



OPINION 6 GIVE PEACE A CHANCE: THE ULTIMATE IMPERATIVE

WORLD 8 MEDIATORS SET TO HOLD NEW GAZA CEASE-FIRE TALKS

MONEY 10 INDIA IMPORTS USD 2.8 BN WORTH OF CRUDE OIL FROM RUSSIA IN JULY

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78th CELEBRATION OF INDIA INDEPENDENCE

PM MODI'S CLARION CALL: Crimes against women will not go unpunished



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the nation from the Red Fort on 78th Independence Day, in New Delhi, on Thursday

Photo: Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday called for strict punishment for those who execute these "monstrous deeds", in an indirect reference to the Kolkata doctor's rape and murder as the Mamata Banerjee Government faces massive anger and protests. In his first Independence Day address of his third term from the ramparts of the Red Fort and his 11th consecutive one, Modi said State Governments need to take crimes against women seriously and instill fear of punishment in the hearts of these criminals. Modi expressed concern over

incidents of rape and violence against women and said he can feel the outrage of people. Modi said there is a need to widely publicise punishments given for atrocities against women, so that there is a fear of consequence. Without directly mentioning the ghastly crime in West Bengal, Modi said extensive discussions on those receiving punishment should be held so that criminals understand that crimes against women lead to hanging. The Prime Minister said, "Now the need of the hour is that there should be a wide discussion about the criminals who get punished so that even those who commit such sins fear the consequences, including

Longest ever PM speech from the ramparts of Red Fort

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday delivered his longest Independence Day speech to date, speaking for 98 minutes. His speech was also the longest by comparison with any PM in the history of India. Besides, Modi who sported a multicoloured Rajasthani leheriya print turban with white kurta and churidar, also broke the record of his immediate predecessor

Manmohan Singh by hoisting the national flag from the ramparts of the Red Fort for the 11th consecutive time. With this, Modi has become the Prime Minister to hoist the Tricolour for the third highest time. The record lies with first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who got the honour 17 times from 1947 to 1964. Prior to this, Modi's longest Independence Day speech lasted 96 minutes in 2016.

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hanging to death. I feel that it is very important to create this fear," he said. "...there are some pressing concerns which bring me a lot of trauma, hence, I once again wish to highlight them from the ramparts of the Red Fort. As a society we should seriously dwell upon the atrocities being meted out to our mothers, sisters and daughters. The outrage is visible in the nation and among the citizens. I can feel this outrage. The States, society and the nation have to take serious cognisance of this malefaction. Crimes against women should be investigated without any delay.

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Bengal women fiercely seek justice in Kolkata rape and murder horror

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

In a unique movement, lakhs of women of different age and from different walks of life and irrespective of their financial status on Wednesday hit the streets of Bengal, more so at several points in Kolkata to register their protest against the brutal rape and murder of a young woman in the safety of her workplace, calling to "break free of the shackles on the eve of India's 78th year of Independence." Similar protests were reported from Mumbai, Bengaluru, Hyderabad and even foreign ports like Australia and Oslo. The protest scene was tumultuous at what they call the epicentre of agitations, Jadavpur University, with thousands converging outside the University, causing widespread traffic jams along the wide boulevards for several kilometers on end. "Is it as though all roads lead to Jadavpur," said Parambrata Chatterjee, a popular Bengali and Hindi film actor. Reports of similar congregations were reported from Coochbehar, Jalpaiguri, Siliguri, Raiganj, Bolpur-Shantiniketan, Bongaon, Durgapur, Purulia, Asansol, Howrah, Midnapore, Barasat, and Rajarhat New Town north of Kolkata. A senior officer in the State police law and order



department said, "Bengal has shown why it is still different ... such a unique protest I have never seen in 25 years of my life. Not a thousand but several lakh, mostly women, who have emerged on the streets jettisoning pressure." Spurred by the 'Reclaim the Night' campaign, which gained momentum through social media, after Rimjhim College postgraduate student of Sociology appealed a few days ago to join her in a midnight protest at 11:55 pm on the appointed day. "I did not think so many people would respond like

this... it shows that women, particularly in India have gun powder inside them, waiting or on the verge of explosion." Meanwhile, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Thursday appealed to doctors to rejoin work reminding the nature of their jobs. "Like the police the doctors too perform emergency duty and I remind them their duty ... I can only appeal to their conscience as several patients are returning to their villages without getting treatment. I have learnt that few have died ... I will request them to return to their work," Banerjee said.

Elections ahead, MHA appoints Nalin Prabhat as DG, Jammu and Kashmir Police

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of holding the maiden Assembly elections in the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, the Union Home Ministry has decided to rush highly decorated IPS officer Nalin Prabhat (1992 Batch), a counter-terrorism and anti-Naxal expert, to lead ongoing anti-terrorist operations as Special Director General of Jammu and Kashmir Police with immediate effect. Nalin will formally take charge as Director General of Police, Jammu and Kashmir with effect from October 1, 2024, immediately after the superannuation of sitting DGP RR Swain on September 30, 2024. An appointment order in this regard was issued by the Union Home Ministry on Thursday, a day after the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet (ACC) on Wednesday sanctioned the inter-cadre deputation of Nalin, Director-General of the National Security Guard (NSG), from the Andhra Pradesh to AGMUT cadre for a tenure of three years. The Special DGP is expected to strengthen the intelligence gathering network of Jammu and Kashmir police besides intensifying anti-terrorist operations to create a conducive atmosphere for holding peaceful Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir. Nalin, 55, has earlier won three police gallantry medals. He also headed the specialised anti-Naxal police force 'Greyhounds' of Andhra Pradesh, his former cadre State. He has extensively served in the CRPF as he headed its Kashmir region deployment as the IG operations and ADG.

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One nation, one election, Uniform Civil Code, need of the hour: PM

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday batted for two crucial issues and made a strong pitch for 'Uniform Civil Code' (UCC) and 'one nation, one election', and said both of these were the need of the hour and would help in the progress of the country. He urged political parties to come forward to realise the dream while contending that frequent polls were creating hurdles in the nation's progress. The Prime Minister made a fresh call for these two contentious issues despite the BJP being 32 short of a majority in the Lok Sabha and depending on allies to reach the halfway mark. In his third term's first from Red Fort, the Prime Minister made an unequivocal pitch for a "secular" civil code instead of the current framework which is "communal" and promoted "discrimination", and also for simultaneous polls, as he fronted the ruling BJP's manifesto promises for a Uniform Civil Code and 'one nation one election'. Both a nationwide UCC and 'one nation one election' have been part of successive BJP's manifestos. While some BJP-ruled States are working to roll out a Uniform Civil Code, the Centre has so far not taken any legislative measure for its implementation nationally. "In our country, the Supreme



Court has repeatedly addressed the issue of the Uniform Civil Code. Numerous orders have been issued, reflecting the belief of a significant portion of our population — and rightly so — that the current Civil Code resembles a Communal Civil Code, one that is discriminatory," he said. The Prime Minister noted that the Supreme Court has given various directions in this regard. The spirit of the Constitution also encourages such a code, he said, referring to Article 44 under the Directive Principles of State Policy. It States that it is the duty of the State to secure for the citizens a Uniform Civil Code throughout the territory of India. "As we celebrate 75 years of the Constitution, we must hold extensive discussions on this subject as the Supreme Court advocates for this change. And it is our collective responsibility to

realise the vision of the framers of our Constitution. We should welcome diverse opinions and perspectives. Laws that divide our nation based on religion and foster discrimination have no place in modern society. Therefore, I assert that it is time for the country to demand a Secular Civil Code. After 75 years of a Communal Civil Code, it is crucial to move towards a Secular Civil Code. Once this shift takes place, it will eliminate religious discrimination and will bridge the gap felt by ordinary citizens," Modi said. The UCC proposes a common set of laws for all citizens, regardless of their religion, covering matters such as marriage, divorce, inheritance, succession, and adoption. The goal is to have secular laws that override religious laws in these areas. Currently, the UCC is only implemented in Goa, while a bill is under consideration in Uttarakhand. In 2016, the Modi Government asked the Law Commission of India to explore how to develop a code given the "thousands of personal laws" in the country. The Law Commission's 2018 consultation paper on family law reform stated that a unified nation does not necessarily require "uniformity" and that secularism should not conflict with the country's diversity.

