halwa who distribute it to the elite sections of population. It did not go down well with the treasury benches and the pandemonium followed. Parliament has been engulfed in chaos over the contentious issue of a caste census for long. This debate not only stirred up intense discussions but also led to a significant clash between Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and former Union Minister Anurag Thakur. Prime Minister Modi backed Thakur. He took to Twitter saying, "this speech by my young and energetic colleague Shri Anurag Thakur is a must-hear. A perfect mix of facts and humour, exposing the dirty politics of the INDI Alliance." Thakur had hit back at Gandhi over



his speech in the Lok Sabha saying people who do not know their caste are asking for caste census. The demand for a caste census has been a long-standing issue taken up by the INDIA bloc. Proponents argue that it is crucial for understanding the socio-economic conditions of various castes and for formulating targeted welfare policies. India has a complex caste system that significantly impacts social and economic dynamics. A caste census would help identify disparities and enable the Government to address them more effectively. Indeed, a comprehensive caste census would provide detailed data on the socio-economic status of different castes.

which is vital for creating effective policies and programs aimed at uplifting marginalised communities. Many marginalised communities continue to face discrimination and lack of opportunities. A caste census could highlight these issues and pave the way for targeted interventions to promote social justice. The Opposition, particularly the Congress party, has been vocal in advocating for it. Rahul Gandhi has emerged as a leading voice, arguing that a caste census is necessary for ensuring social justice and equitable development. He contends that without accurate data, the government cannot effectively address the needs of marginalised communities. On the other hand, Anurag Thakur has taken a firm stance against the opposition's demand. Thakur argues that the government is already implementing numerous schemes aimed at social upliftment and that a caste census may lead to further division within society. Thakur accused the opposition of playing divisive politics and undermining the Government's efforts to promote inclusive development. As the pandemonium in Parliament continues, the issue of caste census remains unresolved. The caste census can be a turning point in deciding Government's approach to welfare. The issue should not die in the din of Parliament.

### PICTALK



Children play at fountains near Lal Chowk on a rainy day in Srinagar

# Delhi sinks in cesspool of Government apathy



SIDHARTH MISHRA

Recent tragedies, such as the flooding of a coaching institute basement that claimed three young lives, highlight Delhi's mismanagement



Historical writings many times create a perspective of adulation for some of the most undeserving characters. Take the instance of Bahadur Shah Zafar, the last of the Mughal dynasty, whose rule started in Shahjahanabad and ended at Palam. He was extended by the British for his connivance with the rebellious soldiers and died in Myanmar. His 'tragedy' is best known by the lines which he penned himself before he died. He wrote, 'kitna hai badnasib zafar dafn ke lie do gaz zamin bhi na mili ku-e-yar m?' (How unfortunate is Zafar! For his burial; Not even two yards of land were to be had, in the land of his beloved.). In the popular culture, it's seldom recalled that he was a worthless leader, incapable of administering, always cribbing and too preoccupied with palace conspiracies. Nearly 150 years later, we in Delhi have a government which is as Zafaresque in its bearing as the Mughal rule in 1857. The day leaders from INDIA block converged in the national Capital in the support of incarcerated chief minister of Delhi Arvind Kejriwal, the same evening his party ruled Delhi government and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD)

presided over a catastrophe in the flooded basement of a coaching institute in the heart of the national Capital. Nobody among those supposed to be in charge of the city administration seems to be mourning the loss of three young lives. They in typical Zafaresque style are busy blaming one and all possible. Kejriwal's regents in the Delhi government have done their bit. Minister Atishi Marlena has said that she has ordered a magisterial enquiry, which you can bet would have no clear finding to present. Her colleague Saurabh Bhardwaj has claimed that though he holds meetings with the officials nobody listens to him. Not to leave behind, city's Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena too has joined the charade blaming the city government and the MCD for not taking the necessary initiative to prevent such a tragedy. In the midst of all this, our modern-day Zafar aka Arvind Kejriwal would be busy penning another sob story in his prison cell about his persecution and alleged continuous loss of weight. How do you expect the MCD to be functional when you have a Mayor



KEJRIWAL'S REGENTS IN THE DELHI GOVERNMENT HAVE DONE THEIR BIT. MINISTER ATISHI MARLENA HAS SAID THAT SHE HAS ORDERED A MAGISTERIAL ENQUIRY, WHICH YOU CAN BET WOULD HAVE NO CLEAR FINDING TO PRESENT

who is unauthorisedly occupying the chair much beyond her term expired? Shelly Oberoi is a beneficiary of the political crisis engulfing Delhi. The Lieutenant Governor scuttled the election of the new Mayor because the file did not have a note by the Chief Minister, who could not put his pen on the file as he was in jail. That was the technical reason but the political reason was that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) did not want to have an embarrassment ahead of the Lok Sabha elections losing the Mayoral polls. Now that the polls are over and the BJP has won all the seven Lok Sabha seats in the national Capital, the Lieutenant Governor could have gathered sufficient wisdom to allow an election and have somebody head the municipal body who was authorised to do so. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi works through various committees, including the one responsible for keeping the drains in the city clean. Ever since the AAP came to power in MCD in 2022 with a thin majority, the slugfest between AAP and BJP has ensured that most of these powerful committees have remained non-functional.

When such a stalemate has swamped the Civic Centre, the headquarters of the MCD, how does one expect the city to have civic governance? During the last Lok Sabha polls earlier this year, the campaign in the city was cantankerous focusing mostly on mudslinging. It was a campaign where the issues about Delhi were all lost in the bitter cacophony. No wonder even after the polls issues of Delhi remain unaddressed. There is no indication that it will be addressed anytime soon. While Kejriwal continues to play a Zafar albeit his rule does not extend beyond his cell in Tihar Jail, the Centre through its representative is in the role of Nero, the Roman emperor who once famously said, "I have only to appear and sing to have peace once more in Gaul." Delhi has been sans governance for several years and will take several years to bring it back on the rails. The Centre should realise that it cannot continue to play Nero but intervene and save it from the kind of destruction that Rome faced. (The writer is an author and president, the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### NEED FOR RAILWAY SAFETY AUTHORITY

Madam — There is an urgent need to establish a railway safety authority as a statutory body with powers to frame safety standards, conduct audits, enforce accountability, and investigate accidents. Improved communication and coordination among railway boards, zonal railways, divisions, and production units are essential. Increased funding for track renewal, bridge repair, signaling upgrades, and coach refurbishment is crucial. Advanced safety systems like Anti-Collision Devices (ACDs), Train Collision Avoidance System (TCAS), Train Protection Warning System (TPWS), and Automatic Train Control (ATC) should be installed to ensure passenger safety and reduce accidents. The recent derailment of the Howrah-CSMT Express, resulting in two deaths and 20 injuries, underscores the need for these measures. Learning from Japan's Shinkansen, which has maintained a perfect safety record with advanced systems, could be highly beneficial. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

#### TRAGIC LOSS OF LIVES OF IAS ASPIRANT

Madam — The tragic loss of three civil services aspirants who drowned in a rain-flooded basement of a coaching centre in Delhi is heart-wrenching. This incident highlights the apathy and connivance of officials who turned a blind eye to urban planning violations. The coaching centre flouted all safety norms, using its basement as a library despite regulations. The city's drainage system, clogged due to rampant illegal constructions, exacerbated the situation. A thorough investigation is necessary to fix responsibility. Both state and central governments must learn from this tragedy, review the status of urban bodies, and strictly enforce norms to prevent such violations. It is deplorable that the negligence of authorities and the greed of the coaching centre led to such a loss.

#### Manu Bhaker's historic Olympic win



Kudos to India's shooting ace Manu Bhaker for making history by becoming the first Indian post-independence to win two medals in a single Olympics. Bhaker and her partner Sarabjot Singh secured bronze in the 10M Air Pistol Mixed Team event, defeating the Koreans 16-10. This added to Bhaker's earlier bronze in the Women's Individual 10M Air Pistol event, making her the first Indian since Norman Pritchard

in 1900 to achieve such a feat. Congratulations to the Indian shooting pair for winning the country's second bronze medal at the Olympics. Bhaker's composure amidst the hype is commendable, and she stands as an inspiration for every Indian youth with her dedication and love for the sport. In closing, Manu Bhaker's remarkable achievements at the Olympics have etched her name in history and brought immense pride to India. Her success, alongside Sarabjot Singh, in securing bronze medals in both individual and mixed team events showcases their exceptional talent and teamwork. Bhaker's unwavering dedication and resilience serve as an inspiration to young athletes across the nation. We extend our heartfelt congratulations to both Manu Bhaker and Sarabjot Singh for their outstanding performances and wish them continued success in their future endeavors. Bidyut Kumar | Faridabad

Worse still is the blame game between Delhi's state and central governments, which overshadows the tragedy. DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

#### CRICKET HAS CHANGED

Madam — Apropos the article, "The evolution of cricket and umpiring", published on July 22, 2024, this is my response. Cricket has undergone metamorphosis of change and it has become more and more a technology-driven sport like most of the modern day sports. The advent of ODIs and followed by T20Is, including of course the IPL, have all attracted millions of fans across the globe and have taken the game to its highest pedestal. English counties propelled the sport in the late 19th century, and it was around this time cricket went international, with the US and Canada playing each other first, followed by Australia's tour of England, which led to the creation of The Ashes. Perhaps, this period formed the basis of the worldwide status cricket now has. Throughout the 20th and

21st century, cricket retained its core rules, but later became a much more skill-based sport. On top of this, the technological advancements made across the sporting world meant that cricket was changing for players, officials and as well the spectators. 'Ball tracking' is one of the key technological innovations in the game, which not only meant better analysis of a bowler's technique, but also the ability to better read LBWs by tracking the ball's path trajectory. Living at a time where T20 internationals have become the most popular of all the three formats, cricket has seen a big surge in viewership. No wonder, being the game's super power, India's recent T20 world cup win at Barbados will only take the game to its extraordinary heights like never before. It is one sport that is liked by every Indian and binds India like no other sport. Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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## Budget prioritises applied research but neglects basic science

Promoting applied research at the cost of fundamental sciences, like physics and ecology, could jeopardise scientific progress and innovation

The recent budget emphasises operationalising the Anusandhan National Research Fund (ANRF) for research and prototype development and increasing private participation in generating funds for research. Though these are commendable, the government should consider a few academic and research community apprehensions. One main concern is the declining trend among researchers and policymakers towards supporting basic science research. Basic science, sometimes called fundamental or pure science, is driven by curiosity and the quest for understanding the underlying principles governing the natural world without immediate concern for practical applications. Discoveries made through basic research often lay the groundwork for subsequent advancements. For instance, a theoretical endeavour to understand atomic and subatomic particles and quantum mechanics initially led to the development of tech-



nologies such as semiconductors and MRI machines. This expansion of knowledge is not merely an academic exercise; it creates a foundation upon which applied sciences can build. We need good physics, chemistry, mathematics, and biology researchers to do this. Unfortunately, our teachers fail to convey the application of basic research to the student community. Natural calamities are recurring in every part of our country. Still, we haven't deliberated with our researchers working in the field of ecology, climate studies or the environment. Biodiversity and the environment are the lifelines of our planet, and we need good researchers to study them in the future. Unfortunately, research in

systematics, ecology, etc., hardly gets the attention of our policymakers. We hardly have a national institution whose mandate is systematics or ecology, though these are part of many institutions as a division. Researching with sophisticated instruments in the lab is comparatively easier than researchers in the field. Why should a researcher spend years in a forest studying wildlife? They are real scientists who are providing yeoman service to the nation. Unfortunately, they are not getting enough recognition or acceptance from our policymakers or society. Because of this, many good researchers passionate about fundamental science research are moving towards more lucrative areas. This will create a cavity in our future scientific knowledge base. Policymakers should understand that the success we have received in space research or health care in recent times is because of the strength of the fundamental science we have built over the peri-

od. We need to create an environment where basic science education and research are promoted. For this, the government should allot part of the budget for ANRF exclusively for basic science research. The huge financial investment required for basic science and the uncertainty of results may deter private entities from funding such endeavours. But if we neglect basic science in the long run, our science will suffer badly. The stagnation of basic science can lead to a lack of new theories and principles, which hinders the development of innovative technologies and solutions. The government should prioritise basic science research in policy documents and provide necessary support to researchers working in the field. We can address emerging challenges only if we have a robust basic science workforce. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN



## FIRST COLUMN FROM HURT TO HEALING

By understanding our desires and analysing our actions, we can find ways to heal ourselves



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Nobody can hurt me without my permission, said Mahatma Gandhi, however, the truth is that most of us hurt each other in our relationships and we do it because we just want to do it. There is no larger reason for it, but it's something that just happens. According to psychologists, most people hurt someone because they want something they think they can't have, or have something they don't want. If we closely observe ourselves, then we would find that most of us are in one of the above two conditions, and we don't know what to do about it, hence we think that the only method of getting what we want is to hurt someone. So, is this the only way out? Is it the right method to follow? We all know it's wrong because it creates a lot of pain on both sides, so why do we do it?

Simply because we don't understand how to have that thing that we badly want or get rid of that thing that we do not need without hurting. There may be numerous reasons for us to hurt people, however the most common of them is 'unfulfilled expectations' which we all experience in our various relationships. Take for example, we just met someone and have fallen in love with him/her. Now before there is any kind of exchange of feelings, we just start dreaming about things that are totally out of context.

After a lot of pursuing, chasing and pushing, when we finally fail to get the desired reply from the other end, we start feeling miserable and then start blaming the person by saying things like 'You



hurt me', 'You broke my heart' etc. We should sit aside in a quiet corner and ask ourselves whether our expectations right from the beginning were realistic. Did the opposite person give us any inclination to believe so that he/she also feels the same as we are feeling? Were feelings of love mutual on both sides? When it was time to understand what he/she was saying, we were building love castles in the air, when it was time to give some space to the opposite person, we were suffocating the person with our forced love & affection. Is this the right kind of behaviour?