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Modi speaks, Rahul Gandhi listens



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi with the Paris Olympics 2024 medal winning contingent and others during the 78th Independence Day celebration at the Red Fort, in New Delhi, on Thursday

Festive season but vendors have little to celebrate

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital may have erupted in celebration of the 78th Independence Day on Thursday, but the festive mood was missing from the once-vibrant streets of Sadar Bazar and Chawri Bazar, usually awash with patriotic fervour and crowded with shoppers buying kites, national flags and other items in the days leading up to the Independence Day and Raksha Bandhan, which falls this year on August 19. Despair has replaced the usual anticipation of the shopkeepers of these markets had from this festive season which brought in good business for them. But this year the vendors confront the grim reality of fewer footfalls and dwindling sales



PIONEER PHOTO

due to frequent spells of heavy rain and resultant flooding and water-logging. Mohammad Ahsan, who sells items related to Independence Day celebration including flags, bands, clothing and masks, rued that water-logging and sludge drives the customers away. "Sales have

nosedived because of the long wet spell. We have to pack up every now and then because of the intermittent rain that has customers scurrying for cover to avoid getting drenched standing on the streets. Unsurprisingly, compared to last year, our earnings are drastically down. The chances

of making up for the loss in the next few days are getting slimmer and slimmer with the water-logging and mud and slush driving away customers." Referring to the "Har Ghar Tiranga" campaign launched by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, he added, "When Modi launched this national campaign, our sales soared to the sky but now with diffused focus on that, this time around the sales have remained very low." The frequent downpour has severely affected sales of the vendors who wait for these events to earn some extra money but with the woeful lack of civic amenities, mostly a foolproof drainage system, in the city we are struggling to stay afloat.

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For once, listen to all creatures great and small

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Independence Day celebrated with fervour may have passed, but many feathered friends injured by glass-coated manjha continue to writhe in pain. A visit to the Charity Bird Hospital in Delhi's Chandni Chowk reveals that in the past few days the centre has been getting at least ten birds per day on an average, majorly injured or tender bones being broken by the

hazardous manjha. "These injured birds are receiving treatment at our hospital as in many others. They often fall victim to hazardous strings, suffering painful injuries and even succumbing," said Dr Har Avtar Singh, a vet with the hospital. "Ahead of the Independence Day and festivals like Rakshabandhan birds such as crows, pigeons, pariah kites, rose-ringed parakeets, barn owls, and even vultures get injured by manjha. There is an urgent need for increased awareness among the public and responsible kite flying

practices to protect our avian companions," he said. As even after first aid treatment, these voiceless creatures may take up to several days or months to recover fully, said Dr Singh, adding many succumb also to the trauma or bruises. For those who rescue injured birds, Dr Singh has a word of advice: Don't apply turmeric, iodine, or ointments, as these are ineffective. "Avoid pulling out the string if the wound has clotted, as this can exacerbate blood loss. Instead, wrap the bird in a cloth and transport it to a veterinarian or contact a local animal welfare group for proper care," he said. The dangers of glass-coated manjha extend beyond avian injuries. The thread can

become entangled in electrical wires leading to electrocution of those who come into contact with it. "We have issued advisories against using such manjha, as it poses severe risks when caught in electrical wires," said an official from the BSES, Yamuna Power Limited. "Kite flying can quickly turn dangerous, even fatal, with the use of metal-coated manjha, a potent conductor of electricity," it said. Also, there have been cases of people getting hurt from strings. "People walking or riding bicycles can suffer severe cuts if they come into contact with manjha. Strings can damage vehicle tires or injure drivers, leading to crashes.

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Vijayan blames Centre for Wayanad landslide

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan chose the right time and place to castigate India's claim as a super power in the field of science and technology. Addressing the Independence Day parade at Thiruvananthapuram on Thursday, Vijayan said that the landslides and flood at Wayanad was caused by the poor weather forecast system of the Central Government establishments.



Home Minister Amit Shah had told Parliament that the State was given advance alerts about the impending disaster many days ahead of the July 30 nature's fury. The Meteorological Department as well as the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services (INCOIS), Hyderabad are always in the forefront in alerting all States in the country about the possibilities of tornadoes, heavy rainfall and sea attacks.

ing. "Though the Central agencies had warned about cyclones, heavy rains and tidal waves in the past, the CPI(M) led Government failed miserably to take preventive measures. We all saw how Vijayan was driven away from the coastal regions of the capital city by fishermen and homemakers when he visited the areas affected by Ookie, the tornado and rainfall in 2019," said Sasikumar.

Doctors' body to resume strike after two days after WB violence

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Shocked at the recent vandalism at the crime scene of a brutal rape-murder at R G Kar Medical College and Hospital, the Federation of Resident Doctors' Associations (FORDA) has announced a resumption of their strike. This decision comes after the strike was initially called off two days ago following assurances from Union Health Minister JP Nadda.



Dr Sarvesh Pandey, General Secretary FORDA said that "We strongly condemn the Union Ministry and state government for their failure to honour their commitments and ensure the safety of healthcare professionals during this crisis.

workers, and to demand a future where such violence is unimaginable," added Dr Aviral Mathur, President, FORDA. The recent decision by FORDA to resume the strike follows discontent among several resident doctors' associations, which had expressed their intention to continue the agitation despite the initial call-off.

Naresh Kumar hoists national flag at NDMC HQ

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) Chairperson Naresh Kumar on Thursday hoisted the National Flag on the occasion of 78th Independence Day at NDMC Headquarter — Palika Kendra here. He announced the 11 points target programme for the next one year for the NDMC to become the first Municipality in the Nation to achieve the goal of sustainable development with inclusion of every social sector of the area.

CBI summons docs of RG Kar Medical College

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KOLKATA

Even as Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee blamed the opposition parties for politicising the RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case setting deadline for the Central Bureau of Investigation to crack the case by the coming Sunday the CBI on Thursday summoned five doctors for questioning in connection with the alleged rape and murder of a lady doctor.

For once, listen to all creatures...

From Page 1

Pets and stray animals can also be harmed by manjha, leading to serious injuries or even death," said Manisha Maan, a former journalist. Despite a ban imposed by the Delhi Government on all forms of manjha and a National Green Tribunal order prohibiting synthetic and nylon manjha, the hazardous strings continue to be sold.

Inspector with Delhi Police. Kartick Satyanarayan from Wildlife SOS urged kite fliers to use only plain cotton threads and to responsibly dispose of any discarded strings found entangled in trees.

approach to address the issue. She suggested that those found guilty of selling hazardous manjha should be asked by the courts to perform community service in bird injury hospitals.

Dr Har Avtar agreed with the suggestion. He said, "Witnessing the consequences firsthand might foster a deeper comprehension of the impact of their actions and the critical need for safer kite-flying practices."

Festive season but...

From Page 1

"Not only are there fewer customers, but the rain has also damaged much of our stocks. Items that once sold for Rs 25 are now being offered at a heavily discounted price of Rs 10 or less. We're barely making enough to feed our kids. Even though there are crowds, sales are non-existent.

Seema, a vendor from Seemapuri and the sole breadwinner for her family, is feeling the pinch. "The rain has arrived late this year, which is unusual for this month. In the streets, which are dirty and dingy, many women sit on the roads to sell their rakhis.

One nation, one election...

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Strongly advocating for 'one nation, one election,' he said extensive consultations have been held across the country on the issue and all political parties have given their views while a committee has submitted an excellent report.

witness to ensure the nation's progress". He also asked the parties to ensure that "national resources are used for the common man. We have to come forward to realise the dream of one nation one election".

conveyed their strong objections to the concept. The concept of 'One Nation, One Election' entails the simultaneous conduct of Lok Sabha and all Assembly elections once every five years.

Elections ahead, MHA appoints...

From Page 1

Meanwhile, a joint team of security forces have further intensified their anti-terrorist operations across the Jammu region after gunning down one of the foreign terrorists in the Assar area of Doda on Wednesday.

materials from the encounter site. His mortal remains were dispatched to his native place in Dehradun for the final rites with full military honors.

The units have been set up in the areas that witnessed terror attacks in recent months across the Jammu province. According to official sources, these units will remain stationed at Latti and Panchari of Udhampur district.

PM MODI's CLARION CALL: Crimes against women will...

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Those committing such demonic acts must be booked prima facie to reinstate the trust on the government, judiciary and civil society," Modi said.

as a developed nation through the collective resolve of 140 crore citizens, who together can overcome any challenge. The Prime Minister said if a nation of 40 crore people could launch the freedom struggle and overthrow a world power by breaking the shackles of slavery, the dream of a prosperous India can be achieved if 140 crore citizens work together towards the goal.

in the neighbouring country and expressed the hope that normalcy will soon be restored there. India has always wished peace, happiness and prosperity for Bangladesh and wants its development journey to continue, said Modi, who sported a multi-coloured Rajasthani leheriya print turban with a white kurta and churidar.

emphatically clear that even though these adversaries (state and non-state players) will at best delay India's rise due to their machinations, India is ready to counter this challenge. Modi also cautioned citizens against those who cannot digest the country's rise, saying some people cannot think of India's welfare.

internal as well as external challenges, the prime minister said, asking foreign powers to be not part of plans against India or be concerned with its progress as the country's growth is tied to humankind's welfare.

also ensured saturation coverage of welfare schemes, he said, adding that when every beneficiary is covered any taint of "casteism and communalism" is ruled out. In a clear swipe at opposition parties, he said some people are glorifying corruption and asserted that he wants to create an "atmosphere of fear" among the corrupt.

Longest ever PM speech...

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In contrast, his briefest address was in 2017, spanning approximately 56 minutes. His longest I-day speech before Thursday was 96 minutes in 2016 while his shortest speech was in 2017 when he spoke for around 56 minutes. On the 78th Independence Day, Modi also became the prime minister to hoist the tricolour on Independence Day and deliver a speech for the third highest time. Modi delivered his first Independence Day speech in 2014, which lasted for 65 minutes.

different stints from 1966-1977 and 1980-1984. Manmohan Singh, who was prime minister of the Congress-led UPA government for 10 years, hoisted the national flag 10 times between 2004 and 2014. Of India's 15 prime ministers, Gulzarilal Nanda and Chandra Shekhar were the only ones who did not get a chance to hoist the tricolour even once.

INBRIEF
NFR OBSERVES PARTITION HORRORS REMEMBRANCE DAY
INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATION 2024 AT IIM BODH GAYA
VIT-AP UNIVERSITY HONOURS 9 UNSUNG HEROES ON I-DAY

I-Day at Red Fort: Viksit Bharat theme, Olympic contingent special guests

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 was the running theme at the 78th Independence Day celebrations at the Red Fort here where members of the Indian contingent that took part in the Paris Olympics were among the special guests.

In the 98-minute speech, his longest Independence Day speech, Prime Minister Narendra Modi asserted that it is India's golden era and a developed India by 2047 awaits the nation.

The dignitaries, who were seated near the podium on the ramparts of the 17th century fort, included Union ministers Amit Shah, Nitin Gadkari, Mansukh Mandaviya, S Jaishankar, Nirmala Sitharaman, Jyotiraditya Scindia, Kiren Rijiju, G Kishan Reddy, Ashwini Vaishnav, Shivraj Chouhan, Chirag Paswan, J P Nadda, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat and Giriraj Singh.

Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and Delhi Lt Governor V K Saxena were also among those present. Gandhi was seen sitting behind a few rows of seats, which were occupied by members of the Indian contingent that took part in the recently-held Paris Games.

Sources said all seating arrangements were done "as per the table of precedence", adding it was decided this year that "Paris Olympics medal winners" would be honoured as special guests at the Independence Day celebrations.



Ranjan Dilmri

Baker, fellow shooter and bronze medallist Sarabjot Singh, and PR Sreejesh who retired after being the goalkeeper of the bronze medal-winning Indian hockey team, among others were present in the VIP seating area. Ambassadors and diplomats of many foreign countries also attended the event.

Dinesh K Tripathi and IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari also greeted Prime Minister Modi. General Officer Commanding (GOC), Delhi Area, Lieutenant General Bhavnish Kumar conducted the PM to the Saluting Base, where a combined Inter-Services and Delhi Police Guard presented general salute to the Prime Minister. Thereafter, Prime Minister Modi inspected the Guard of Honour.

A large group of boy and girl cadets (from Army, Navy and Air Force wings) of the NCC from different schools across the country were seated on Gyanpath, opposite the ramparts. They formed 'My Bharat' logo with customised tricolour kits. A total of 500 National Service Scheme (NSS) volunteers also take part. After the event, Modi broke from his security protocol to meet and interact with several NCC cadets who wore matching gear -- t-shirt and cap, with '78 Viksit Bharat 2047' printed on the back of the t-shirt, many of whom vied to take a selfie with the PM.

LG hoists Tricolour at Raj Niwas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Lt Governor (LG) V K Saxena on Thursday here hoisted the National Flag at Raj Niwas on the occasion of 78th Independence Day. A ceremonial police contingent presented the National Salute.

Paying homage to the countless freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country, Saxena emphasized upon the arduous journey towards independence. While acknowledging the challenges that are ahead, the LG expressed confidence in India's potential to become a global leader.

"We have paid a heavy price for our freedom. Millions of patriots have written the story of independent India with their blood. While some of their names are well-known to us, there are millions more whose names we have never heard. Today is the day to pay our respects to these unsung heroes of freedom movement," Saxena said.

The LG highlighted India's rapid strides in various sectors, including defence, space, pharma and healthcare during the recent years. He recounted that the successful hosting of the G-20 Summit and the World Heritage Conference recently, underscored the country's growing stature on the global stage.

Saxena also emphasized upon focussing on youth empowerment, job creation, and environmental sustainability. The on-going efforts to revitalize



Ranjan Dilmri

Delhi's heritage sites, restore and rejuvenate the Yamuna floodplains and massive afforestation / reforestation drives were underlined by the LG as examples of his commitment to sustainable development. He pointed out that the Ghats of Yamuna and its floodplains in Delhi had developed as eco-friendly public green spaces in the shape of Asita, Bansera, and Vasudev Ghat. This, Saxena said, had brought the people of the city closer to the river, in the process making them stakeholders in its rejuvenation.

In addition to this, several historical sites like Mehrauli Archaeological Park, St. James Church, Sanjay Van, Shalimar Bagh, Rajaonki Baoli, and Anang Tal Baoli had or were in the process of undergoing conservation, preservation, and restoration. Saxena said the Yamuna River, flowing alongside Delhi, belongs to us all. The air we breathe here affects us equally. While the government primarily bears the responsibility of keeping it clean, it is also our duty to support the government in this endeavour.

National flag unfurled at Prisons Headquarters

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Director General of Prisons Satish Golcha on Thursday hoisted the National Flag at the Prison Headquarters on the occasion of 78th Independence Day and announced a special remission for convicts.

In his address, the Director General (Prisons) announced that a total of 1,160 eligible convicts were granted remission ranging from 15 to 25 days based on their conduct during their time in prison. A statement by the department said, "New Laws have been implemented in all jails of Delhi prisons and work is at advance stage regarding Online Court Production of Inmates before courts. Officers, staff have been informed, trained in aspects of release, bails etc regarding various relevant sections of BNS, BNSS and BSS."



Several other organizations are also contributing to skill development initiatives across various jails," it stated. Golcha also highlighted recent advancements in prison security, including the installation of 1,248 additional CCTV cameras equipped with facial recognition technology to enhance the safety of inmates. "Furthermore, the latest mobile jammers have been installed in six jails of the Tihar prison complex, specifically targeting high-security wards," it said. Screening tests for HIV, Hepatitis B, and Syphilis were conducted for 10,573 prisoners and a special cervical cancer screening camp was organized in collaboration with AIIMS at Jail No. 06. "Number of Ambulances and Recruitment of Doctors for Delhi prisons has been taken up on priority. A proposal for creation of 3200 new posts in Delhi Prisons is at an advance stage of consideration," the statement said.

AAP initiates 'Desh Azad, Loktantra Jail Mein' campaign

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

AAP on Thursday initiated 'Desh Azad, Loktantra Jail Mein' campaign on the occasion of Independence Day stating that freedom fighters would have never imagined that in independent India an elected Chief Minister would be kept in jail in a false case.

Expressing his disappointment on Kejriwal not being able to hoist tricolor at his official residence, his wife Sunita Kejriwal took to X and said, "The tricolor was not hoisted at the CM residence today. It was very sad. This dictatorship can keep an elected Chief Minister in jail, but how will it stop the patriotism in the heart?" Senior leader of AAP and former Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia also targeted the Centre regarding this and tweeted, "On the anniversary of independence from the British, salute to that spirit, which is today imprisoned in the dictator's jail for safeguarding freedom from dictatorship." Delhi Cabinet Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj tweeted, "Today the whole country is celebrating Independence Day and our beloved Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is behind bars for many months in a false case. The country will soon get freedom from this arbitrariness. Jai Hind, Jai Bharat, Jai Samvidhan."

INBRIEF



In a grand celebration of excellence and leadership, Prof. (Dr.) Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor of Guru Gobind Singh Indraprastha University, was honored with the Highest State Award 'Prerna Srot Samman' at the State-level Independence Day Ceremony 2024, held in Dehra, Kangra. The award, presented by the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu, honours Prof. Verma's exemplary contributions to promote innovation and excellence, recognizing his deep sense of pride and enduring bond with his Himachali heritage.



The 78th Independence Day was celebrated by the member of the R&M Block Association in Model Town 3. The event was distinguished by the presence of Pawan Sharma, AAP MLA, alongside other committee members in New Delhi on Thursday

Gahlot hails Kejriwal as freedom fighter on I-Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Home Minister Kailash Gahlot, who hoisted the national flag at the Chhatrasal stadium here on the 78th Independence Day, hailed Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as a "freedom fighter" who has been "punished" for working for people.

Gahlot said he was distressed that an elected chief minister could not hoist the national flag because he is in jail. "Standing under this flag, I can say proudly that Arvind Kejriwal is a modern day freedom fighter because he accepted the punishment to work for the people of Delhi by going to the jail, but did not bow down or break in front of the anti-democratic forces," he said. Gahlot said the country did not get freedom just so that an elected chief minister could be put in jail, adding it got it to defeat illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and diseases.

Kejriwal began the effort to free the country from these ills by providing quality education, healthcare, free electricity and world class transport facilities to the people in Delhi, he asserted.