Remember! Any kind of one-sided relationship is extremely painful and maleficent because it makes you feel like a spare part in someone else's life as if you aren't as important to them as they are to you. Hence to prevent oneself from such pain and agony, it is best to have clear communication with the person whom you have feelings for. It doesn't matter what kind of a relationship you are in, but you have got to communicate your feelings because when we open the door of a dialogue, we open our hearts.

So always express yourself because carrying the burden of unspoken words can take a toll on you. It's 100 times better to say what you genuinely feel rather than repeating 'I love you' 100 times. However, it's so unfortunate that most of us prefer to bleed from within and stick to our 'no expressing' stubbornness. A wise person would thus always think about these reasons when being hurt rather than wasting time on 'Why me?'

So c'mon don't give up so easily because life is too short for such mundane things, just forget what hurt you but never forget what it taught you. Learn your lessons and move on.

*(The writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)*

# Reforming the personal income tax regime



UTTAM GUPTA

In the Budget for 2024-25, Finance Minister has made the 'new regime' of personal income tax more appealing, while continuing to rationalise the capital gains tax structure



In the Union Budget for 2024-25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has endeavoured to make the 'new regime' of personal income tax (PIT) a bit more attractive besides continuing the process of 'rationalising' and 'simplifying' the structure of capital gains tax (CGT) that was started in her budget for FY 2023-24. Sitharaman had introduced the new PIT regime in the Budget for 2020-21. Even while retaining a 5 per cent tax for annual income in the Rs 250,001-Rs 500,000 range (as under the old regime before 2020-21), on income higher than Rs 500,000, the government levied: 10 per cent on Rs 500,001-Rs 750,000; 15 per cent on Rs 750,001-Rs 1,000,000; 20 per cent on Rs 1,000,001-Rs 1,250,000; 25 per cent on Rs 1,250,001-Rs 1,500,000. For income above Rs 1,500,000, the 30 per cent tax continued. Unlike the old regime where persons could claim annual exemptions and deductions on long-term investments up to a maximum of Rs 375,000, none was allowed under the new regime.

However, individuals were given the choice to go either for the new regime or continue with the old regime. In the Budget for 2023-24, she altered the tax new structure to provide for nil tax on income up to Rs 300,000; 5 per cent tax on income in the Rs 300,001-Rs 600,000 bracket; 10 per cent in the Rs 600,001-Rs 900,000 bracket; 15 per cent in Rs 900,001-Rs 1,200,000; 20 per cent in Rs 1,200,001-1,500,000; and 30 per cent on above Rs 1,500,000. Besides, salaried persons and pensioners can also claim a standard deduction of Rs 50,000. This was much better than the 2020-21 package. Under it, a person with an annual income of say Rs 1,500,000 needs to pay Rs 140,000 as tax when compared to Rs 150,000 payable under the old regime albeit with tax breaks. Besides, the former left the person with cash-in-hand of Rs 1,360,000 against only Rs 975,000 under the old regime (after paying tax Rs 150,000 and investment Rs 375,000). Furthermore, under the new (modified) regime a salaried person won't have to pay any tax on annual income up to Rs 750,000. In the Budget for 2024-25, the FM has further tweaked the slabs to provide



IN CASES WHERE THE STRATEGIC SALE IS MOOTED, THE GOVT FACES A BIGGER CHALLENGE AS APART FROM A FAVOURABLE MARKET, IT NEEDS BIDDERS WITH DEEP POCKETS

for nil tax on income up to Rs 300,000; 5 per cent tax on income in the Rs 300,001- Rs 700,000 bracket; 10 per cent in the Rs 700,001-Rs 1000,000 brackets; 15 per cent in Rs 1000,001- Rs 1,200,000; 20 per cent in Rs 1,200,001-1,500,000; and 30 per cent on above Rs 1,500,000. Besides, salaried persons and pensioners can now claim a standard deduction of Rs 75,000. For a person with an annual income of Rs 1,500,000, these changes will yield an incremental savings of Rs 15,000 over the tax payable as per the 2023-24 budget. She will need to pay only Rs 125,000 as tax. Moreover, a salaried person won't have to pay any tax on annual income up to Rs 825,000 up from Rs 750,000 earlier. Already, nearly two-thirds of those filing IT returns have shifted to the new tax regime.

The additional sweetener from the 2024-25 budget will incentivize more persons to shift. Coming to CGT, the subsisting tax rates varied widely depending on the asset such as equity shares, bonds, physical assets, listed or unlisted, holding period, etc. This was prone to arbitrage/misuse, evasion and protracted litigation. Last year, the government began the process of reforming it. In the Finance Bill, 2023 passed by the Lok Sabha on March 24, 2023, it amended to change the tax treatment of capital gains from non-equity or debt mutual funds (DMF). DMF is a scheme that invests in fixed-income instruments, such as corporate and government bonds, corporate debt securities, money market instruments etc. that offer capital appreciation.

Earlier, any capital gain on redemption of units in a debt fund held for three years or longer was treated as long-term capital gain (LTCG) and taxed at a flat 20 per cent with the

benefit of indexation (it adjusts the cost of a person's investment to account for inflation, effectively reducing her capital gains and in turn, her tax liability). Any capital gain on redemption of units before three years was treated as short-term capital gain (STCG) and taxed at an individual's income tax (albeit personal) slab rate.

The amendment dispensed with this distinction in the case of 'Specified mutual funds' (SMFs) which essentially refer to mutual funds where not more than 35 per cent of their total proceeds are invested in equity shares of domestic companies. As a result, gains arising from SMFs irrespective of the period for which the units are held by investors are deemed STCGs and hence, liable to tax at the rate applicable to the slab in which their total income falls.

The new tax treatment effective from April 1, 2023, also applied to exchange-traded funds (ETFs), gold funds, outbound mutual funds equity funds etc. In the budget for 2024-25, the FM has gone for a major overhaul of the CGT regime. For all categories of assets - financial or physical, listed or unlisted - except debt and non-equity MFs and unlisted bonds, long-term capital gains (LTCG) will attract tax at a uniform rate of 12.5 per cent. The holding period for deciding long-term is 24 months except in the case of stocks, equity mutual funds and REITs/InvITs where the threshold is 12 months. In the case of debt and non-equity MFs and unlisted bonds, the gains will be taxed at the applicable slab rate.

For assets held for less than 24 months, short-term capital gains (STCG) will be taxed at the applicable slab rate. However, in the case of stocks, equity mutual funds, listed bonds and REITs/InvITs, the STCG will be taxed at 20 per cent. This is up from

15 per cent levied earlier. Pertinently, for these instruments, even the LTCG tax of 12.5 per cent is higher than the 10 per cent levied earlier. Three broad messages emanate from these changes.

First, these reward long-term investors who will now pay LTCG of 12.5 per cent down from 20 per cent or the applicable slab rate (generally 39 per cent) earlier depending on the asset class. A higher annual exemption limit of Rs 125,000 (up from the existing Rs 100,000) from LTCG from stocks and equity MFs is an added sweetener. Second, while reducing the LTCG tax rate, FM has taken away the benefit of indexation.

This way she has plugged a major source of revenue loss in the real estate sector whereby developers could drastically reduce the tax outgo by taking advantage of indexation. However, owners of old houses acquired before 2001 (ancestral property) have been spared as they will continue to get indexation benefits. Third, investors looking for short-term gains pay more as the STCG tax rate on stocks and equity mutual funds now is 20 per cent up from 15 per cent earlier.

These persons being mostly rich persons/high net-worth individuals with surplus funds, Sitharaman's endeavour to collect more tax from them is fully justified. The new CGT regime is undoubtedly a big improvement. However, the government should aim at a structure where irrespective of the asset class, listed or unlisted and the holding period, the capital gains arising therefrom are an addition to her income in the relevant year. Therefore, tax should be levied at the rate applicable to the slab his total income falls in (all sources put together).

*(The writer is a policy analyst; views are personal)*

# The OTT platforms are redefining star power and entertainment

These platforms not only showcase diverse stories and talents but also help actors reach a global audience and achieve instant stardom

In today's rapidly changing entertainment landscape, Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms have emerged as a powerful force in redefining how we consume content and perceive celebrity status. These platforms have not only revolutionized the way stories are told but also introduced a new breed of superstars, offering actors opportunities to gain recognition and connect with audiences on a global scale that rivals traditional commercial movie stardom.

The accessibility of content through platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ has disrupted the established order in both Hollywood and Bollywood. Unlike conventional cinema, where fame often dictated success, OTT platforms prioritize diverse



CHAITANYA KUMAR PRASAD

storytelling and talent. This shift has empowered actors who were previously relegated to supporting roles or lesser-known projects to take center stage and achieve instant fame. For instance, actors like Nawazuddin Siddiqui, Pankaj Tripathi, Vijay Varma, and Jaideep Ahlawat in India, along with Phoebe Waller-Bridge in the West, have risen to stardom through standout performances on OTT platforms.

These digital stages provide a unique opportunity for actors to connect with audiences worldwide, transcending borders and cultural boundaries. OTT platforms have also given rise to a new form of celebrity influence, one that values performance, quality, and character relatability over traditional box office metrics. The popularity of these stars is rooted in their ability to connect with audiences through captivating stories and authentic performances.

This evolution has opened doors for exploring a wide range of genres and unconventional characters, allowing actors to showcase their versatility and depth. By stepping beyond the typical main character archetypes, actors now have the opportunity to por-

tray complex roles that not only highlight their talent but also solidify their star status and diversify their portfolios. What sets OTT stars apart is their relatability and authenticity, which enhances their appeal. Unlike traditional movie icons who are often seen as larger-than-life figures, OTT stars are perceived as more down-to-earth and relatable. This relatability translates into strong brand value, as audiences feel a deeper connection to these actors and their on-screen personas. OTT platforms also serve as a hub for brand collaborations, where actors endorse products that align with their on-screen personas. This integration of content and commerce has opened up new avenues for revenue generation for actors,



while also boosting their brand image. Additionally, OTT platforms have the distinct advantage of reaching a larger and more diverse audience, further enhancing their appeal. The influence of OTT platforms is also evident in how they have breathed new life into theatrical releases. There is now a "reverse osmosis"

effect where movies that may have had limited box office runs or regional appeal find broader audiences and renewed popularity when released on streaming services. Moreover, the allure of OTT platforms has attracted big stars and celebrated directors to create original content specifically for streaming audiences. Renowned filmmakers and top-tier actors, who traditionally dominated the theatrical space, are now embracing the creative freedom and diverse storytelling opportunities offered by OTT platforms. High-profile projects like Martin Scorsese's "The Irishman" on Netflix and Sanjay Leela Bhansali's "Heeramandi" are prime examples of this shift. During the COVID-19 pandemic,

when theaters were shut down, OTT platforms not only sustained the entertainment industry but also thrived as the sole infotainment channel for audiences.

The era of DVD rentals and brick-and-mortar video stores has given way to the convenience of streaming services, which offer a vast library of movies and TV shows at the click of a button. Streaming platforms have emerged as launchpads for movies and series that gain immense popularity, often surpassing traditional cinema. Shows like "Stranger Things," "Money Heist," and "Sacred Games" have garnered cult followings, turning their actors into global sensations. The viral nature of streaming content, combined with its global accessibil-

ity, can catapult relatively unknown actors and smaller productions into the limelight, achieving a level of fame that rivals big-budget blockbusters. OTT platforms also cater to niche audiences by offering content that may not have widespread commercial appeal but resonates deeply with specific viewer groups. This has allowed for a variety of stories and genres to thrive, from indie films to experimental series. By tapping into these niche markets, OTT platforms have redefined the concept of a "hit," allowing for diverse forms of success that go beyond traditional box office.

*(The writer is former Addl. DG DFF & Festival Director IFFI, Views are personal. Inputs: Zoya Ahmad, Vaishnavie Srinivasan)*

# Hamas leader Ismail killed in alleged Israeli strike

AP ■ BEIRUT



Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed by a pre-dawn airstrike in the Iranian capital Wednesday, Iran and the militant group said, blaming Israel for a shock assassination that risks escalating the conflict even as the US and other nations were scrambling to prevent an all-out regional war. Iran's supreme leader vowed revenge against Israel.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has pledged to kill Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's October 7 attack on southern Israel. The strike came just after Haniyeh had attended the inauguration of Iran's new president in Tehran — and only hours after Israel targeted a top commander in Gaza, Iran's ally Hezbollah in the Lebanese capital Beirut. The assassination of Hamas' top political leader was potentially explosive amid the region's volatile, intertwined conflicts — because of its target, its timing and the decision to carry it out in Tehran. Most dangerous was the potential to push Iran and Israel into direct confrontation if Iran retaliates.

"We consider his revenge as our duty," Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement on his official website. He said Israel had "prepared a harsh punishment for itself" by killing "a dear guest in our home."

Bitter regional rivals, Israel and Iran risked plunging into war earlier this year when Israel hit Iran's embassy in Damascus in April. Iran retaliated and Israel countered in an unprecedented exchange of strikes on each other's soil, but international efforts succeeded

in containing that cycle before it spun out of control. Haniyeh's killing could also prompt Hamas to pull out of negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage release deal in the 10-month-old war in Gaza, which US mediators had said were making progress. And it could inflame already heightening tensions between Israel and Hezbollah — which international diplomats were trying to contain after a weekend rocket attack that killed 12 young people in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

Tuesday evening, Israel carried out a rare strike in the Lebanese capital that it said killed a top Hezbollah commander allegedly behind the rocket strike. Hezbollah, which denied any role in the Golan strike, said Wednesday that it was still searching for the body of Fouad Shukur in the rubble of the building that was hit in a Beirut suburb, killing two women and two children, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry. There was no immediate reaction from the White House to the killing of Haniyeh. A key question was whether Israel told its top ally

the US ahead of time about the strike.

Asked about Haniyeh's killing during a visit to Singapore, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said, "This is something we were not aware of or involved in."

Speaking to Channel News Asia, Blinken said he would not speculate about the impact on cease-fire efforts. "But I can tell you that the imperative of getting a cease-fire, the importance that that has for everyone, remains."