Kejriwal was arrested on March 21 in connection with an excise policy case and is currently lodged in Tihar Jail. Gahlot further said India's democracy is too strong for any power to weaken it, as he cited as an example of the resilience, the release of former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia from jail. On the occasion, he hoped that Kejriwal would also get bail soon. "I hope that Kejriwal will be out soon and will hoist the national flag in the years to come," he said. Sisodia, also



Ranjan Dilmri

arrested in connection with the excise policy case on February 26 last year, was granted bail by the Supreme Court on August 9. Gahlot said the Delhi government led by the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) will continue to give free electricity, education, healthcare and bus rides to women. "By bringing change in Delhi, Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has proved that if intentions are clear and the government is honest, everything is possible," said Gahlot. "Our government has done a lot of work in Delhi under the leadership of Arvind Kejriwal. There is 24 hours free electricity in Delhi. With this, there has been a tremendous change in the government schools of Delhi," he added. Gahlot listed the achievements of the government in various sectors like education, health and improving the pollution situation in the national capital. The minister, who also holds

the portfolio of Transport, said Delhi is known as the Electric Vehicle capital and has the largest fleet of electric buses in the country and third largest in the world. Delhi has 1,970 electric buses at the moment and by 2025, 80 per cent of the bus fleet will be electric, he shared. Gahlot alleged the "democratic rights" of the people of Delhi were taken away through a legislation brought by the Centre, but assured people that their work won't stop despite all obstacles. Remembering freedom fighters who laid down their lives, he said, "Today, on the 78th year of independence, I salute all the freedom fighters." He also saluted the soldiers, who risked their lives to protect the country on the country's borders after independence. Delhi cabinet ministers Atishi, Saurabh Bharadwaj, Gopal Rai, Imran Hussain and Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar were present on the occasion.

Appropriate to compare Kejriwal to Nadir Shah: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Thursday strongly condemned state Home Minister Kailash Gahlot for his speech during the Delhi Government's Independence Day celebration where he called the incarcerated Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal a modern-day freedom fighter and called it 'shameful'. While calling Gahlot's speech 'political', Sachdeva said that it would have been more appropriate to compare Kejriwal to Mughal Ruler Nadir Shah. "The way Kailash Gahlot mentioned the names of Arvind Kejriwal and Manish Sisodia and praised them, it seemed as if he was not addressing the Delhi government's ceremony but addressing party workers from the AAP's platform," he said. Sachdeva lashed out at the senior AAP leader and said, "Whether it was his mention of old electricity and water schemes in the Independence Day speech or the use of words like 'forces against the nation trying to stop Kejriwal,' everything seemed like political propaganda." The Delhi BJP chief called him a bigger anarchist than other AAP leaders. Attacking



him, he added, "listening to Gahlot's political speech, it seemed that he wanted to prove himself a bigger anarchist politician than Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia, and Atishi." Further, he said that the comparison hurts families of freedom fighters. "Kailash Gahlot comparing Arvind Kejriwal to freedom fighters is shameful and has hurt the sentiments of thousands of freedom fighters and their families," Sachdeva said. "It would not be an exaggeration to say that by politicizing the Independence Day address, Kailash Gahlot insulted democracy and the constitution, and the people of Delhi will never forgive him," he said. Additionally, on the occasion of the 78th anniversary of Independence, Sachdeva hoisted the national flag in the presence of senior leaders including Northwest Delhi MP Yogendra Chandolia and extended his greetings to the people of Delhi on Independence Day.

Minister's remarks insult to those who fought for country: LoP Vijender

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



Leader of the Opposition in the Delhi Assembly, Vijender Gupta, expressed strong objections today over the statement made by Delhi Minister Kailash Gahlot during the 'Independence Day Program' organized by the Delhi Government at Chhatrasal Stadium. Minister Gehlot had referred to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal as a "modern freedom fighter," which Gupta strongly condemned. He stated that Gehlot's remarks are not only misleading to the public but also an insult to the thousands of brave sons and freedom fighters who sacrificed their lives for the country's independence. Gupta further criticized Gehlot for glorifying an individual who is the mastermind behind a massive financial scandal related to Delhi's excise policy, currently incarcerated and under investigation by multiple agencies. Gupta emphasized that the gravity of the charges against this individual is evident from the repeated denials of bail by various courts.

Hindus from Pakistan celebrate their first Independence Day

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

More than 250 Hindu from Pakistan who were given citizenship under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA), celebrated their first Independence Day, amid the drizzles and uncertainty looming over their head about the encroachment drive by the Delhi Development Authority (DDA). These Pakistani Hindu are residing near Majnu Ka Tila Gurudwara, in a dainty slum.

On the occasion of Independence Day celebrations, they sang patriotic songs, unfurled tricolour, danced in happiness. These people, especially the girls, celebrated their first freedom to go to school and venture outside without fearing forceful conversions. Today, these Hindus dressed up in sparkling clothes and set up a stage where everyone danced. These euphoric Hindus stated that despite celebrating Independence Day every year for the last decade or more in the country, this time the occasion becomes even more special as many have been granted citizenship by the Central government and many are just days away from getting one with their application in the pipeline. A 16 year old Bagwanti said that she is very happy to celebrate the occasion. "While we were there, we couldn't step out of the home like we can do here. We couldn't dance like this either. But now we can do this and also study. I dream of becoming a teacher," the class 10 student said. In the area, about 250 people live where at least 150 of them have been given citizenship



Saumya Shukla

under the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) by the Centre. In the city, at least 5,000 of such people who have fled from Pakistan live in different parts of city including Majlis Park, Signature Bridge, Adarsh Nagar, Rohini Sector 11 and 25. DeenDayal, grandfather of the famous girl Nagarika whose name was inspired from CAA and was also mentioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his speeches, thanked the Indian Government and Prime Minister for giving them an identity. "Now we are free to go anywhere. We have the freedom to work and have the same rights as those who live here. I thank the government and Narendra Modi for giving citizenship. In sometime, we can also vote. We have always considered ourselves as a citizen of this country but today celebrating Independence Day officially as a citizen makes it even more important," he said. Adding that their plans of celebrating the occasion were even bigger, he said that the rain ruined so many things. "I just hope that the government gives us a house because we can be evicted from here anytime. We are hardworking people, we do not need any financial aid. We just wanted citizenship and a house. We are asking for it so we do not keep fearing for where we will go," he said.

Modi voices concern for safety of Hindus in unrest-hit Bangladesh



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday hoped that the situation in violence-hit Bangladesh will return to normal soon even as he said 140 crore Indians are concerned over the safety of Hindus and minorities in the neighbouring country.

Mounting concerns in New Delhi over widespread incidents of attacks on the minority Hindu community in Bangladesh after Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India on August 5 following weeks of violent unrest. "As a neighbouring country, I can understand the concern regarding whatever has happened in Bangladesh. I hope that the situation there will become normal soon," Modi said. "In particular, the concerns of 140 crore countrymen is that the safety and security of

Hindus and minorities there is ensured. India always wants that the neighbouring country marches on the path of peace and prosperity," he said. The Prime Minister said India will remain a well-wisher in Bangladesh's development journey, in what is being seen as an indication of New Delhi's readiness to work with the new dispensation in Dhaka. "We have a commitment to peace. In the coming days, we will continue to wish well for Bangladesh in its journey towards development because we are people who think about the well-being of humankind," he said. It was the second time in the last one week that Modi raised concerns over the condition of minorities in Bangladesh. While extending best wishes to Muhammad Yunus after he took charge as the head of Bangladesh's interim government on August 8, Modi had talked about ensuring the safety of Hindus and other minority

communities in that country. In a social media post, Modi said: "We hope for an early return to normalcy, ensuring the safety and protection of Hindus and all other minority communities." "India remains committed to working with Bangladesh to fulfil the shared aspirations of both our peoples for peace, security and development." Meanwhile, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief Mohan Bhagwat said in Nagpur that Hindus living in Bangladesh are being subjected to violence for no reason and that India has the responsibility to ensure that they do not face any injustice and atrocities. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, in a statement in Parliament on August 6, said India is "deeply concerned" over the situation in Bangladesh, especially about the status of the minority communities. "We are also monitoring the situation with regard to the status of minorities," he said.

New criminal laws focus on justice, not punishment: Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday asserted that justice for people and not punishment lies at the core of the new criminal justice system put in place in the country. In his Independence Day speech, the Prime Minister underlined that his Government has abolished the burden of thousands of compliances on people. He also said the Government's interference in people's lives has been reduced. Modi said the Government has abolished more than 1,500 laws which used to burden the common man with thousands of compliances so that people do not get entangled in the web of laws. Modi said provision in laws which prescribed jail term for even the smallest of mistakes too have been scrapped. Referring to the three new criminal laws The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) -- he said they have replaced IPC, CrPC and the Evidence Act.

India emerging as a global defence manufacturing hub: PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Underlining country's growing self-reliance in defence manufacturing, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said India is attaining 'Aatmanirbharta' in defence and is emerging as a global manufacturing hub due to the steps taken by the Government in the last few years. In his Independence Day address, Modi pointed out that there was a time when the majority of the defence budget was used to procure weapons/equipment from abroad, but his Government focused on indigenous manufacturing to make the Nation self-reliant. He lauded the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces for taking a series of decisions, including the notification of a number of positive indigenisation lists, wherein there are over 5,600 items that are being/will be procured only from the Indian industry after designated timelines. He expressed satisfaction that India, which was once completely dependent on

import of defence equipment, is today exporting to numerous countries. It may be recalled that due to the persistent efforts of the Government, the annual defence production hit a record high of Rs 1.27 lakh crore in Financial Year (FY) 2023-24. In the same fiscal, defence exports touched a record high of Rs 21,083 crore, an increase of 32.5% over FY 2022-23. In addition, there has been a massive jump in defence exports in the first quarter of FY 2024-25. Rs 6,915 crore worth of defence equipment has been

exported in the first quarter, an increase of 78% from the first quarter of FY 2023-24, when the figure was Rs 3,885 crore. Referring to the 2016 surgical strike and 2019 air strike, the Prime Minister stated that there was a time when the country was a victim of terror attacks; but today it is bold and strong, with the Armed Forces giving a befitting reply to anyone who tries to harm the sovereignty, unity and integrity of the country. He asserted that the Nation is proud of its brave soldiers who selflessly serve the motherland.



PM urges citizens to perform duties for safeguard of rights

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said the Constitution was instrumental in safeguarding the rights of Dalits, oppressed and the deprived sections of the society and urged citizens to focus on their duties enshrined in the document. Addressing the nation on the 78th Independence Day, the Prime Minister said when citizens fulfill their responsibilities collectively, they naturally become guardians of each other's rights. "By performing our duties, we inherently protect these rights without needing any additional effort," Modi said. He said the 75th anniversary of adoption of the Constitution was an important landmark to reflect on its pivotal role in uniting and strengthening the Nation. "Over these 75 years, the Constitution has been instrumental in fortifying Bharat's democracy and safeguarding the rights of our dalits, the oppressed, the exploited and the deprived sections of the society," Modi said in remarks that came amidst a raging row over the Supreme Court judgement on sub-categorisation of SC and ST reservations. Underlining the need to fulfill duties enshrined in the Constitution, the Prime Minister said such responsibility extended

beyond citizens to every arm of the Government. "This responsibility extends beyond just the citizens to the Central Government, its employees, State Governments, State Government employees and every local self-governing institution, whether it be a panchayat, municipalities, municipal corporations, tehsil or district," he said. "However, it is also essential that all 140 crore citizens recognise their duties. When we all fulfill our responsibilities collectively, we naturally become guardians of each other's rights," Modi said. "By performing our duties, we inherently protect these rights without needing any additional effort. I hope we will embrace this mindset which will not only strengthen our democracy but also enhance our collective strength, propelling us forward with renewed power," he said. The Prime Minister's remarks also came against the backdrop of the opposition attack on the BJP, accusing it of trying to change the Constitution, a charge vehemently rejected by the party. Following a Supreme Court observation that a concept of creamy layer be applied in sub-categorisation of SC/STs, the Union Cabinet had asserted that there was no provision of creamy layer in the Constitution given by B R Ambedkar.

Vibrant space sector key to India's strength, innovation says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

"A vibrant" space sector is playing a key role in making India a strong country after it was liberated from the restrictions of the past, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday. Addressing the 78th Independence Day celebrations from the Red Fort, Modi said his Government was strengthening the space sector, which has spawned hundreds of start-ups, as part of its long-term vision. "Private satellites and private rockets are being launched today. It is a matter of pride. When intentions are right, we get the desired results," he said. "Hundreds of start-ups have come up in the space sector. It is an important part of making

India a powerful Nation. We are strengthening it with far-sighted thinking. "We have made many reforms in the space sector. We have liberated it from the restrictions of the past," he added. The Prime Minister said the success of Chandrayaan has fired up an interest in science and technology in schools and colleges. "Our educational institutes will have to come forward to nurture this interest in science and technology," Modi said. The Government has increased support for research by setting up the National Research Foundation and granting it statutory cover. The Government has a permanent system through the NRF to strengthen research in universities, he said.

Govt to revamp education system to keep students in India, attract foreigners

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said his Government wants to build such an education system as will keep youngsters from going abroad for studies. Addressing the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 78th Independence Day, Modi also said the Government wants more foreign students to come to India and study. "We want to give a boost to our education system in accordance with the 21st century and the new education policy has a very big role to play in it. I do not want that the youth of my country should be forced to



study abroad. The millions of rupees of middle class families should not be spent in sending children abroad for studies. "We want to develop such an education system here that will prevent the youth of the country from going abroad. In fact we would want foreign students to come here and study," he said. The Prime Minister also said

an additional 75,000 medical seats will be created in the next five years. "Even today, children, mostly belonging to the middle class, are going abroad for medical education. They spend millions on medical education abroad. Around 25,000 youths every year go abroad for medical education and they go to such countries, I get surprised when I hear about them. "So we have decided, 75,000 new seats will be created in the medical line in the next five years," Modi added. The Prime Minister also sought to revive the "ancient Nalanda University spirit," positioning India as a global education hub by promoting higher learning and research.

Cong denounces Modi's divisive civil code remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition on Thursday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of peddling a "divisive agenda," with the Congress slamming his "communal civil code" remarks during his Independence Day speech as a "gross insult" to B R Ambedkar. The Congress also alleged that Modi's capacity for "malice, mischief, and maligning" history was on full display at the Red Fort. The Congress's denunciation came in the wake of Modi saying a "secular civil code" is the need of the hour as the existing set of laws is a "communal civil code" and discriminatory. In his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort, the Prime Minister said, "A large section of the country believes, which is true also, that the civil code is actually, in a way, a communal civil code. It discriminates (among people)." Slamming Modi, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "The non-biological PM's capacity for malice, mischief, and maligning of history knows no bounds. It was on full display today from the Red Fort.

BJP highlights Modi's vision for India to become global powerhouse

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP said on Thursday Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Independence Day address has mapped India's transformation in the last 10 years of his Government and outlined the steps to make it a global powerhouse. The BJP also cited B R Ambedkar's remarks at the Constituent Assembly to rebut the Congress' criticism of Modi's call for a uniform civil code as a "gross insult" to the makers of the Constitution. In a social media post, Home Minister Amit Shah said Modi's address cast "a panoramic view of a radiant future on the horizon" and also instilled in Bharat the power of the unwavering belief that it can achieve the goal. He said, "Over the last 10 years, Bharat has charted a journey of self-transformation through course corrections. It



is a new Bharat with citizen-driven governance. It is a new Bharat that firmly believes that 140 crore citizens can certainly achieve the greatness, prosperity and progress they deserve." BJP President J P Nadda said Modi's address reflected India's progress and future aspirations. In his speech, he outlined a series of ambitious goals aimed at driving the Nation's growth and establishing India as a global superpower across various sectors, Nadda said. "Reflecting on the progress

made over the last 10 years, PM Modi emphasised the Nation's achievements and reiterated the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047. As India celebrates its 78th Independence Day, this vision inspires us to continue striving toward a prosperous and inclusive future," he said. BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya cited Ambedkar's rebuttal at the Constituent Assembly to a member's concern over the possibility and desirability of a uniform civil code to hit back at the Congress.

Jaishankar to visit Kuwait for bilateral ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will visit Kuwait on August 18 which will enable both sides to review various aspects of the bilateral relations including political, trade, investment, cultural and people-to-people contacts, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. During the visit, he will meet Kuwait's Foreign

Minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya. He is also expected to call on the leadership of the State of Kuwait, MEA said in a statement. Jaishankar's visit will enable both sides to review various aspects of India-Kuwait bilateral relations including political, trade, investment, energy, security, cultural, consular and people-to-people contacts, as well as exchange views on regional and international issues of mutual interest, it added.