In Manila, US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said he still had hopes for a diplomatic solution on the Israeli-Lebanon border. "I don't think that war is inevitable," he said. "I maintain that. I think there's always room and opportunity for diplomacy, and I'd like to see parties pursue those opportunities."

But international diplomats trying to defuse tensions were alarmed. One Western diplomat, whose country has worked to prevent an Israeli-Hezbollah escalation, said the double strikes in Beirut and Tehran have "almost killed" hopes for a Gaza cease-fire and could push the Middle East into a "devastating regional war." The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive situation.

An Israeli military spokesman declined to comment. Israel often doesn't comment on assassinations carried out by its Mossad intelligence agency or strikes on other countries. In a statement by his office, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said Israel doesn't want war after its strike on the Hezbollah commander in Beirut, "but we are preparing for all possibilities." He did not mention the Haniyeh killing.

The killing of Haniyeh abroad comes as Israel has not had a clear success in killing the group's top leadership in Gaza, who are believed to be primarily responsible for planning the October 7 attack, after nearly 10 months of fighting in the enclave.

Earlier this month, Israel carried out a strike in Gaza targeting the head of Hamas' military wing, Mohammed Deif, killing at least 90 Palestinians living in nearby tents, according to Gaza health authorities. Israel said it believed Deif was killed, but neither it nor Hamas has confirmed his death.

More elusive has been Hamas' top leader in Gaza, Yehya Sinwar, believed to be the mastermind of Hamas' brutal surprise assault into southern Israel, during which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 250 others.

Haniyeh left the Gaza Strip in 2019 and had lived in exile in Qatar. Israel has targeted Hamas figures in Lebanon and Syria during the war — but going after Haniyeh in Iran was vastly more sensitive. But Israel has operated there in the past: It is suspected of running a yearslong assassination campaign against Iranian nuclear scientists. In 2020, a top Iranian military nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was killed by a remote-controlled machine gun while traveling in a car outside Tehran. During Haniyeh's last hours in Iran — a close ally of Hamas — he was smiling and clapping at the inauguration ceremony of the new President Masoud Pezeshkian. AP photos showed him seated alongside leaders from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group and Hezbollah, and Iranian media showed him and Pezeshkian

## China flays Haniyeh killings; warns of deeper chaos

**Beijing (PTI):** Strongly condemning the assassination of the Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, China — which brokered a unity deal between various Palestine groups last week — on Wednesday warned that the killing could plunge the region into deeper chaos.

Chinese foreign ministry spokesman Lin Jian told a media briefing here that Beijing strongly opposed the assassination of Haniyeh, whose Hamas group took part in the unity talks along with 14 Palestine factions in Beijing sponsored by China. Haniyeh, Hamas' supreme leader, was killed in an airstrike in Tehran early Wednesday. He was in exile and was on Israel's hit list after the militant group launched a surprise attack on Israel on October 7 last year. "China has always advocated resolving regional disputes through

negotiation and dialogue," Lin said, adding that China was "deeply concerned" that the incident could lead to further turmoil in the region. He also reiterated China's call for a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire in Gaza to avoid further escalation of the conflict. Last week, the Chinese Foreign Ministry which coordinated the dialogue among 14 rival factions, said the declaration was a first step to promote a "comprehensive, durable and sustainable ceasefire" in the Gaza Strip battered by Israeli bombing. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who met the leaders' factions, said the signing of the agreement was "an important, historic moment in the Palestinian cause." He had also said that under the deal the rival groups had agreed to set up an "interim national reconciliation government" to govern post-war Gaza.

rebels who control much of Yemen.

As a show of support for Hamas in the Gaza war, Hezbollah has been exchanging fire almost daily with Israel across the Israeli-Lebanese border in a simmering but deadly conflict that has repeatedly threatened to escalate into all-out war. The Houthis and Iraqi and Syrian militias have also fired rockets and drones at Israel and at American bases in the region, though most have been intercepted. A strike Tuesday night southwest of the Iraqi capital Baghdad killed four members of one Iranian-backed militia, Kataib Hezbollah, which has targeted US bases previously, according to Iraq's Popular Mobilization Forces, a militia coalition. It accused the US of being behind the strike. US officials did not immediately comment.

## 'Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities faced torture'

**Geneva (AP):** The UN human rights office issued a report Wednesday saying Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities since the October 7 attacks faced waterboarding, sleep deprivation, electric shocks, the release of dogs, and other forms of torture and mistreatment.

The report said Israel's prison service held more than 9,400 "security detainees" as of the end of June, and some have been held in secret without access to lawyers or respect for their legal rights. A summary of the report, based on interviews with former detainees and other sources, decried a "staggering" number of detainees — including men, women, children, journalists and human rights defenders — and said such practices raise concerns about arbitrary detention. "The testimonies gathered by my office and other entities indicate a range of appalling acts, such as waterboarding and the release of dogs on detainees, amongst other acts, in flagrant violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law," said UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk in a statement. Findings in the report, one of the most extensive of its kind, could be used by International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecutors who are looking into crimes committed in connection with Hamas' October 7 attacks and Israel's blistering ongoing military campaign in Gaza.

## Sudan's military says its top commander survived drone strike that killed five

AP ■ CAIRO

Sudan's military said its top commander, Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, survived a drone attack on a military graduation ceremony that killed five people in the country's east. The military said in a statement Wednesday that the attack by two drones took place in Gebeit, a town in eastern Sudan, after the ceremony was concluded. Military chief Burhan, who was attending, was not hurt, according to Lt. Col. Hassan Ibrahim, from the military spokesman's office.

Sudan has been torn by war for more than a year between the military and a powerful paramilitary group, the Rapid

Support Forces. With fighting in the capital, Khartoum, the military leadership largely operates out of eastern Sudan near the Red Sea Coast. Videos posted by Al Araby TV shows multiple people running along a dusty road at the time of the drone attack, while other footage showed people at the graduation ceremony apparently looking to the sky as the drone strike hit.

The assassination attempt comes nearly a week after Sudan's paramilitary leader said that he plans to attend cease-fire talks in Switzerland next month arranged by the United States and Saudi Arabia.

Gen. Mohammed Hamdan Dagalo, head of the Rapid

Support Forces fighting Sudan's army, emphasized at the time that the talks would become "a major step" toward peace and stability in Sudan and create a new state based on "justice, equality and federal rule." The Sudanese Foreign Ministry on Tuesday responded to the U.S. invitation to the talks in Geneva, saying the military-controlled Sudanese government is prepared to take part but said that any negotiation before implementing the Jeddah Declaration "wouldn't be acceptable to the Sudanese people." The Jeddah Declaration of Commitment to Protect Civilians passed last year meant to end the conflict, but neither side commit-

ted to its objectives. Representatives from the Sudanese Army and the RSF, led by Mohamed Hamadan Dagalo, engaged in revived talks brokered by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia in Jeddah, focusing on the delivery of humanitarian aid, achieving ceasefires and paving the way toward a permanent cessation of aggression, among other objectives. In its Tuesday statement, the Sudanese Foreign Ministry accused the RSF of being the only party that attacks cities, villages and civilians. The military-controlled Sudanese government demanded sanctions to be imposed on "rebels to stop their continuous aggression, end their siege on cities, and open roads."

## Mosque targeted, around 40 police officers injured at UK stabbing site

PTI ■ LONDON

A far-right mob targeted a mosque in north-west England that saw three young girls fatally stabbed during a peaceful vigil in their memory and around 40 police officers suffered injuries in the disorder. According to reports, misinformation being spread on social media about the ethnicity and religion of the 17-year-old male suspect in police custody led to the rioting at the mosque in Southport on Tuesday night. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, who had earlier visited the site of Monday's brutal stabbing attack on a dance

studio on Hart Street, condemned the mobs for hijacking the vigil and insulting the grieving community with their actions. "The people of Southport are reeling after the horror inflicted on them yesterday. They deserve our support and our respect," said Starmer.

"Those who have hijacked the vigil for the victims with violence and thuggery have insulted the community as it grieves. They will feel the full force of the law," he said. Alice Dasilva Aguiar, 9, Bebe King, 6, and Elsie Dot Stancombe, 7, were named as the victims of the fatal stabbing. Eight others were seriously injured, five of

whom remain in critical condition in hospital. Merseyside Police have said it was currently not treating the incident as terror-related. "There has been much speculation and hypothesis around the status of a 17-year-old male who is currently in police custody and some individuals are using this to bring violence and disorder to our streets. We have already said that the person arrested was born in the UK and speculation helps nobody at this time," said Alex Goss, Assistant Chief Constable of the force.

The police said 22 of its officers sustained serious injuries, including fractures, lacerations,

a suspected broken nose and concussion. The rioters set cars belonging to members of the public alight, threw bricks at the local mosque and damaged a local convenience store, and set large refuse bins on fire.

As a result, strict legal orders have been enforced in the area designed to minimise serious violence and giving additional powers to officers to tackle anti-social behaviour. "Sadly, offenders have destroyed garden walls so they could use the bricks to attack our officers and have set cars belonging to the public on fire, and damaged cars parked in the Mosque car park.

## About 8 in 10 Democrats satisfied with Harris after Biden drops out: Poll

**Washington (AP):** Vice President Kamala Harris appears to have energized Democrats in the early days of her candidacy, with the surge in warm feelings extending across multiple groups, including some key Democratic constituencies that had been especially tepid about President Joe Biden, a new poll shows.

About 8 in 10 Democrats say they would be somewhat or very satisfied if Harris became the Democratic nominee for president, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which was conducted after Biden withdrew from the race.

In a separate AP-NORC poll, taken before Biden dropped out but after his debate against former President Donald Trump, only about 4 in 10 Democrats said they were somewhat or very satisfied that he was the Democratic Party's likely nominee for president.

The rapidly changing views among Democrats in such a short time span underscore how swiftly the party — from rank-and-file voters to elected officials — has coalesced behind Harris as its standard-bearer, motivated by the fresh face at the top of the ticket and newfound confidence in the party's prospects against Trump in November. Gary Hines, a Democrat from Philadelphia, said he wasn't particularly impressed by Harris' first presidential bid but now, she's shown "she's up to the task, can do the work, has proven that she's running a strong campaign so far and maybe on a bigger level, she's somebody



## 'China behind 2021 cyberattack on govt agency'

AP ■ BERLIN

An investigation has determined that "Chinese state actors" were responsible for a 2021 cyberattack on Germany's national office for cartography, officials in Berlin said on Wednesday. The Chinese ambassador was summoned to the Foreign Ministry for a protest for the first time in decades.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson Sebastian Fischer said the German government has "reliable information from our intelligence services" about the source of the attack on the Federal Agency for Cartography and Geodesy, which he said was carried out

"for the purpose of espionage." "This serious cyberattack on a federal agency shows how big the danger is from Chinese cyberattacks and spying," Interior Minister Nancy Faeser said in a statement. "We call on China to refrain from and prevent such cyberattacks. These cyberattacks threaten the digital sovereignty of Germany and Europe." Fischer declined to elaborate on who exactly in China was responsible. He said a Chinese ambassador was last summoned to the German Foreign Ministry in 1989 after the Tiananmen Square crackdown. Germany's attribution of the cyberattack is the latest case to reflect increasing ten-

sions between Berlin and Beijing about potential security risks posed by China. In April, three people were arrested in Germany on suspicion of spying for China and arranging to transfer information on technology with potential military uses. And an assistant to a prominent German far-right lawmaker in the European Parliament was arrested on suspicion of spying for China. Three weeks ago, Germany said it will bar the use of critical components made by Chinese companies Huawei and ZTE in core parts of the country's 5G networks in two steps starting in 2026. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's government last year drew up a

strategy for relations with China that refers to a "systemic rivalry" with the Asian power and a need to reduce risks of economic dependency, but highlights Berlin's desire to work with Beijing on challenges such as climate change and maintain trade ties. The strategy drew criticism from Beijing. In the 2021 case, the Interior Ministry said that part of the cartography agency's network was compromised but further malware wasn't found. It said the attacker was successfully kicked out of the network, and the agency — which provides official geodata for Germany — undertook a series of measures to improve its IT security.

## Carter Center unable to verify Venezuela poll results, blasts officials



Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, left, and opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez hold up vote tally sheets from the top of a truck during a protest against the official presidential election results declaring President Nicolas Maduro the winner in Caracas, Venezuela, on Tuesdaytwo days after the election. AP/PTI

**AP ■ CARACAS**

The Carter Center said it was unable to verify the results of Venezuela's presidential election, blaming authorities for a "complete lack of transparency" in declaring Nicolas Maduro the winner without providing any individual polling tallies. The statement Tuesday night by the Atlanta-based group is perhaps the harshest rebuke yet of Venezuela's chaotic election process because it comes from one of just a handful of outside groups invited by the Maduro government to observe the vote.

"The electoral authority's failure to announce disaggregated results by polling station constitutes a serious breach of electoral principles," the Carter Center said. The group, which had a technical mission of 17 experts spread out in four cities across Venezuela, added that the election did not meet

international standards and "cannot be considered democratic."

The Carter Center's harsh criticism capped a second long day of protests against the results by opponents of Maduro who said their candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez, trounced the incumbent by a more than two-to-one margin.

Maduro's government hasn't taken lightly to the criticism and ratcheted up their attacks on their opponents Tuesday, with some allies suggesting the opposition's most influential leader and a presidential candidate be arrested.

A day after Maduro was declared the winner by a National Electoral Council that is loyal to him and the ruling party, the attacks, which were aired on national television, followed the opposition's surprise release of detailed voting data that it said shows that Edmundo Gonzalez won by a landslide.

## Storm disrupts high-speed trains from Paris

Paris (AP): A local storm on Wednesday interrupted all high-speed train traffic connecting Paris to the southeast of the country as well as Switzerland in both directions, France's rail company said, leaving thousands of travellers stranded amid the Olympics and departures for summer vacation. The SNCF said all the fast trains leaving from and arriving at the Gare de Lyon train station in the French capital were immobilised due to a tree that fell on the tracks and was hit by a train in Burgundy. Regular-speed trains use separate tracks and haven't been affected. Authorities cut the power off the track, but initial observations showed the matter won't be fixed quickly, the SNCF said, adding that all on that line were being brought back to a station in order to help people.

that can beat Donald Trump." All those factors have ignited an enthusiasm in Hines that wasn't there when Biden was still in the race, he said.