Job stress linked to higher risk of serious heart disorder: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

While the link between job strain, effort-reward imbalance, and coronary heart disease is well documented, a recent study published in the Journal of the American Heart Association reveals a new and concerning dimension to work-related stress. The research indicates that these stressors may also increase the risk of developing atrial fibrillation (AFib), a serious heart rhythm disorder. This finding highlights the broader cardiovascular impacts of job-related stress, extending beyond traditional heart disease to disrupt heart rhythms. Led by Xavier Trudel, an occupational and cardiovascular epidemiologist at Laval University, Canada, the study examined medical database records of nearly 6,000 white-collar workers in Canada over 18 years. "This research is the first to assess the impact of workplace psychosocial stressors on AFib," said Trudel as he emphasised the need to incorporate work-related stress factors into preventive strategies, advocating for healthier work

environments to benefit both individuals and organizations. AFib, characterized by an irregular and often rapid heart rhythm, can lead to blood clots in the heart, significantly increasing the risk of stroke, heart failure, and other cardiovascular complications. Dr Vanita Arora, Clinical Lead—Cardiac Arrhythmias and Pacing Indraprastha Apollo Hospital, Delhi who is not associated with the study called it a serious observation which needs more awareness particularly in the context of India where lifestyle changes are resulting into stress and non-communicable diseases. She added that triggers can also be due to thyroid but stress remain a bigger cause. Dr Arora explained, "Atrial fibrillation (AFib) is a type of arrhythmia characterized by an irregular and often rapid heart rhythm. This condition can lead to the formation of blood clots in the heart, which significantly increases the risk of stroke, heart failure, and other serious heart-related complications. As AFib disrupts the heart's normal rhythm, it poses a substantial threat to cardiovascular health,

making its early detection and management crucial." Dr Arora further said that if noticed regularly, we recommend Radio Frequency Ablation. But most important is that one should avoid triggers like keeping the thyroid and stress level under control. The study in question had analyzed 5,926 workers (49% men, 51% women) with an average age of 45 at the start and 65 by the end of the follow-up period. Out of these, 186 cases of AFib were identified. Among those with AFib, 19% reported high job strain, 25% experienced effort-reward imbalance, and 10% reported both stressors. Notably, over one-third of these participants had been diagnosed with coronary heart disease or heart failure prior to developing AFib. This research underscores the critical need for employers and employees to recognize and address the psychological and physiological impacts of job stress, aiming to foster environments that promote overall cardiovascular health. More than one-third of participants were diagnosed with coronary heart disease or heart failure before their AFib incidence.

President approves 103 gallantry awards on eve of I-Day

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on the eve of Independence Day approved 103 gallantry awards for personnel of the armed forces and central armed police forces. The awards include four Kirti Chakras, the second highest award during peacetime and 18 Shaurya Chakras, India's third peace time awards. Three of the Kirti Chakras and four of the Shaurya Chakras will be awarded posthumously, the Defence Ministry said in a statement. The Kirti Chakra awardees killed in action are Colonel Manpreet Singh of 19 Rashtriya Rifles (RR), Rifleman Rav Kumar of 63 RR, and Deputy Superintendent of Jammu and Kashmir Police Humayun Muzammil Bhat. Major Malla Ram Gopal Naidu is the only living recipient of the honour. Colonel Manpreet Singh, the commanding officer of 19 RR, was



killed in a counter-insurgency operation in Anantnag last year. He was a second-generation army officer and had completed 17 years of service. Singh is survived by his wife, a seven-year-old son, a three-year-old daughter, and his mother. Bhat, 34, was also killed in the same operation. His father, Ghulam Hassan Bhat, retired as an Inspector General

of police in Kashmir. The DSP's colleagues then said that he was someone who "always led from the front." Married in 2022, Bhat is survived by his wife Fatima, a daughter who was only one month old at the time, his father, mother, and a sister. The medals approved by the President include one Bar to Sena Medal

(Gallantry); 63 Sena Medals (Gallantry), including two posthumous; 11 Nao Sena Medals (Gallantry), and six Vayu Sena Medals (Gallantry), the statement said. Most of the personnel, honoured by the country on Wednesday, demonstrated bravery and leadership during counter-terror operations in Jammu and Kashmir, which is now witnessing a spike in terrorist activity, with encounters taking place almost daily. The Shaurya Chakra awardees include Colonel Pawan Singh of 666 Army Aviation Squadron (Reconnaissance and Observation), Major CVS Nikhil of 21 Para (Special Forces), Major Aashish Dhonchak of 19 RR (posthumous), Major Tripatpreet Singh of 34 RR, Major Sahil Randhawa of 34 RR, Subedar Sanjeev Singh Jasrotia of 5 Jammu and Kashmir Rifles, Naib Subedar P Pabin Singha of 56 RR, and Sepoy Pardeep Singh of 19 RR (posthumous).

MP will raise its share in India's economy to 5 per cent in next 5 years: CM Yadav

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Mohan Yadav on Thursday said his government has resolved to increase the state's contribution in the country's economy to five per cent from the present four per cent in the next five years. Addressing the state's main event of the 78th Independence Day after unfurling tricolour at the Lal Parade Ground here, he also announced that starting November 1 this year, four missions will be launched in the state for the development of youth, women, farmers and the poor.



resolved to raise its contribution to the country's economy from four per cent to five per cent in the next five years," he said. The government is working towards doubling the amount of the state budget in the next five years, he added. PM Modi was focusing on the youth, women, farmers and the poor for the country's development, Yadav said. Taking inspiration from the PM, Madhya Pradesh will launch four separate missions for youth, women empowerment, farmers and the poor on November 1, he said. "Our youth needs to have access to artificial intelligence and new technologies apart

from traditional knowledge. For this, we have invested Rs 485 crore. Under it, one college each in 55 districts of the state has been turned into PM College of Excellence," the CM said. According to him, efforts were being taken to fill the vacant government posts in the state. "More than 11,000 young people have been given appointment letters for posts in government departments in the last eight months," he said. He also said that more than 60 industrial units were being set up with an investment of Rs 10,000 crore to open up vistas for over 17,000 employment opportunities. "The youth have an important

role to play in achieving the target of turning Bharat into a developed nation by 2047. Youth are the future of the country," Yadav added. More than Rs 11,000 crore have been deposited into the bank accounts of 1.29 crore women under the Ladli Behna Yojana in the last eight months. Women are being given financial assistance (of Rs 1,250 per month) under the scheme to make them economically strong so that they overcome their problems themselves, he said.

Yadav's predecessor Shivraj Singh Chouhan, now Union Agriculture Minister, launched the scheme ahead of the MP assembly polls last year. Many feel that the scheme powered the BJP to retain power in the central state with a brute majority. Talking about sports, he said the participation of five players from the state in the just-concluded Paris Olympics has made Madhya Pradesh proud. In 2023-24, players from state sports academies have bagged 37 gold, 18 silver and 15 bronze medals - in all 70 medals - in international tournaments, he said.

'CM's pharmacy stores' to make generic medicines available to people soon: Stalin

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin on Thursday announced launching pharmacy outlets 'Mudalvar Marunthagam' (Chief Minister's Pharmacy) soon to ensure the availability of generic and other medicines at low cost to the people.



In his Independence Day address after hoisting the national flag at Fort St George, Stalin announced a comprehensive scientific study on natural calamities triggered by heavy rains in the mountainous regions of the state, including the Nilgiris. He referred to the challenges posed by climate change and the recent landslides at Wayanad in Kerala. The study under the auspices of the state disaster management authority will be conducted by a multidisciplinary team of experts and the panel will recommend to the government measures aimed at goals including disaster prevention, mitigation and risk reduction. The low-cost pharmacy chain will be the latest addition to a string of welfare schemes of the Stalin-led DMK regime

and such initiatives include Rs 1,000 monthly support to college-going students. Stalin said over 75,000 openings will be filled by January 2026 in the government sector and more than 25 lakh youth are set to get employment --direct and indirect-- in the private sector. The Chief Minister's pharmacy scheme will be launched next year, on the day of Pongal, the harvest festival, (January 14, 2025) and as many as 1,000 pharmacy outlets will be opened in the first phase. In order to effectively implement the scheme, pharmacists and cooperative societies will be provided by the government necessary credit facilities

and Rs 3 lakh subsidy. Also, he announced 'Mudalvarin Kakkum Karangal' (CM's protecting hands) scheme for the welfare of retired personnel of the Armed forces. Under the scheme, which envisages 30 per cent capital and 3 per cent interest subsidies, the beneficiaries will be provided facilitation to avail bank loan, up to Rs 1 crore, to launch business ventures and kin of soldiers who made supreme sacrifices while performing their duty are also eligible. In the next two years, to benefit 400 ex-servicemen, Rs 120 crore capital subsidy and 3 per cent interest subsidy will be provided for Rs 400 crore worth projects.

Tracing the origin of CMs hoisting the tricolour, Stalin said it was late Chief Minister M Karunanidhi who secured from the Centre in 1974, the right for the Chief Ministers to hoist the national flag on the Independence Day and it was also a kind of independence struggle, to secure more rights for the states.

The CM said he was proud to hoist the tricolour for the fourth consecutive year, which coincides with the completion of the centenary celebrations (2023-2024) of Karunanidhi (1924-2018). Though he has explained the Dravidian model several times, the Chief Minister said it would be appropriate to once again make it clear. "The Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam is a movement that stands on the foundation of principles of social justice, equality, self-respect, love for language (mother tongue), racial right and state autonomy." In sync with the Dravidian ideology, during the past three years of his party-led regime, the growth witnessed by Tamil Nadu is spread across all the sectors.

Manipur home to 34 tribes and we all must stand together: CM



PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Thursday reaffirmed his government's commitment to restoring peace, highlighting that the state is home to 34 recognised tribes. Speaking at the 78th Independence Day celebrations at 1st Manipur Rifles ground here, Singh attributed the ongoing unrest to external elements seeking to destabilise the state. Reflecting on the ongoing conflict, Singh reiterated that Manipur belongs to all 34 recognised tribes, including Thadou, Hmar, Simte, Meitei, Tangkhul, Mao, Maram, Anal, and Lamkang. "This Manipur is not for one community. We must all stand together for a united and strong India," he added.