"I really want to go out and maybe knock on doors, which I would've never done," said Hines, 68. "It's jizzed me up quite a bit." Americans are also more likely to say that Harris would make a good president than they were earlier in July, a shift that was primarily driven by Democrats. They still see a tough contest looming, though: A majority of U.S. adults, 56%, say that if Trump and Harris are their parties' nominees for the general election in November, Trump is more likely to win. Lauren Schulman, a Democrat from Pompano Beach, Florida, said she admires Biden and what he has accomplished during his presidency. But she said with him at the top of the ticket, "I have just been so terrified that we were going to lose."

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## 'US-Mexico border arrests expected to drop by 30%

**San Diego (AP):** United States-Mexico border arrests have plummeted about 30 per cent in July to a new low for Joe Biden's presidency, US authorities said, raising prospects that a temporary ban on asylum may be lifted soon.

The US Border Patrol is expected to arrest migrants about 57,000 times during the month, down from 83,536 arrests in June, the previous low mark of Biden's presidency, according to two US Customs and Border Protection officials who spoke to The Associated Press on Wednesday on the condition of anonymity because the figures had not been released publicly. It would be the lowest monthly tally since 40,507 arrests in September 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic slowed movement across borders in many countries, including to the United States.

Even before Biden's Democratic administration invoked powers to suspend asylum on June 5, border arrests had fallen by about half from a record-high of 250,000 in December amid increased Mexican enforcement. Since June 5, arrests have fallen by half again, helping the White House fend off attacks by former President Donald Trump and other

Republicans that Democrats, including Vice President Kamala Harris, have allowed the border to spiral out of control. The asylum halt would end if daily arrests drop below 1,500 over a seven-day average, a scenario that Customs and Border Protection officials are preparing for with arrests now hovering 1,600 to 1,700 a day. The halt would be reinstated if arrests reach a seven-day daily average of 2,500, a threshold of "emergency border circumstances" that was immediately met when the restrictions took effect in June. Immigrant advocacy groups are challenging the asylum measures in court. Under the halt, US authorities deny a chance at asylum to anyone who crosses the border illegally.

Unaccompanied children are exempt, and others may seek asylum-like forms of protection that allow them to stay in the United States with a higher bar and fewer benefits, like the United Nations Convention Against Torture. Asked to comment on July numbers, the Department of Homeland Security on Wednesday referred to a statement last week that arrests had dropped 55 per cent since asylum restrictions took effect.

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# Hasina seeks cooperation from UN, to conduct probe into violence

PTI ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Wednesday sought cooperation from the United Nations and other international organisations to conduct a proper investigation into the recent nationwide violence during the anti-quota agitation to punish the real culprits involved in the attacks. Bangladesh witnessed violent clashes between the police and mostly student protesters demanding an end to a controversial quota system that reserved 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971.



"We're seeking UN and other international organisations' cooperation for a fair and proper investigation into the matter," Hasina said, adding that the people involved in the violence must be brought to justice. "Because I know I have no negligence to this end," she was quoted as saying by the Dhaka Tribune newspaper. Speaking at an event, she came down heavily on those who were involved in damaging public properties alongside killing many people and thus tarnishing the country's image. "My question is who has gained what (through the mayhem)? Why was there bloodshed?" she asked. The prime minister said they have already formed a one-member judicial probe commission with an apex court justice before raising any such demand to investigate the matter. "We have formed the commission with a judge (of the High Court). I have given the order to include two more as man-

power and enhance the periphery of the investigation," she said. "You (countrymen) have to find out the people involved in the conspiracy to push the country backwards through fishing in troubled water by launching such an incident," she said. The conspiracies being hatched by the collaborators of the Pakistani occupation forces pushed Bangladesh back time and again, she added. "These are the most painful

and regrettable things," she said with an emotional voice. The prime minister said her government had earlier issued a notification cancelling the quota system. The Bangladesh government for the first time on Monday officially acknowledged that 150 people were killed across the country during the students' unrest over the quota system. The government called in the army to quell protests, which started in universities and colleges earlier this month, quickly turning into a more widespread agitation against Hasina and her government, regarding job quotas. The unrest has left several thousand people, including policemen, wounded and major government installations damaged. The protests subsided last week after the apex Appellate Division of unitary Bangladesh's Supreme Court on July 21 ordered a massive quota reform, keeping only seven per cent of reserve posts instead of the existing 56 per cent. The government subsequently issued a Gazette notification in line with the order saying 93 per cent of jobs would be open to candidates on merit.

# Myanmar's military regime extends state of emergency by 6 months

AP ■ BANGKOK

The military regime that seized power in Myanmar 3 1/2 years ago on Wednesday extended the state of emergency in the civil war-ravaged country for another six months, saying it needs time to prepare for long-promised elections. The state of emergency was initially declared when troops ousted the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi on February 1, 2021, arresting her and members of her National League for Democracy party. The emergency decree empowers the military to assume all government functions, giving the head of the ruling military council, Senior Gen Min Aung Hlaing, legislative, judicial and executive powers. At the moment, military regime is facing its greatest challenge since taking power, as powerful ethnic minority militias and people's defense forces that support Myanmar's main opposition have taken wide swaths of territory in fierce fighting in recent months. The military is now estimated to control less than half the country, but is holding on tenaciously to much of central Myanmar, including the capital, Naypyidaw, which



was recently targeted by small rocket attacks and two bombings. The extension of the state of emergency was granted by the National Defense and Security Council, after Ming Aung Hlaing argued more time is needed to restore stability to the country and carry out a census in preparations for national elections, state-run MRTV reported. The plan for a general election is widely seen as an attempt to normalize the military's seizure of power through the ballot box and to deliver a result that ensures the generals retain control. Critics have already said the military-planned elections will be neither free nor fair because there is no free media and most of the leaders of Suu Kyi's National League for

Democracy party have been arrested. Under the country's 2008 constitution, drafted by the army, the military can rule the country under a state of emergency for one year, followed by two possible six-month extensions before holding elections. Wednesday's extension, however, was the regime's sixth, and was again rubber-stamped by the NDSC, which is nominally a constitutional administrative government body, but in practice is controlled by the military. It did not announce the details behind its decision. Additionally, such extensions are supposed to be endorsed by the country's president, but current acting president Myint Swe last week authorized Min Aung Hlaing to carry out his duties with the NDSC while he is on medical leave. The military originally announced elections would be held in August, 2023, but has regularly pushed the date back and has recently said they would take place sometime in 2025. Under the country's constitution, for an election to be held the military has to transfer government functions to the president at least six months before the polls. The 2021 military takeover was met with widespread non-violent protests. But after

peaceful demonstrations were put down with lethal force, many opponents of military rule took up arms, and large parts of the country are now embroiled in conflict. The fiercest fighting in recent weeks has been in the north-east, where the ethnic militias from an alliance group claimed last week to have seized Lashio, which houses the northern regional military headquarters, and Mogoke, the center of the country's lucrative gem-mining industry. Reports suggest that regime troops continue to hold the regional headquarters but could be forced from Lashio soon. In Lashio, the main prison gate was reportedly opened over the weekend and more than 200 political prisoners, including Tun Tun Hein, a former deputy speaker of the lower house of Myanmar's parliament and senior member of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, were released. Maung Maung Swe, a member of Myanmar's main opposition group, the National Unity Government — whose leadership operates largely from outside the country — told The Associated Press that its forces in Myanmar were providing care for more than 200 of released political prisoners.

# China sanctions US lawmaker for 'interference' in its domestic affairs

Bangkok (AP): China sanctioned a United States lawmaker on Wednesday for "frequently interfering" in China's domestic affairs. The sanctions against Rep. Jim McGovern include freezing his assets and properties in China, prohibiting any organization or individual in China from conducting transactions or working with him, and denying him and his family a visa to enter the country, according to a statement from China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It's one of several rounds of sanctions against US lawmakers and companies that China has announced as relations have soured between Beijing and Washington. China previously sanctioned US representative Michael McCaul and ex-representative Michael Gallagher over their support for Taiwan, a self-governed democracy that China claims as its own. McGovern and McCaul introduced a bill calling for stronger US support for Tibet, a region in China where human rights groups have criticized authorities for the treatment of ethnic Tibetans. Relations between the US and China have sunk, starting with a trade war in 2018 and then the COVID-19 pandemic. The US has been increasingly critical of China's human rights record, its handling of the pandemic and its actions towards Taiwan.

# China accuses Japan of 'smear attacks' in recent talks with US, India, Aus

Beijing (AP): China has expressed strong dissatisfaction to Japan about what it called "smear attacks" against China at recent high-level meetings with the United States, India and Australia, the Foreign Ministry said Wednesday. A ministry statement said that Liu Jinsong, the director general of the Asian affairs department, conveyed solemn representations and serious concern at a meeting the previous day with Akira Yokochi, the deputy chief of mission at the Japanese Embassy. "Liu pointed out that Japan's smear attacks on China are self-contradictory to its statement of promoting the strategic and reciprocal relationship between the two countries," the statement said. Meeting in Tokyo on Sunday, Japan's foreign and defense ministers agreed to bolster military cooperation with the US at what are known as "2+2" talks with their American counterparts. A joint statement said China's foreign policy "seeks to reshape the international order for its own benefit at the expense of others" and that such behavior represents "the greatest strategic challenge" in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. The US-Japan talks were followed by a meeting on Monday of the foreign ministers from the Quad countries — the US, Japan, India and Australia. The joint statement did not mention China by name but expressed



opposition to "the militarization of disputed features and coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea." The Chinese government has complained repeatedly about the US deepening ties with other countries in the face of China's rise, which President Joe Biden has made a priority during his four years in office. The Foreign Ministry statement said China urges Japan to stop making irresponsible remarks on China's internal affairs — a likely reference to Taiwan — and called on Japan to stop colluding with "certain countries" to form small circles that lead to confrontation. A Japanese Embassy statement said that Yokochi had expounded Japan's positions at the meeting and made representations on various China-related topics, but it did not provide any details.

# Russian military begins 3rd round of drills to train troops

AP ■ MOSCOW

The Russian military on Wednesday began a third round of drills with tactical nuclear weapons, part of the Kremlin's messaging intended to force the West to limit its support for Ukraine. The Russian Defence Ministry said the drills will feature units of the central and southern military districts armed with Iskander short-range missiles. They will practice receiving nuclear weapons from storage and deploying them to designated

launch areas. The maneuvers will also include air force units that will arm their warplanes with nuclear weapons and perform patrol flights. The ministry said the drills are intended to maintain troops' readiness for combat missions. Tactical nuclear weapons include bombs, warheads for short-range missiles and artillery munitions and are meant for use on a battlefield. They are typically far less powerful than strategic weapons — massive warheads that arm intercontinental ballistic missiles and are intended to obliterate entire cities. The previous two rounds of the maneuvers were held in May and June. The drills in June were conducted jointly with the armed forces of Russia's ally Belarus. Last year, Russia moved some of its tactical nuclear weapons into neighboring Belarus, which also borders Ukraine and NATO members Poland, Latvia and Lithuania. Belarus' authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko has relied on close ties with Russia and provided

his country as a staging ground for sending troops to Ukraine in February 2022. Russian President Vladimir Putin and his officials have repeatedly reminded the West about the country's nuclear might in a bid to discourage NATO allies from ramping up their support for Kyiv. The Kremlin has described the drills with tactical nuclear weapons as part of Moscow's response to statements by NATO allies encouraging strikes on Russian territory with Western weapons and the possible deployment of Western

troops to Ukraine. Amid recent battlefield gains in Ukraine, Putin has emphasized that Russia doesn't need nuclear weapons to achieve his goals. But he also reaffirmed that they can be used in the case of a threat to Russia's territorial integrity in line with the country's nuclear doctrine. Russian hawks have urged the Kremlin to change the doctrine to lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons, and Putin said the document could be modified to take into account the evolving global situation.

CEO of its most important supplier, Spirit AeroSystems, and another longtime Boeing executive, Stephanie Pope, who recently took over the commercial airplanes division. Like Calhoun, who took over as CEO in the wake of the two Max crashes, Ortberg will be inheriting the leadership of a company facing ongoing crises and criticism from both outside and internally. It is pushing back against whistleblower allegations of manufacturing shortcuts that crimp on

# Boeing names new chief executive officer

Chicago (AP): Boeing named a longtime aerospace industry veteran on Wednesday as its next chief executive, who will take over a company that has been rocked by legal, regulatory and production problems. Robert "Kelly" Ortberg, a former CEO at aerospace supplier Rockwell Collins, will succeed David Calhoun, 67, as CEO and president effective August 8, the company said. Calhoun announced in March that he would retire at the end of the year. Boeing named its new CEO as it reported a loss of more than USD 1.4 billion on falling revenue during the second quarter. The loss was wider and revenue lower than Wall

Street expected, as both Boeing's commercial-airplanes business and defence unit lost money. The disappointing results come at a tumultuous time for Boeing. The company agreed to plead guilty this month to a federal fraud charge in connection with its 737 Max jetliner and two crashes that killed 346 people. The Federal Aviation Administration increased its oversight of the company after the blowout of a panel on an Alaska Airlines jet raised manufacturing quality concerns. Boeing Chairman Steven Mollenkopf said Ortberg was chosen after a "thorough and extensive search process" and "has the right skills and experience to lead Boeing in its

next chapter". Ortberg has earned a reputation for running complex engineering and manufacturing companies, Mollenkopf said. The company waived the mandatory retirement age of 65 for Ortberg, a spokesperson said. Boeing did the same for Calhoun days after he turned 64 in 2021. Ortberg emerged as a leading candidate only recently. Others who were reportedly considered for the job included Patrick Shanahan, a former Boeing executive and now

CEO of its most important supplier, Spirit AeroSystems, and another longtime Boeing executive, Stephanie Pope, who recently took over the commercial airplanes division. Like Calhoun, who took over as CEO in the wake of the two Max crashes, Ortberg will be inheriting the leadership of a company facing ongoing crises and criticism from both outside and internally. It is pushing back against whistleblower allegations of manufacturing shortcuts that crimp on

safety. The company, based in Arlington, Virginia, also is dealing with supply-chain problems that are hindering production, which it hopes to fix in part by re-acquiring Spirit AeroSystems, a key contractor. It is still trying to persuade regulators to approve two new models of the Max and a bigger version of its two-aisle 777 jetliner. And it faces a multi-billion-dollar decision on when to design a new single-aisle plane to replace the Max.

**Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar**  
Tender Notice Reference No. GNDU/Gen/55/2024  
The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:

Sr. No.	Item	Quantity
1	Supply/ Printing of 40 Pages OMR Answer Books	16 Lac
2	Supply / Printing of 20 Pages Answer Book	50,000

Closing date & time: 21-08-2024 at 5:00 p.m.  
For details log onto: [www.eproc.punjab.gov.in](https://www.eproc.punjab.gov.in)  
Note: Any corrigendum (s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.  
NA/12/24480/2023/36216 Dated CHD :- 7/31/2024

**Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot (Ph.D Section)**  
BABA FARID UNIVERSITY OF HEALTH SCIENCES, FARIDKOT  
PH.D ENTRANCE TEST (PHDET)  
Online fresh applications in the prescribed format are invited through University website w.e.f from 01/08/2024 to 10/08/2024 for admission to Ph.D Courses in faculties of Medical / Allied Health/ Dental/ Nursing/ Physiotherapy/ Pharmaceutical Sciences, alongwith fee of Rs. 3000/- + 18% GST through University payment gateway. The date of Entrance Examination will be notified on University website. For eligibility/detail/updates visit at University at: [www.bfuhs.ac.in](http://www.bfuhs.ac.in)  
Note: The candidates who have already applied for PH.D Entrance Test (PHDET) Session 2022-23 need not apply again.  
REGISTRAR  
nil/12/206/2023/36207 Dated CHD :- 7/31/2024

**PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.**  
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall Patiala-147001)  
Corporate Identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813  
Phone No. 0172-2207679, Email id:- se-it-os@pspcl.in

**Tender Enquiry No.320/DIT-1083 dated 30-07-2024**  
Dy. CE/ IT (O&S) Ground Floor PSPCL Head Office, The Mall, Patiala invites e-tender for Provisioning of MPLS connectivity in 47 towns of PSPCL and PSPCL DC/ DRC. For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in> from 30-07-2024, 5:00 PM onwards.  
Note: Corrigendum and addendum, if any will be published online at <https://eproc.punjab.gov.in>  
C-517/24  
76155/12/3207/2023/36243 Dated CHD :- 7/31/2024

**verka**  
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.  
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX No. 0172-5041812,66  
Notice Inviting Tender [www.verka.coop](http://www.verka.coop)

e tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Head office, Chandigarh Hologram i. Type-I ii. Type-II	Annual/ 60 Lac 80 Lac
2.	For Verka Mohali Dairy Hiring of vehicles:- a) Swift Desire/ Venue/ Breeze or Equivalent. b) Mahindra Pick-up (Capacity 02 Ton) c) Mahindra Camper	25 No's 02 No's 01 No.
3.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy Hiring of:- a) Insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk product in Bathinda Milkshed Area. b) Diesel Cars (Swift Dzire or Equivalent) at Milk Union Bathinda for Procurement, Marketing and Depot, Verka Bathinda Dairy	01 year with extension upto one year / 01 vehicle for 03 MT & 01 vehicle for 2.2 MT 03 No's
4.	For Verka Patiala Dairy a) Fire Wood b) Hiring of Passenger Car (Bolero/ Swift/ Dzire/ Toyota/ Etios or equivalent) for marketing activities. c) Hiring of:- i. Vehicle for Veterinary Route & Extension work. ii. Insulated S.S Road Milk Tankers for Milk lifting from BMC's /MCC's & sister Dairies Cap. 9000 - 11000 ltrs. iii. Vehicle Tata 207, Mahindra Maxi truck etc. for transportation of Milk from Societies/ Farms at MCC Samana (Route No. 14, 15 & 28).	Half yearly/ 1500 MT Annual 01 No. Single Chamber-14 No's Double Chamber-01 No. 03 No's
5.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy a) Hiring of Mahindra Maxi Truck Pickup, Bolero Pickup or equivalent for transportation of :- i. Milk through cans from various Societies/ Dairy Farms to MCC/BMC/ Dairy Dock. ii. Cattle feed and allied products from Verka Sangrur Dairy/ Stores to various Societies/ Dairy Farms/ Macc/ BMCs. b) Hiring of SS Road Milk Tankers cap.15,18,20,23,25,30 KL for transportation of milk from Verka sangrur Dairy to other Plants of Punjab and outside Punjab. c) For Design, Supply, Erection, Installation and testing of the PCC and APFC Panels. d) Allotment of Verka Milk booths at different location in distt. sangrur/ Barnala/ Malerkotla on rent basis. i. Civil Hospital Tapa ii. Civil Hospital Bhadour iii. Civil Hospital Ahemadgarh iv. Govt. Sen. Sec. School Sandhu Patti Barnala v. Market Committee Khanour vi. Govt. Sen. Sec. School Moonak	02 Years/12 No's 02 Years/01 No. 03 No. 01 No. 03 Year on rent / 06 No's

NOTE:  
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. [www.verka.coop](http://www.verka.coop) & e Tendering portal i.e. [eproc.punjab.gov.in](http://eproc.punjab.gov.in).  
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

NA/12/24483/2023/36219 Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

**verka**  
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.  
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX No. 0172-5041812,66  
Notice Inviting Tender [www.verka.coop](http://www.verka.coop)

e tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Jalandhar Dairy Design, Supply, Installation, testing & Commissioning of 1010 KVA DG set with electrical and civil work.	One job
2.	For Verka Gurdaspur Dairy a) For backlit glow sign board, double sided glow sign board, non lit flex board, flex change, flex banner, wall painting/ shop painting, vehicle painting, umbrella, A-type standing flex board and vinyl stickers. b) Allotment of civil Hospital Batala Milk Bar on rent. c) Hiring of :- i. Car (Swift Dzire or its equivalent) ii. Diesel Car (05 Seater Bolero camper or its equivalent)	01 year 02 year 01 year 01 year
3.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy a) Purchase of polypropylene bottles cap. 180ml with caps. b) Hiring of Vehicles (3.0 MT, 6.0 MT, 9.0 MT and 15.0 MT) for supplying of Milk Products in the Punjab and other states. c) Hiring of vehicle for supply of fresh Milk and Milk Products at Local Army 02/ Tray capacity 250) and Beas route (Tray Capacity 200)	Annual 01 No. 02 No's
4.	For Verka Ludhiana Dairy a) Sale of the unserviceable material on Annual Rate Contract basis. b) Supply of :- i. Veterinary medicines. ii. Single Phase Dairy Barn Ventilation fan with motors. c) Hiring of :- i. Insulated vehicles for supply of packed milk and fresh milk products in Ludhiana city and adjoining towns. ii. Passenger vehicles Innova crystal for Verka Ludhiana Dairy without driver for minimum running of 2000 kms per month on lump sum basis. d) Outsourcing of milk Booth/ Milk Bar at :- i. Park back side Main Shopping Centre Sector 32 A Chandigarh Road, Ludhiana. ii. Machhewara. iii. Kamalpura	Annual Annual One time purchase 200 No's 01 year with extension upto one year 01 No. 03 years
5.	For Verka Faridkot Dairy Hiring of :- a) Insulated road milk tanker for transportation of milk from MCC's to various Milk Plants in Punjab etc. on rate contract. b) Pick up or its equivalent vehicle for lifting the milk from MPCC/DF to MCC at Route 5,25,27,62 & 18. c) Insulated road milk tanker for transportation of milk from BMC's to various milk chilling Centres/ Milk plants in Punjab etc. on rate contract. d) Diesel Cars for procurement, Marketing & AI Activities in the field. i. Bolero Jeep ii. Swift Dzire or its equivalent	Cap.10000 Kg-06 No's Cap.15000 Kg-02 No's Cap.20000 Kg-02 No's Cap.10000 Kg-02 No's 01 No. 02 No's
6.	For Verka CFP, Bhattian (Khanna) Labour Job contract for different activities related with Production, store & Mktg. sections.	Annual
7.	For Verka CFP, Ghania Ke Banger Transportation of Verka Cattle Feed and mineral feed supplement to various stations in the state of Punjab.	Annual

NOTE:  
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. [www.verka.coop](http://www.verka.coop) & e Tendering portal i.e. [eproc.punjab.gov.in](http://eproc.punjab.gov.in).  
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.

NA/12/24488/2023/36228 Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

# Stock markets rise for 4th day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark BSE Sensex rose by nearly 286 points to close at a record high while Nifty settled above 24,950 level on Wednesday, extending their winning run to the fourth day on gains in metal, power and select auto shares.

The 30-share BSE Sensex settled higher by 285.94 points or 0.35 per cent at 81,741.34 — its all-time closing high — with 20 of its components advancing and 10 ending lower. The index opened higher and jumped 372.64 points or 0.45 per cent to hit an intra-day high of 81,828.04.

The NSE Nifty rose 93.85 points or 0.38 per cent to close at an all-time high of 24,951.15. During the day, it surged 127.3 points or 0.51 per cent to hit a high of 24,969.35.

“The domestic market is attempting to cross above the psychological threshold of 25,000, as subdued Q1FY25 earnings and stretched valuations are curbing the challenge, while positive global trends and sector rotation are supporting the



traction,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. Positive global sentiment driven by expectations of an easing interest rate cycle by the US Fed and the RBI in the medium term, owing to benign inflation, ignited the rally, he added.

As expected, the BoJ raised its interest rate while all eyes are on US Fed policy to be announced later in the evening.

Among the Sensex stocks, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Maruti Suzuki India, NTPC, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, Bharti Airtel, ITC and Tech Mahindra were the major

gainers. Maruti Suzuki rose by 2.28 per cent as the auto major reported a 47 per cent jump in its net profit for the June quarter. Reliance Industries, Tata Motors, Infosys, Mahindra and Mahindra, Bajaj Finance and Axis Bank were the laggards. Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities, said Nifty ended comfortably in the green ahead of the FOMC outcome, closing just shy of the psychological 25,000 mark, signifying the bulls' continued strength on Dalal Street.

Investors now await key data releases and the FOMC outcome, with expectations

set on Jerome Powell's commentary, Tapse said. The US Federal Reserve (Fed) will announce its fifth interest rate decision for this year later in the night, after a two-day meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC). From this meeting, the Fed might offer hints about a possible rate cut in September.

“Indian shares began Wednesday on a positive note, buoyed by strong cues from other Asian markets amid expectations for additional stimulus measures from Beijing to support its ailing economy,” Avdhut Bagkar Technical and Derivatives Analyst at StoxBox, said. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies jumped to a life-time peak of Rs 462.38 lakh crore (USD 5.52 trillion) on Wednesday helped by a four-day rally in benchmark indices, making investors richer by Rs 5.45 lakh crore.

At the market close, the BSE smallcap gauge fell 0.14 per cent to in the broader market. However, BSE MidCap gauge jumped 0.86 per cent. During the day, both the indices hit their all-time high level.

# India's smartphone shipments dip 2% in Q2 2024 as heatwave, slower demand take toll

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's smartphone shipments fell two per cent year-on-year in June quarter, hurt by the heatwave and slower demand, as per a report by global research firm Counterpoint that showed Xiaomi reclaimed top spot in volume share and Samsung led in value terms. Notably, 5G smartphones captured their highest-ever share of 77 per cent in the overall shipments, according to Counterpoint's Monthly India Smartphone Tracker. Another key takeaway was that India's smartphone market hit its highest ever Q2 value, driven by the ongoing trend of premiumisation.

“India's smartphone shipments fell 2 per cent YoY in Q2 2024 (April-June),” it said.

The decline was influenced by a heatwave, a seasonal slump, and slower demand from Q1 2024. “In response, OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) hosted sales



events in Q2 to clear inventory, leading to a reduced sell-in and a period of degrowth,” it said. On the market's volume dynamics, Senior Research Analyst Shilpi Jain explained that heatwave conditions in various regions led to lower footfalls in offline channels and delayed smartphone purchases as consumers prioritised appliances like air-conditioners and refrigerators. This reduced demand led to

an inventory build-up. However, summer sales at online channels, good harvest and aggressive promotions towards the end of the quarter provided relief to OEMs, helping close the quarter on a better note than at the beginning. “During the quarter, Xiaomi reclaimed the top spot with a 23 per cent YoY growth in its shipments, driven by a streamlined and focused portfolio that spans from the entry-level to affordable

premium segments,” Counterpoint said. Xiaomi reclaimed the top spot with an 18.9 per cent shipment share, and Vivo followed closely with 18.8 per cent share. On value dynamics, Research Analyst Shubham Singh said: “In Q2 2024, India's smartphone market achieved its highest ever Q2 value, driven by the ongoing trend of premiumisation.” Consumers continued to upgrade to higher-value smartphones, supported by better trade-in values and easy financing schemes. This resulted in a 24 per cent YoY growth in the ultra-premium (over Rs 45,000) segment. Samsung led the market in terms of value with a 25 per cent share, followed by vivo and Apple. “Meanwhile, Apple ranked third in value terms. But it is expected to rebound in the next quarter, driven by the recent price cuts across the entire range of iPhones,” Singh said.

# Toyota to set up manufacturing plant in Maharashtra; likely to invest ₹20 K crore

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automaker Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday said it will set up a new manufacturing plant in Maharashtra at an investment of around Rs 20,000 crore.

The company has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra government to examine the setting up of a greenfield manufacturing facility at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) said in a statement.

Headquartered in Karnataka, TKM already has two manufacturing units located at Bidadi near Bengaluru.