Despite recent challenges, Singh expressed confidence in the state's future. "Had it not been for May 3, 2023 violence, the progress and development Manipur would have achieved now would be unimaginable. However, we are committed to working harder to make up for the lost time," he concluded. "The crisis emerged after we began investigating and found that people from outside silently slipped into the state with an aim to break it. It gives us goosebumps to think of

what might have happened to the indigenous people if we had stayed silent," Singh said. The Chief Minister urged all communities to set aside political and personal agendas to bring peace to the region. "We must unitedly deal with the issues at hand. Peace can definitely be achieved with unity and honesty, but there should be no conspiracies or investigations among us," he added. Singh also pointed to last year's violence on May 3, which he blamed on groups opposing development in the state. "Sections of people, propelled by self-interests and aiming to break the state, caused the unfortunate incidents. The resulting conflict has caused great hardship, but the government is providing daily essentials, health provisions, and education to those in relief camps," he said.

Singh highlighted ongoing efforts to relocate Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to pre-fabricated houses and provide them with economic livelihood schemes. He also mentioned central government projects, including a 51.23 km ring road to ease congestion in Imphal and the 111 km Imphal-Jiribam railway project, which aims to connect the capital with the national railway network.

I-Day symbol of national unity and pride: Arunachal Governor

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Governor Lt Gen (Retd) KT Parnaik on Thursday said that Independence Day is a powerful symbol of national unity and pride, offering a moment to reflect on the country's remarkable journey. Taking part in the I-Day celebrations at Raj Bhavan here, the governor said the celebration instils a sense of responsibility and patriotism in the youth, encouraging them to contribute positively to the nation's progress, a communique from Raj Bhavan said. Paying tributes to the brave sons and daughters of India, who made the ultimate sacrifice to secure our freedom, he said that India's Independence marks the birth of the world's largest democracy. The governor recalled the values that guided the nation's founding fathers, along with



the contributions of the state's freedom fighters, including Matmur Jamoh, Moje Riba, and many others who played crucial roles in the struggle for Independence. Arunachal Pradesh is achieving this vision, he said, with collective effort, determination, and a deep commitment to the ideals that have guided India's journey so far. To realise this vision, he stressed the importance of focusing on industrial growth, digital innovation,

sustainable development, and creating a favourable environment for entrepreneurship. On the occasion, the governor and first lady of the state, Anagha Parnaik, distributed sweets to school children. Officers and staff of Raj Bhavan, along with department officials attached to the Raj Bhavan, students and teachers from government and private schools, participated in the celebration, the communique added.

Sikkim CM launches web-based land record management system

PTI ■ GANGTOK

Sikkim Chief Minister Prem Singh Tamang on Thursday inaugurated a web-based integrated land record management system on the occasion of the 78th Independence Day. Developed by the Land Revenue and Disaster Management Department, the system aims to streamline and manage land records more efficiently. After hoisting the tricolour, during the state-level Independence Day celebrations, held at Paljor Stadium Tamang said, to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Sikkim's statehood the state government plans to organise a year-long celebration under the theme "Sunaulo Sikkim, Samridha Sikkim - Samarth Sikkim" (golden Sikkim, prosperous Sikkim and capable Sikkim).



The chief minister said Prime Minister Narendra Modi would be invited to be the chief guest for the

"Our traditions and values are the foundation upon which our society is built, and they must be preserved for future generations," he said.

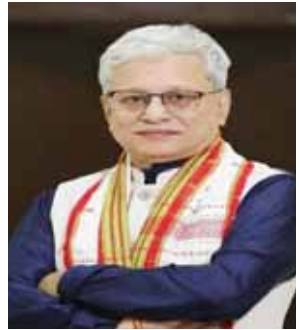
Tamang said that environmental protection is one of the pillars of Sikkim's development and underscored the critical importance of environmental protection as a key component of Sikkim's development agenda. He introduced the initiative "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" (a tree in the name of mother), urging every citizen to plant a tree in the honor of their mother. This initiative, he explained, is not just to pay tribute to the nurturing spirit of mothers but also a vital step in preserving Sikkim's rich biodiversity and combating climate change. "It is our collective responsibility to work hand in hand to realise the dream of 'Viksit Bharat. Our success lies in our ability to work as a cohesive team, and contribute their best," he said.

He emphasised the importance of safeguarding cultural heritage in an era dominated by technological advancements like the internet, Google, and artificial intelligence (AI). The CM highlighted the dual responsibility of embracing modern technology, while ensuring that the state's cultural traditions, values, and identities remain intact.

Telangana Guv: I-Day sacred occasion to honour country's hard-won freedom

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Governor Jishnu Dev Varma on Thursday hoisted the national flag at the Raj Bhavan here on Independence Day and emphasised that it is a sacred occasion to honour and celebrate the country's hard-won freedom. In his address, he reflected on the nation's journey since Independence, highlighting the sacrifices of countless patriots who fought for the country's liberation. He urged



every Indian to take pride in the nation and work tirelessly towards the rapid

development of both the country and Telangana, a Raj Bhavan press communique said. Meanwhile, Independence Day was celebrated on Thursday with patriotic fervour across Telangana, including at the Legislative Assembly, various government offices and the offices of ruling Congress, BJP, BRS, AIMIM and other parties. Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy attended the Independence Day celebrations at the historic

Golconda Fort here, Assembly Speaker Gaddam Prasad Kumar hoisted the national flag in the legislature premises. Chief Secretary Santhi Kumari hoisted the tricolour in the Secretariat. The ministers of the state government attended the celebrations held in various districts. AIMIM president Asaduddin Owisi hoisted the National Flag at various locations in the city, including Musheerabad, Charminar and Champapat.

In a first, all-women India, Bangladesh border troops exchange I-Day greetings



PTI ■ NADIA (WEST BENGAL)

An all-women unit of the Border Security Force (BSF) made a maiden gesture and handed over sweets and exchanged greetings with lady BGB personnel of Bangladesh at the front in West Bengal as part of the traditional Independence Day celebrations held along the international border. The first-ever women border guards exchange took place near the Gede border post of the BSF in the said district even as a "high alert" continues all along this over 4,000 km front following the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government less than a week back. The six-member BSF team, dressed in ceremonial regalia, belonged to the 32nd battalion of the force deployed in the area to guard the international boundary in Nadia district. The personnel are of the constable rank, officials told PTI. The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) women team that

participated in the traditional ceremonial event held in the morning is affiliated to the 6th battalion of the Bangladesh force deployed under the Darshana border post of the neighbouring country. "The exchange of greetings and sharing of sweets symbolises mutual respect and camaraderie between the two border forces. It is a tradition which the women personnel have performed for the first time," 32nd battalion BSF Commandant Sujeet Kumar said. He said the two sides shook hands and wished for continued prosperity of their respective countries with a commitment to having strong bilateral ties between them. A senior officer said the exchange of sweets and pleasantries between the two forces traditionally takes place during the national festivals of the two countries like Independence Day and Republic Day apart from big festivals like Deepawali and Eid.

ULFA (I) claim of planting 24 bombs prompts search ops across Assam

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The banned ULFA(I) on Thursday claimed to have planted bombs at 24 places across Assam, prompting the security forces to send teams to look for explosives. A senior police officer said bomb disposal squads have been rushed to all the places mentioned by ULFA (I) but there is no report of recovery of any bomb or explosive. In an email purportedly from the United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) (Independent) to media houses, including PTI, the terror outfit asserted that the bombs did not blast due to "technical failure". It gave a list identifying the exact location of 19 bombs and said locations of five

more explosives could not be ascertained. It sought public cooperation in defusing the bombs. When contacted, a senior officer at Assam Police headquarters told PTI that all the SPs of the districts, especially those mentioned in the list by the anti-peace talk faction of ULFA, have been alerted and asked to carry out a thorough search of the areas. "Bomb disposal squads, metal detectors and sniffer dogs have been dispatched to every location. So far we have not got any information on recovery of bombs," he added. However, some local police officials in Nagaon, Lakhimpur and Sivasagar claimed that they have recovered some "bomb-like

materials" from the spots. Out of the 24 locations, eight places are in Guwahati. These include an open field at Last Gate in Dispur, near Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma and other ministers' official residences. Another place is the Satgaon road towards the Army cantonment in Narengi in Guwahati. Apart from these, Ashram Road, Panbazar, Jorabat, Bhetapara, Maligaon and Rajgarh in the capital city have also been mentioned as the spots of bombs. Places have been named in Sivasagar, Dibrugarh, Lakhimpur, Nagaon, Nalbari, Talulpur, Tinsukia and Golaghat districts also where ULFA(I) claimed to have planted bombs.