In Karnataka, the automaker, including its group companies, has invested more than Rs 16,000 crore and created close to 86,000 jobs in the entire value chain, it said. Toyota's cumulative export contributions also stand at around Rs 32,000 crore thus representing the company's export focus, it added.

“Today's MoU signing



marks a pivotal point as we stride into the next phase of growth in the country enabling us to contribute to enriching lives with qualitative mobility solutions locally and globally,” TKM Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer Masakazu Yoshimura said. The proposed investment, once finalised, is expected to be made over a multi-year period, potentially contributing to substantial job creation and economic growth in the region. In a social media post on

X, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis shared the investment figure of Rs 20,000 crore for the plant.

“Transforming Maharashtra, Developing Marathwada! Reaffirming its commitment to India; Toyota Kirloskar Motors is set to launch a Green Field Manufacturing Facility in Maharashtra!” he posted.

TKM currently has an installed production capacity of 3.42 lakh vehicles at its two Bidadi-based units.

# Encora expands strategic partnership with Cloud Software Group

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Encora has announced plans to expand its strategic relationship with Cloud Software Group to include extended product engineering and support. The pact includes product development and engineering services under a managed services model, supporting the evolving needs of global businesses of Cloud Software Group (CSG), a release said on Wednesday.

As part of the existing partnership, Encora has established and operates a ‘TIBCO’ Center of Excellence (CoE) and Academy in India. The centre employs over 350 engineers across technologies, contributing to the development, quality assurance, and support for the TIBCO platform and other key products. “With the intent to build on the existing strategic relationship, Encora and Cloud Software Group have expanded the scope of engagement to include



extended product engineering and support,” according to the release. While Cloud Software Group provides enterprise with mission-critical software, the Santa Clara, California-headquartered Encora is a technology modernisation and innovation partner to enterprise companies. Encora's portfolio includes digital engineering services, including product engineering and development, cloud services, quality engineering, data and analytics, digital experience, cybersecurity, and Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Model (LLM) Engineering, among others.

# SoftBank-backed Unicommerce to float IPO on August 6

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SoftBank-backed SaaS platform Unicommerce eSolutions Ltd will launch its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on August 6.

The initial share sale will conclude on August 8 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on August 5, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). The issue is entirely an Offer For Sale (OFS) aggregating up to 2.56 crore equity shares by the selling shareholders.

Under the OFS, SB Investment Holdings (UK) Ltd, an affiliate of Japan's SoftBank, will offload 1.61 crore shares and promoter AceVector Limited (formerly known as Snapdeal Limited) will sell up to 94.38 lakh shares.

Founded in 2012, Unicommerce eSolutions is India's leading e-commerce enablement Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform. The company's suite of SaaS solutions enables end-to-end management of e-commerce



operations for brands, retailers, marketplaces and logistics service providers. It serves a large and growing base of clients in India including Lenskart, Fabindia, Zivame, TCNS, Mamaearth, Emami, Sugar, BoAt, Portronics, Pharmeasy, Cello, Urban Company, Mensa, Shiprocket, Xpressbees. In February, Unicommerce had said it is expanding its overseas operations by onboarding more clients. It is already serving 46 clients in Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia and is now expanding these operations by adding more clients. According to a Redseer Report, the Total Addressable Market (TAM) for players in

the eCommerce enablement SaaS in the transaction processing or nerve centre layer was estimated at about USD 1.2 billion in 2023. This growth is driven by the increasing market potential for core products in this layer, an opportunity to broaden the product portfolio, and international expansion prospects in SEA and the Middle East. Specifically, in India, the TAM for core products in the transaction processing layer was approximately USD 260 million in 2023. IIFL Securities and CLSA India are the book-running lead managers to the issue. Shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and the National Stock Exchange.

# Rupee closes 1 paisa higher at 83.72 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 1 paisa at 83.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by month-end Dollar demand from importers. Forex traders said significant foreign fund outflows and overnight surge in crude oil prices weighed on the local unit.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic currency opened 1 paisa higher than the previous day's close.

It slipped to 83.75 during the day and settled for the day 1 paisa higher at 83.72 (provisional) against US dollar. On Tuesday, the rupee closed flat at 83.73 against the American currency. “We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs). However, a positive tone in the domestic markets and weak US dollar may support the rupee at lower levels,” Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Any fresh intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the rupee, he said.

“Investors may watch out for the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting outcome on Wednesday and



Bank of England's monetary policy on Thursday. USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.50 to Rs 84,” he said.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 285.94 points to hit an all-time high of 81,741.34, while Nifty rallied 93.85 points to a record 24,951.15.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.36 per cent to 104.17. “The US dollar fell on Wednesday after the Bank of Japan raised interest rates by 15 bps to 0.25 per cent from 0.1 per cent, leading to a sharp surge in the yen. Other Asian currencies, too, appreciated on weakness in the US dollar,” Choudhary said. Brent crude — the global oil benchmark — went up 2.26 per cent to USD 80.41 per barrel in futures trade. Foreign institutional investors were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday, offloaded shares worth Rs 5,598.64 crore, according to exchange data.

# Omaxe may challenge Sebi order barring firm, chairman, MD from securities market for 2 yrs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Omaxe will consider challenging market regulator Sebi's order that barred the company, its Chairman Rohtas Goel, Managing Director Mohit Goel and three others from the securities market for two years for misrepresentation in the company's financial statements.

The Sebi order had a negative impact on the company's share prices. The stock of the company on Wednesday declined 4.99 per cent to Rs 152.20 apiece -- its lower circuit limit -- on the BSE.

It fell 5 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit of Rs 154.19 per piece on the NSE. Asked about the Sebi order and its future course of action, the Omaxe spokesperson said, “The company has not received any order from Sebi. Once received, the content will be verified and appropriate remedy available under the law, including filing of appeal will be contemplated.”

“As per news articles, it appears more in the nature of accounting interpretations, which were duly explained through documentation, market practice and case laws. Rest we will be filing our response to stock exchanges within the stipulated time frame, on receipt of order,” the spokesperson added. In its 126-page final order, Sebi has also restrained three others -- Sudhangshu S Biswal, Arun Kumar Pandey,



and Vimal Gupta — from the securities markets. Additionally, these five persons have been prohibited from holding any position as Director or Key Managerial Person of any other listed company for a period of two years.”

Apart from these, the regulator has levied a fine totalling Rs 47 lakh on 16 entities, including these six. The penalties range from Rs 1 lakh to Rs 7 lakh need to be paid within 45 days. Sebi said these entities have “acted in concert in order to execute a fraudulent scheme that they tried to portray as normal transactions for the benefit of the company although it was experiencing loss, while also trying to portray these as merely lending activities, thereby trying to maintain the price of the scrip of Omaxe for a period of three years.”

The company misrepresented the financial statements during 2018-19, 2019-20 and 2020-21 through its various items -- revenue, debtors, advances, and expenses. “By the act of large-scale

misrepresentation/misstatement/manipulation in financial statements by Omaxe, the scrip price was directly or indirectly manipulated to maintain the value of the collateral kept by the promoter against the loan, Sebi noted. Furthermore, the fraud was never disclosed to shareholders of Omaxe, which misled them to remain invested in its shares or deal in its securities. Also misrepresentation of the books and accounts of Omaxe misled the investors in the securities market, it added.

Accordingly, Sebi has barred six entities, including Omaxe, Rohtas Goel, Mohit Goel, and three others from “accessing the securities market and further prohibited from buying, selling or otherwise dealing in securities, directly or indirectly, or being associated with the securities market in any manner, whatsoever, for a period of two years.” The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint against Omaxe alleging that the company conducted fraudulent transactions, diverted/siphoned of funds, misrepresented the financial statements, inflated turnover among others.

As these allegations were serious in nature, the matter was taken up for further examination by Sebi, including a forensic audit into the affairs of Omaxe.

# Key jute sector issues feature at advisory committee meeting

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Indian Jute Mills Association highlighted several pressing issues at the 32nd Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting in New Delhi, including the challenges faced by the sector due to declining demand for jute bags, officials said. Key stakeholders such as representatives from the sugar and plastic industry bodies participated in the meeting on Tuesday.

The SAC makes recommendations to the Union government on the mandatory use of jute packaging materials, and packaging norms for essential commodities such as foodgrains and sugar. The Jute Commissioner's Office (JCO) stressed upon the need for supporting the sector, the IJMA officials said. An estimated 40 million farmers and 3.5 lakh jute mill workers are dependent on the industry.

The representatives of sugar industry bodies raised concerns about the pricing and quality of jute bags, urging the government to fix rates for sugar jute bags. “They also noted the reluctance by major buyers like some beverage giants to use jute bags, despite environmental benefits,” said industry sources present at the meeting. The non-compliance with government notifications by the sugar industry was also a



cause for concern, they said. Plastic industry representatives sought the removal of “discouraging language” about plastic bags in the Jute Packaging Materials Act (JPMA), the sources said.

“The jute industry is operating at 55 per cent capacity, affecting over 50,000 workers. The demand for jute bags is projected to drop to 30 lakh bales for 2024-25,” IJMA Deputy Chairman Rishav Kajaria said. The IJMA also urged the SAC for immediate government intervention in enforcing 100 per cent reservation norms in foodgrain and sugar packaging in 2024-25. Other key issues discussed at the meeting include revising policies on the use of used jute gunny bags, addressing financial constraints due to the GeM portal pricing cap, initiating investigation into subsidised jute imports, and ensuring strict compliance with labour laws and wage agreements, the officials said. The jute industry contributes over Rs 12,000 crore to the rural economy, but is faced with challenges as raw jute prices fall below MSP levels, they added.

# Gold rises ₹350; Silver jumps ₹1,100

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 350 to Rs 71,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, taking cues from domestic demand and global trends.

In the previous session, the precious metal had closed at Rs 71,600 per 10 grams. Silver prices jumped Rs 1,100 to Rs 85,600 per kilogram on Wednesday. It had closed at Rs 84,500 per kg in the previous trade, according to the All India Sarafa Association.

Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also increased by Rs 350 to Rs 71,600 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 71,250 per 10 grams. The commodity market experts suggested that the gold demand in the Indian markets remains high, driven by the recent import duty cuts and the upcoming festive season. “Participation in gold has been on an increasing trend. The prices of the yellow metal may further firm up correction as some participation continues to increase. We believe that prices of gold will increase from its current prices,” Chintan Mehta, CEO of Abans Holdings, said. Globally, Comex gold is trading higher at USD 2,465.50 per ounce, up by USD 13.60 per ounce from the previous close. “Comex gold extended gains following a 1 per cent gain yesterday, holding well above USD 2,400 per ounce buoyed primarily by safe-haven buying in response to the recent airstrike in Beirut by Israel,” Kaynat Chainwala, at Kotak Securities, said.

# Sindhu storms into Olympics women's singles pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS

Ac Indian shuttler PV Sindhu stormed into the pre-quarterfinals of the Olympic Games' women's singles competition after beating Kristin Kuuba of Estonia in straight games here on Wednesday. The two-time Olympic medallist won 21-5 21-10 in her second and last Group M match that lasted 33 minutes. The 29-year-old Sindhu, who had beaten Maldives' Fathimath Abdul Razzaq 21-9 21-6 in her first match, topped the group. The winner of each of the 16 groups qualifies for the round of 16. "I'm very happy. It was important for me to top the group. I would be playing



against He Bingjiao mostly. I hope I take this confidence and go forward. It's not going to be easy, especially in the next coming rounds, so I have

to be prepared and be 100%," Sindhu said after the match. The Indian ace has previously won a silver medal in the 2016 Rio Games and a bronze in

the Tokyo edition. "I think it's one match at a time and obviously I want that medal and I feel really happy when people say that

we want a hat-trick from you, we want that medal from you. "But at the same time, it comes with a lot of responsibilities, lot of pressure but it's important for me to just stay calm and just keep going and just one match at a time because yeah, you can't expect easy wins, you have to fight hard to earn it." Just like in her first match, Sindhu did not have to toil much, as the gulf in class between the two players was evident. The Estonian, ranked 73rd in the world as against the 13th position of the Indian, was completely out of sorts in the first game which Sindhu pocketed in 14 minutes. The 27-year-old Kuuba gave a fight in the second game,

making a lot of retrievals, but Sindhu was just too good for her. Kuuba took a 2-0 lead but Sindhu quickly seized the initiative and levelled the score. But Kuuba did not throw in the towel and engaged the Indian in longer rallies. There was one rare moment when Sindhu was stretched to the maximum near the net and Kuuba smashed the shuttle beyond the reach of the Indian. But the vastly experienced Sindhu was in her elements soon after. Two cross-court smashes gave Sindhu a 15-6 lead and from there on, it was all over for the Estonian, who saved two match points before surrendering.

## Sen stuns Christie to enter men's singles pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS

India's Lakshya Sen progressed to the pre-quarterfinals of the Olympics men's singles badminton competition with a stunning straight-game win over Indonesia's world number 4 Jonatan Christie in the final group match here on Wednesday. The 22-year-old from Almora, a 2021 world championships bronze medallist, displayed great maturity and tactical acumen to outwit Christie, the reigning All England and Asian champion, 21-18 21-12 in what turned out to be a lop-sided contest. Sen is likely to face compatriot HS Prannoy in the pre-quarterfinals. Prannoy will face Vietnam's Le Duc Phat later in the day. Sen had defeated Kevin Cordón, a Tokyo Olympics semifinalist, in the opening Group L match on Sunday which was "deleted" after his Guatemalan opponent pulled out due to a left elbow injury. A gold medallist at the 2022 Commonwealth Games, Sen beat Julien Carraggi of Belgium before facing Christie. The only time the Indian had defeated Christie was four years ago at the Badminton Asia Team Championships and came into this match with a dismal 1-4 head-to-head count. However, Sen rose to the occasion on Wednesday and showed great maturity as he went about his business. He tried to keep the shuttle flat and target the weak forehand of Christie, who looked to slow down the rallies and used his cross



court shots at the corners to trouble the Indian, albeit without much success. In the first game, Christie opened up a 5-0 lead and soon moved to 8-2. However, Sen regrouped quickly, kept the shuttle flat and waited for his opponent to make mistakes. It worked as he moved to 7-8 before a thunderous forehand smash earned the Indian a slim one-point advantage. Sen engaged Christie in fast and flat exchanges to move to 14-12, and the latter slowed down the pace with a gruelling rally, which he won with a push at the backline. The Indonesian drew parity at 16-16 with a precise cross-court smash, which a diving Sen couldn't reach and soon eked out a two-point lead at 18-16. A straight smash from Sen was followed by a wide smash from Christie, and it was 18-18. A perfect flat push and then an incredible behind-the-back return in the middle of the next rally gave Sen game point and he converted it easily to earn the bragging rights.

## Olympics bet against climate change with Seine swimming

AP ■ PARIS

With plans for athletes to swim the Seine River through the heart of Paris, Olympic organisers essentially bet against climate change's extreme weather. For several days it appeared they would lose - by ditching the swimming portion of triathlon races. It wasn't until early Wednesday, after the men's race had been postponed a day and test events called off, that organizers announced the most recent tests showed the water met standards to allow swimming. Some scientists and engineers said organizers were taking a huge gamble at a time when heavy rains have increased with human-caused climate change, especially in Europe. The rains run off from the urban environment and contribute to higher bacteria levels in the city's famed river. "They just gambled, flipped the coin and hope for a dry season and it turned out to be the rainiest in the last 30 years," said Metin Duran, a professor of civil and environmental engineering at Villanova University who has researched stormwater management. Organisers "had worked through most of the scenarios related to computer hacking and physical threats without fully assessing the implications of extreme events associated with climate," said University of Arizona climate scientist Kathy Jacobs, who directs the Center for Climate Adaptation Science and Solutions. "It's definitely time to take climate threats seriously." If any city could be expected to be mindful of the challenges of climate change, it's Paris. It's where the most significant climate agreement in history was struck almost a decade ago - to try to limit Earth's warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) above pre-industrial levels.

## Quarters berth sealed, Indian men's hockey team set for first real test against Belgium

PTI ■ PARIS

Assured of a quarterfinal berth, India will aim for consistency when they take on reigning champions Belgium in their tough penultimate Pool B match of the Olympic Games here on Thursday. The Red Lions are leading Pool B with three wins from as many matches, while the Indians are a rung below in the second place with two wins and a draw. Mighty Australia are placed third with seven points from two wins and a loss. Argentina have also qualified for the quarterfinals with four points from three games, which includes a win, a draw and a

loss. New Zealand and Ireland are out of the race after suffering three consecutive losses. Only the top four can make the last-eight stage cut. The Indians started their campaign on a shaky note with a close 3-2 win over New Zealand and then scored a last-minute goal to salvage a draw against former champions Argentina. But against Ireland, it was a completely different performance from the Indians, at least in the first two quarters. They dominated the possession with one-touch play to score two goals in the first quarter which proved vital in the end. India skipper Harmanpreet



Singh once again rose to the occasion, first converting a penalty stroke and then finding the net from a set piece in the second quarter to hand his side the win. The Indian mid-field, led by veteran and four-time

upfront by keeping the pressure on the opposition defence. Against Ireland on Tuesday, India opted for one-to-one short passes to build their attacks, instead of going for aerial balls. Right-back Jarnanpreet Singh has been a revelation in the tournament so far and was omnipresent, be it in defence or creating chances from flanks. Another player who deserves credit is Amit Rohidas, who produced a rock solid performance at the back. He defended the penalty corners brilliantly being the first rusher and from one-on-one situations.

## At 55, Georgian shooter shows up at record 10th straight Olympics to fulfil father's last wish

PTI ■ CHATEAUXROUX (FRANCE)

Nino Salukvadze had all but decided to bid adieu to her pistol after nine Olympic appearances, which yielded three medals, until she lost her father, whose "last wish" pushed her to compete in an unprecedented 10th Games. The 55-year-old, who was Georgia's flagbearer at the opening ceremony, became the first woman and only the second athlete overall after Equestrian show jumper Ian Millar to compete in a 10th consecutive Summer Games. Her first two Olympic medals, a gold and silver in 25m pistol and 10m air pistol, came in the 1988 Games in Seoul where she represented the USSR before she completed the set with a bronze for Georgia 20 years later in Beijing. Salukvadze said she found the resolve to give it another shot here here when she recalled her father Vaktang Salukvadze's words, which to her, seemed like a final wish. "He never asked me for anything, so I think maybe it was his last wish," said the veteran, who will be



competing in the 25m pistol qualifications on Friday. Stuningly, she stills holds the junior world record in this event. She touched that landmark in 1989 and it has only been equalled by India's Manu Bhaker, who is putting on quite a show here with bronze medals in 10m air pistol and 10m air pistol mixed team events. While the 22-year-old Bhaker is revelling in her newfound stardom and rise in stature, Salukvadze is enjoying her swansong. Battling issues with her right eye, the veteran is certain that she is in the middle of her Olympic farewell. "After Tokyo I thought I had finished, but my father, who

was my coach - he died this year - told me, 'Maybe you will cry (if you don't carry on). It is only three years, not four years (since Tokyo 2020),' she recalled. "I thought 'Ok, I will try'. He was a very good coach because our sport is very psychological. Now it is a competition with my mind." Salukvadze is a role model back home and also a perfect ambassador of global sports fraternity. During the Beijing Games, she made quite a statement by giving a friendly peck to Russian silver-medallist Natalia Paderina on the podium despite their countries being at war with each other. Besides her father's wish, Salukvadze wanted to be present at the Paris Olympics to also push for gender equality. "When I was told I had a quota place representing Georgia, I wanted to take this pistol and throw it into the air. Only one man has ever done this before - a horse rider from Canada - so maybe this is good for women's equality," she said.

## Defending champion US women fall to Germany in pool play in 3x3 basketball

AP ■ PARIS

The defending champion U.S. Women lost to Germany 17-13 on Tuesday in the opening game of pool play in 3x3 basketball at the Paris Olympics. Hailey Van Lith led the U.S. With six points. But she was struggling after the game, and she said she believes the heat exacerbated an illness she already was dealing with. "I think I actually have a cold," she said. "I think it was from the rain in the opening ceremony. So, I think it's a combination of that, but I'll be fine. I played through it in the NCAA Tournament, so there's nothing that's going to take me out." Sonja Greinacher had five points and six rebounds for Germany. Marie Reichert added five points. The U.S. Raced out to a 5-0 lead, but Germany scored the next six points, including three from Elisa Mevius. Van Lith made a layup before dishing to Dearica Hamby for another basket to cut Germany's advantage to 11-10 with about three minutes to go.



Greinacher made a 2-point shot for Germany before another basket by Van Lith got the U.S. Within one again with about 90 seconds remaining. This time, Germany scored the next four points on two each from Greinacher and Reichert. "It obviously gives us a lot of self-confidence going forward," Greinacher said. Sierra Burdick was disappointed in the team's Olympic opener, but she said it isn't surprising that they still have work to do since they haven't been playing together that long. Hamby replaced Cameron Brink on the team this summer after Brink sustained a knee injury.

"I knew it wasn't going to be pretty," she said. "I didn't think it was going to be that ugly." CANADA 22, AUSTRALIA 14Twins Michelle and Katherine Plouffe combined for 18 points to lead Canada past Australia. Michelle Plouffe got things going with a 2-pointer as Canada scored the first six points. A 2-point shot by her sister made it 9-1 with about 6 1/2 minutes remaining. Canada was up 15-2 before Australia scored the next six points, with the last three from Alex Wilson. Michelle Plouffe ended the run by scoring the next three points to pad Canada's lead.

Katherine Plouffe sealed it when she made a basket before hitting a 2-pointer to give Canada 22 points with 1:22 left on the clock. Wilson led Australia with six points and six rebounds. SPAIN 18, AZERBAIJAN 16Gracia Alonso and Vega Gimeno scored five points each as Spain outlasted Azerbaijan. Spain trailed by one before scoring the next eight points to make it 14-7 with less than three minutes to go. Azerbaijan responded with a 4-0 run to get within three with about 1:30 remaining. Spain took advantage of a turnover to score the next three points, capped by a 2-pointer from Gimeno, to push the lead to 17-11. Azerbaijan closed to 17-14 on a free throw by Dina Ulyanova with six seconds left, but Gimeno added a free throw for Spain. Tiffany Hayes made a pair of free throws for Azerbaijan to cut the lead to two with one second left. But the clock ran out before Azerbaijan could do anything else.

## Simone and Team USA earn redemption by powering to gold in women's gymnastics

PTI ■ PARIS

Simone Biles, Jordan Chiles and Sunisa Lee spent the night before perhaps the biggest gymnastics meet of their lives restless. There was a tension in the air. They'd all been in the Olympic spotlight before, experiences that left them with medals but also the kind of scars - be they physical, psychological or both - that heal but never really go away. And here they were in Paris, the leaders of a star-laden U.S. Team everyone expected to finish atop the medal stand, and something wasn't right. In a different time, in a different era, it might have festered. Might have followed them onto the floor at Bercy Arena and into the history books, too. This is not a different time. This is not a different era. This is now. So the oldest team the U.S. Has ever sent to the Olympics, including a trio

that has spent their respective careers breaking barriers about what a female gymnast can and can't do, what they can and can't be, did something they never used to do. They talked, with Biles - three years removed from a Tokyo Games that dragged the conversation around mental health and sports kicking and screaming into the light - right in the middle of it. "I think there was a little bit of struggle," she said. "So it was really needed." By the time they walked onto the floor for the Olympic final, the tension was gone, largely replaced with joy. And not soon after, gold. The self-described "Redemption Tour," the moniker given to a team filled with women who wanted to return to the Games for deeply personal reasons, ended with Biles and the Americans where they have almost always been since she burst onto the scene 11 years



ago: on top of the podium, the rest of the world looking up. Eight years after winning gold in Rio with a team that called Aly Raisman grandma because she was all of 22, Biles - now 27 and married - was back again with Jade Carey (24), Chiles (23), Lee (21) and teenager Hezly Rivera at her side. "We don't have to be put in

the box anymore," Biles said about a group that has dubbed itself "The Golden Girls." No, they don't. With Biles at her show-stopping best, the Americans' total of 171.296 was well clear of Italy and Brazil and the exclamation point of a yearlong run in which Biles has cemented her legacy as

the greatest ever in her sport, and among the best in the history of the Olympics. "She's the greatest of all greats," said Chiles, who now has gold to go with the team silver she, Lee and Biles earned in Tokyo, when Biles removed herself from the team final to protect herself. Chiles, who seemed like a longshot to make it this

spring after injuries piled up, was pretty good in her own right. She began the night by drilling her double-twisting Yurchenko vault, sending the Americans on a four-apparatus stop on their "Tour" that felt equal parts coronation and celebration. By the time Biles, the left calf that bothered her during qualifying heavily taped, stepped onto the floor for the final event - a floor exercise set to music by Taylor Swift and Beyonce - it was over. She joked she knew she simply needed to stay on her feet to win. She did more than that, providing an exclamation point on the U.S.'s third gold in its last four trips to the Games. The Americans remain peerless (if not flawless, this is gymnastics after all) when at their best. And over two hours in front of a crowd that included everyone from tennis great Serena Williams to actor Natalie Portman, Biles left

little doubt about anything. Her status as the sport's greatest of all time. Her ability to move past the "twisties" that derailed her in Japan. Her spot in the pantheon of the U.S. Olympic movement. She now has a staggering 38 medals in major international competitions. Eight of those have come under the Olympic rings, moving her past Shannon Miller for the most by an American gymnast. Yet her return wasn't so much about winning. That's never really been the point anyway, just a byproduct of her unparalleled excellence. It was about a joy she had lost somewhere along the way. It seems to have returned. She leaned into the crowd that roared at every flip, every leap and, yes, every twist. With her husband - on break from NFL training camp - waving an American flag while sitting next to her parents, Biles did what she has done so well for so long save for a couple of difficult days in Japan during

a pandemic: she dominated. Biles met with her therapist in the morning to put her in the right mindset. There was brief - very brief - moment of trepidation as she raced down the vault runway, the event that began to spin out of control in Tokyo. Only this time, she essentially stuck her Cheng vault, the one that sends her spinning through the air in a fraction of a second. Afterward, she exhaled. "I was like Yes, please no flashbacks or anything," Biles said. "But I did feel a lot of relief. And as soon as I landed I was like 'Oh yeah, we're going to do this.'" Yes they were. Just like always. The only real drama centered on who would finish next to the Americans on the medal stand. Italy, which was a surprising second to the U.S. During qualifying, returned to the podium for the first time since 1928 by holding off Brazil for silver.

# Gambhir praises India's tenacity but calls for further improvement on turning pitches

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Head coach Gautam Gambhir praised India for pulling off a tenacious Super Over win in the low-scoring third T20I against Sri Lanka for a series whitewash, but called for consistent improvement on pitches assisting sharp turn. In a contest delayed by an hour due to rain here on Tuesday, India struggled against both spin and pace on a fresh pitch to make a mere 137/9. But the Suryakumar Yadav-led side showed doggedness in the second half despite Sri Lanka's domination to force the contest into a Super Over, restricting the hosts to 137/8 from 129/4 after 18 overs, and eventually winning the match to seal a 3-0 win. "Guys, congratulations on a great series win. Congratulations to Surya as well, outstanding captaincy and with the bat as well. I asked for something before the start of the game and you absolutely delivered it. "This is what happens when you keep fighting, (and when) you don't give up," Gambhir told the team in a dressing room chat shared by



BCCI on 'X'. "These kind of games happen and the only way these key games can happen (in favour) is when we keep fighting on every delivery and for every run and this was the example." Gambhir, however, urged the team to keep working on improving collectively on turning tracks which posed a

different challenge to the batting group in particular. "We keep getting better, we keep improving our skills as well because we still need to get better on playing on wickets like these, because we might end up getting these kind of wickets (in future). "So we should first assess the situation and conditions

really quickly and what is the par score as well," he said. Gambhir urged players, who are not a part of the three-match ODI series starting on Friday, to enjoy their break but at the same time, keep working on their fitness. "Some of the guys will not be a part of the 50-overs format which will have a longer break, so

make sure when you come back for the Bangladesh series...You can take a break. You absolutely deserve it, but more importantly, keep your skills and especially the fitness levels high." "You don't want to come for that series thinking that 'okay, I can just turn up, probably deliver for the team'. So make sure that from the fitness point of view, the fitness levels are right up there," he said. Hardik Pandya praised Shubman Gill and Riyan Parag for their gritty 54-run stand which pulled India out of trouble. "In batting first, we were challenged, the conditions were difficult, but after losing those early wickets, Shubman and Riyan, the way they batter and created the partnership was brilliant," he said. "When you speak about situational awareness, at that point of time what both of you did was very, very important. That gives us a platform to at least reach to a decent total (to which) our bowlers can make sure and bowl at the right areas," he said. Pandya praised Washington

Sundar (25 off 18 balls) and Ravi Bishnoi (8) for their respective contributions highlighting the importance of runs from lower order batters. "I always emphasise on the fact that the lower order has to come and chip in, and Washy and those eight runs by Bishi (Ravi Bishnoi) was very important," he said. Pandya also praised Suryakumar for his inspired bowling changes, with the India skipper bringing on Rinku Singh (1-0-3-2) for the penultimate over and himself for the last over (1-0-5-2) which turned the game on its head. "As Gauti bhai mentioned, Surya, well done in making sure that the way you rotate the bowlers, showing faith in the bowlers which you gave (the ball to) in the last couple of overs that was brilliant and as a bowling group, obviously, it was fantastic," he said. "When you win games like this, eventually it kind of takes us forward. We are taking it step-by-step, but this was definitely a right step going forward for the future and well done to all the guys who are playing ODIs, kill it, continue," Pandya added.

## Italy wins gold in women's team epee fencing to disappoint passionate French crowd again

AP ■ PARIS

The fans atencing are most passionate at the Paris Olympics, especially when France is challenging for a gold medal. They usually leave disappointed. Italy overcame a passionate "Marseillaise"-singing crowd at the Grand Palais to hand France its fourth fencing silver medal of the Games in the women's team epee Tuesday. Alberta Santuccio got the winning touch for Italy in overtime against France's Auriane Mallo-Breton to complete a hard-fought 30-29 win for gold. It was the second time that Mallo-Breton lost a Paris Olympic final by a single point after a 13-12 loss to Hong Kong's Vivian Kong Man Wai in the individual epee Saturday. French fencers are 0-3 in finals against non-French opponents at the 2024 Olympics, with those losses coming in epee events. The host nation's only gold came when Manon Apithy-Brunet beat her teammate Sara Balzer in the women's saber final on Monday. "If you look at the (epee) finals, of course we seem to be losing, but we're in the finals

all the same," Mallo-Breton said Tuesday through an interpreter. "I think that in the teams, there are possibilities to go and get some wonderful medals, and we hope that the other (French) teams will be able to go and do that, so we're going to be supporting them." Team fencing involves squad members fencing one-on-one in a rotating sequence that means everyone gets to face each opponent once. Despite the overtime loss, Mallo-Breton was still France's standout in the final with a combined record of 14-10 against all opponents. Italy has one gold, one silver and one bronze medal so far in fencing. Five more team events remain. Polish fencer Aleksandra Jarecka was shaking on the floor with emotion after winning her team bronze. Jarecka tied the score with less than three seconds to go and then won the tiebreaker point for a 32-31 overtime win against China. Just before that was an unexpected twist when an apparent glitch with the scoring system seemed to give Poland an extra point in the last minute, only to take it away.

## Swiatek remains on course for another title

AP ■ PARIS

For almost five full games at the Paris Olympics, No. 1-ranked Iga Swiatek's high-bouncing topspin shots were being sent back over the net by No. 52 Wang Xiyu of China with crushing baseline groundstrokes of her own. Wang even held a break point that would have given her a 3-2 lead in the opening set. Then Swiatek restored the expected order on Court Philippe Chatrier - the site of her four French Open titles - and won four straight games to close out the first set along the way to advancing to the quarterfinals with a 6-2, 6-4 victory amid stifling conditions on Tuesday. "It's never about only one player," Swiatek said. "I was aware that she can play great tennis. And I accepted that some points she can really take advantage. But I wanted to really be intense and push in the right moments. Also be patient and not slow down. So I think my intensity worked and in important moments I was the one that was more solid." In part because of Swiatek's dominance on the red clay at Roland Garros, where the Olympic tennis tournament is being held, the 23-year-old from Poland is favored to add a gold medal to her growing collection of big titles.



Swiatek's quarterfinal opponent will be eighth-seeded American Danielle Collins, who eliminated Camila Osorio of Colombia 6-0, 4-6, 6-3. Second-ranked Coco Gauff was left fuming over a perceived missed officiating decision in a 7-6 (7), 6-2 loss to Donna Vekic of Croatia. Angelique Kerber, the 36-year-old German who has won three Grand Slam titles and used to be ranked No. 1, beat 2021 U.S. Open runner-up Leylah Fernandez of Canada 6-4, 6-3 to become the oldest women's quarterfinalist since tennis returned to the Olympics in 1988. Kerber has said the Paris Games will be the final tournament of her career. Anna Karolina Schmiedlova of Slovakia eliminated Jasmine Paolini - the Italian who was the runner-up at the French Open and Wimbledon this year - 7-5, 3-6, 7-5. Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine rallied past seventh-seeded Maria Sakkari of Greece 4-6, 7-6 (5), 6-4.

## It's amazing leadership from big hearted Suryakumar: Washington Sundar

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Suryakumar Yadav's ability to stake risks at crucial junctures of the game like using Rinku Singh in the penultimate over and himself in the final one won India the third and final T20I against Sri Lanka, said all-rounder Washington Sundar. In a low scoring match on Tuesday, India pulled off a stunning win with Suryakumar making some interesting bowling changes towards the end of Sri Lankan

innings. Chasing 138, Sri Lanka were cruising towards a comfortable win when they needed 12 runs from the last two overs with six wickets in hand, but Suryakumar introduced Rinku Singh in the penultimate over who returned 1-0-3-2, and brought himself on in the final over to take a couple of more wickets and stun Sri Lanka. In the Super Over, Sri Lanka lost two wickets in just four balls as India knocked off the target of three runs on the first ball itself with Suryakumar



hitting a four to seal a series clean sweep. "Honestly, it's amazing of him, amazing of his leadership skills to be honest because (with) 12 balls (left and) 12 (runs) to win and for him to bring Rinku (on), especially when Kushal Perera is batting, and Rinku got him out and Surya (then) himself came in the last over and won the game for us," Sundar told the media after the match. "We all know he has a big heart when he goes out there to bat but also he has a big heart in terms of leadership

as well. All the credits to him and (it was) amazing of him." Sundar said it was Suryakumar who kept on insisting that India must take wickets in the

middle overs to maintain pressure on Sri Lanka, even though the hosts remained in command during the run chase.

## Daniel of Ireland wins Olympic gold and also hopes to pick up some new YouTube followers

AP ■ NANTERRE, FRANCE

Daniel Wiffen won Ireland's first Olympic gold medal in the pool in 28 years. That was thrilling enough as he wiped away tears standing on the podium, the Irish flag draped over his shoulders. Perhaps just as importantly, the 23-year-old Irishman is sure to pick up some new followers on his YouTube channel - a pitch he made when asked how people can learn more about a swimmer who is largely unknown outside his country. "People should watch," Wiffen said after winning the 800-meter freestyle on Tuesday night. "I blog every week - show you exactly what an Olympic champion does day-in, day-out in the pool." Get ready for a flood of fans, Daniel. Wearing round glasses and looking studious, Wiffen cried as the Irish anthem played in La Defense Arena. He may not



look the part of an Olympic champion, but his performance in the pool says otherwise. Wiffen will be back later in the Paris Games, hoping to win another gold on Sunday in the 1,500 meters - the final day of competition in the pool. "I don't normally cry, so I really hope nobody is going to see that," Wiffen said. "But it did come out of me, and it's obviously just a special moment. I've never heard that

surprisingly claimed three golds and a bronze at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics amid suspicions she was doping. national anthem from an Olympics before." Wiffen surged past Italy's Gregorio Paltrinieri on the final lap, looking as fresh as he did at the beginning of the grueling race. He won in 7 minutes, 38.19 seconds, overpowering defending Olympic champion Bobby Finke (7:38.75) of the United States and Paltrinieri (7:39.38). Mona McSharry won bronze for Ireland's first medal of these Games on the previous night in the 100 breaststroke. "I was dying the last 20 meters," Wiffen said. "I'm not sure if you saw that, because my arms are in absolutely so much pain. But I knew that the crowd is gonna carry me in, and that's exactly what happened. Then I saw the red light on the block, and that was it." Until these Olympics, Ireland's swimming history was essentially confined to Michelle Smith de Bruin, who

CHANGE OF NAME By virtue of an affidavit sworn before the Notary Public, Baripada, I, Dinesh Kumar Agarwala, aged about 50 years, S/O- Kishanlal Agarwala, Ward No.6, Purunahatsahi, Baripada, Dist.-Mbj, hereby declare that my correct name is "Dinesh Kumar Agarwala", not "Dinesh Agarwala", and this correct name "Dinesh Kumar Agarwala" is there in all my official records/documents, except in my son Khushal Agarwala's ICSE certificate (Roll No.- 7192604), where it has been wrongly printed as "Dinesh Agarwala". Hence, I state that my name should be corrected/mentioned as "Dinesh Kumar Agarwala" instead of "Dinesh Agarwala" in my son's ICSE certificate. Sd/-Dinesh Kumar Agarwala.

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e-mail- ori-Bonaigarh@nic.in  
Letter No: 2326 Date: 29/07/2024  
**Tender Call Notice No:- 05 /2024-25**  
**i-48:** Sealed Tenders are invited from the interested bidder for the civil work under BDO, Bonaigarh of Sundargarh district. The detail of works, eligibility, estimated cost and cost of tender paper has been uploaded in the district website [www.sundergarti.odisha.gov.in](http://www.sundergarti.odisha.gov.in). The bidder should be B&C class contractor only. They have to submit the bid document to the undersigned in the address of office of the B.D.O., Bonaigarh, At./P.O. Bonaigarh, Pin-770038, Dist.-Sundargarh (Odisha) through Registered Post / Speed Post only on or before 13 /08/2024, up to 5:00 PM. The sale of tender paper will be from dated 31/07/2024 to dated 12/08/2024 in the district website [www.sundergarh.odisha.gov.in](http://www.sundergarh.odisha.gov.in). The authority reserves the right to cancel or reject the entire process without assigning any reason thereof. The tender will be opened on dated 14.08.2024 at 11.00 AM in the office of the undersigned in the presence of the bidders or his/her authorized representatives.  
Your faithfully,  
Sd/-Block Development Officer, Bonaigarh  
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## Kaylee still rules Olympic backstroke

AP ■ NANTERRE, FRANCE

When it's time to race, Kaylee McKeown is sure hard to beat. American Regan Smith came into the women's 100-meter backstroke at the Paris Olympics with the world record and no shortage of confidence. At the turn Tuesday night, it was Smith in the lead with McKeown right on her heels. By the time they reached the other end of the pool, it was the Aussie lunging there first. McKeown still rules the backstroke. "She is an absolutely incredible racer and she knows what to do when it matters," Smith said. Smith, who broke McKeown's world mark with a time of 57.13 seconds at the U.S. Trials last month, led at the turn but couldn't hold off the hard-charging Aussie, who defended the title she won in Tokyo three years ago. McKeown surged to the front about halfway through the return lap and reached for the wall in 57.33, winning by a



relatively comfortable margin over Smith's finish of 57.66. "The nerves were definitely there but I just reminded myself it's a pool in a different venue, and I train every single day of my life," McKeown said. The U.S. Also grabbed the bronze as Katharine Berkoff touched third in 57.98, capturing her first Olympic medal and following in the footsteps of her father, David Berkoff, who won four medals - two of them gold - in Seoul and Barcelona. Smith reached over the lane rope to congratulate

McKeown, but this one had to sting. The 22-year-old Minnesota native appeared to be in top form and primed to win her first gold medal. Instead, it was McKeown capturing her fourth gold overall. She swept the backstroke events in Tokyo and also claimed a relay gold. "It's one race at a time," McKeown said. "I've checked off three boxes so far and there's a few more to go."

**Irish win first swimming gold since 1996** Wiffen won Ireland's first gold medal in swimming since scandal-plagued Michelle Smith finished first in three events at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics. Wiffen surged past Italy's Gregorio Paltrinieri on the final lap, looking as fresh as he did at the beginning of the grueling race. Actually, he was in excruciating pain. "I was dying the last 20 meters," Wiffen said. "I'm not sure if

you saw that, because my arms are in absolutely so much pain. But I knew that the crowd is gonna carry me in, and that's exactly what happened. Then I saw the red light on the block, and that was it." Wiffen won in 7 minutes, 38.19 seconds, climbing on the lane ropes to hold one finger skyward. Finke also came on strong late in what was essentially a three-man race, also passing Paltrinieri to take the silver in 7:38.75. The bronze went to the Italian, who posted a time of 7:39.38. It was another dazzling performance by an Irish swimmer, on the heels of Mona McSharry grabbing a bronze in the 100 breaststroke the previous night. Until these Olympics, the country's swimming history was essentially confined to Smith, who surprisingly claimed three golds and a bronze in 1996 amid suspicions she was doping. She later received a doping ban that essentially ended her career, but she kept her medals.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA ELECTRICAL LICENSING BOARD OFFICE OF THE ENGINEER-IN-CHIEF ELECTRICITY-CUM-PRINCIPAL CHIEF ELECTRICAL INSPECTOR, ODISHA, 3rd FLOOR HEADS OF DEPARTMENT BUILDING, BHUBANESWAR-751001**  
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