Projects affecting environment need second thought, says CPI

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The CPI, an ally of the ruling CPI(M) in Kerala, on Thursday said that in view of the landslides that hit Wayanad district, any projects that may impact the environment requires a second thought. The statement was made by CPI State Secretary Binoy Viswam who said that the Western Ghats running through Kerala are very fragile and, therefore, scientific studies need to be carried out before going ahead with any proposed tunnel projects there. His statement comes a day after Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan said that tunnels were generally not considered the cause of natural disasters. The CM, at a press conference



here on Wednesday, had said that it needs to be examined whether such projects should be set aside in view of the disasters. "Already studies have been carried out with regard to it (tunnels). Such tunnels are generally not considered the reasons or causes of natural disasters. That is not how the world sees them. But, it is a subject for

study. We can look into it," he had said. On Thursday, Viswam, while speaking to reporters, said, "It is the view of the CPI that scientific study should be carried out regarding tunnel projects. Going forward with such projects without a scientific study will create apprehensions in the mind of the public." He said that the land in the Western Ghats cannot take any more burden and nature has conveyed that message many times. "That is what happened in Choorakkal and Mundakkai," the CPI state secretary said. "In the backdrop of the landslides in Wayanad, we need to think twice about any work that may impact the environment," Viswam added.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Clarion call for Viksit Bharat

Prime Minister Modi unfurls the national flag for the 11th time; shares his vision for 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047

On the 78th anniversary of India's independence, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unfurled the national flag at the Red Fort for the 11th consecutive time. In an august ceremony, Modi highlighted the path towards a 'Viksit Bharat' (Developed India) by 2047, calling for unity, resilience, and dedication. Prime Minister Modi paid rich tribute to the countless freedom fighters and also reflected on the nation's achievements. Modi's speech set the tone for India's future, building on both the challenges faced and the milestones achieved under his government. In his speech, Modi emphasized India's potential to become a developed nation by 2047, exactly 100 years after gaining independence. "Today, we are 140 crore people, and if we resolve to move in one direction, we can achieve a developed India by overcoming all obstacles," he said. In his speech PM Modi acknowledged the growing concerns surrounding natural disasters, which have affected multiple regions across India. From devastating landslides in Kerala to the widespread flooding in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Delhi, the Prime Minister expressed his sympathies for the lives lost and the homes destroyed. India's rapid advancements in banking, space, and women empowerment featured prominently in Modi's address.



PM Modi highlighted reforms aimed at boosting the economy and supporting farmers, the middle class, and startups. Hailing the space achievements of the country Modi said that there was a rise in space startups and a keen interest in scientific temper after India's moon odyssey. PM Modi said he was proud

of women's empowerment, with over 10 crore women joining self-help groups across the country. He compared the success of women entrepreneurs to that of India's global CEOs and announced that additional funds would be allocated to support these groups. Looking back at a decade of infrastructure development, Modi detailed the government's accomplishments in housing, stating that 4 crore homes had been constructed, with 3 crore more on the way. His government's focus on the "ease of living" has been a cornerstone of its policies, aimed at improving the quality of life for India's citizens. Modi further stressed the need for ongoing reforms, particularly in the agricultural sector, where natural farming practices are being promoted. Overall it was a balanced and positive speech with an emphasis on development. As customary, the PM also enumerated his government's achievements albeit with little exaggeration. As PM Modi's 11th Independence Day speech ended, it was clear that his vision for India was rooted in development, unity, and resilience. With the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047, the Prime Minister called on every Indian to join in shaping the nation's future, overcoming challenges, and taking pride in its achievements.

PICTALK



BSF personnel offer sweets to each other on the Independence Day at Wagah Border, in Amritsar

PTI

Sustainable real estate: A catalyst for economic growth

With growing investments in sustainable projects, India's real estate industry is poised to become a leader in global sustainability efforts

Sustainable real estate development focuses on creating environmentally friendly, socially responsible, and economically viable buildings and communities. India's real estate sector contributes significantly to energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, making it a critical area for innovation. New technologies and materials, such as bamboo, recycled wood, and eco-friendly cement, are being used to reduce construction's environmental impact. Smart home technologies are also being integrated into developments to help residents manage energy consumption and waste.



These benefits include reduced operating costs, higher property value, access to government incentives, reduced carbon emissions, conservation of natural resources, improved air and water quality, and social benefits. Economic benefits include reduced operating costs due to the use of less energy, water, and other resources. Green buildings have higher resale and rental values due to better indoor air quality, natural light, and thermal comfort. Government incentives, such as tax credits and rebates, can help developers reduce construction costs and boost profits. On the other hand, reduced carbon emissions, conservation of natural

resources, improved air and water quality, and improved quality of life are those attributes that indirectly benefit the country's economy in the long run. Current sustainable real estate scenario of India Sustainable real estate development in India is focusing on energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste reduction. Green roofs and walls are becoming more common, insulate buildings, and reduce heat island effects. Additionally, efforts are being made to make existing buildings more sustainable through retrofits and upgrades, with government incentives encouraging these upgrades. The Indian government has introduced regulations and initiatives to promote sustainability, such as the Green Rating for Integrated Habitat Assessment (GRIHA) and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED). Experts predict a heightened focus on eco-friendly features and green technologies in 2024, aligning with global environmental concerns and changing consumer preferences. The industry's sustainability push,

exemplified by policies like GRIHA, promotes eco-friendly construction practices. While sustainable buildings in Tier 1 cities are limited, the number of sustainable buildings in India is increasing, making them cheaper to run and creating a better working environment. Endowed with immeasurable natural bounties, Goa is emerging as a centre stage of green projects, attracting investors and end consumers from all parts of the country. Goa, India's west coast, is attracting real estate investors due to its stunning beaches, rich cultural heritage, and growing infrastructure. India's sustainable real estate development sector is expected to experience exponential growth. This growth is attributed to the growing awareness and demand for sustainable living spaces. India's real estate industry has the potential to lead in sustainable development practices, thanks to government initiatives and increased awareness among developers and investors.

(The writer is the director Yugen Infra; views are personal)



AMIT MAMGAIN

Hiroshima and Nagasaki, both bombed in August 1945, should have been the ultimate wake-up call for the global community. Between 150,000 and 246,000 people, mostly civilians, were killed in these two attacks. This dark chapter of history should have taught us the importance of peace, the consequences of war, and the need to abandon violence. However, as we look around the world today, it is clear that the lessons from Hiroshima have not been internalized by everyone. Ongoing conflicts, genocides, and the development of deadlier weapons point to a world that still grapples with the same issues of violence, cruelty, and disregard for human life. In recent years, the world has witnessed violence in regions such as Gaza, Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Congo, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Bangladesh. The recurring bloodshed underscores a disturbing pattern: political, ethnic, and religious tensions continue to ignite conflicts that tear societies apart. The situation in Gaza is a prime example, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict seemingly unending, causing immense suffering to civilians. In Cambodia, the haunting memories of the Khmer Rouge regime, which resulted in the deaths of nearly a quarter of the population, still resonate, revealing the extreme brutality that ideological fanaticism can unleash. Bosnia's genocide during the Yugoslav Wars and Rwanda's massacre of nearly a million people highlight what happens when ethnic hatred spirals out of control. In the Congo, conflict over natural resources fuels ongoing violence, displacing and killing countless individuals. The Middle East remains another flashpoint, where wars in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen have led to enormous loss of life and the displacement of millions, creating a refugee crisis that stretches across the globe. These wars are not only killing people but are also tearing apart communities and families, leaving generations scarred by the horrors of war. One can hardly overlook the harrowing effects these conflicts

have on innocent civilians, particularly women and children. Women are frequently subjected to rape, torture, and trafficking in conflict zones. Children grow up surrounded by violence, with limited access to education, food, clean water, and healthcare. Infrastructure, when destroyed, further hampers humanitarian aid efforts, worsening the already dire situations in these regions. In 1946, shortly after the bombing of Hiroshima, Mahatma Gandhi expressed his condemnation of the use of atomic weapons. Writing in "Harijan", he called the bomb "the most diabolical use of science" and reaffirmed his belief in nonviolence. To Gandhi, the atomic bomb symbolized not just the destruction of a city, but a moral failure of humankind. His words continue to hold relevance today, as he pointed out that violence cannot be countered with more violence. Nonviolence, he argued, was the only viable path to peace, the only thing that the bomb could not destroy. Without adopting nonviolence, he warned, humanity would be on a path to suicide. This warning feels more relevant than ever in today's world. As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict persists, the ongoing vio-

Give peace a chance: The ultimate imperative



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As wars escalate, the peace becomes ever more elusive. The memory of numerous wars in the past urge us to reject the cycle of violence and hatred



THE ONGOING VIOLENCE IN GAZA ILLUSTRATES THE DANGEROUS CYCLE OF HATRED THAT SEEMS UNBREAKABLE. YET, DESPITE THE ESCALATING NATURE OF CONFLICTS WORLDWIDE, THE PURSUIT OF PEACE REMAINS ESSENTIAL

lence in Gaza illustrates the dangerous cycle of hatred that seems unbreakable. Yet, despite the escalating nature of conflicts worldwide, the pursuit of peace remains essential. Achieving peace may seem like a distant goal, but it is one that is necessary for the survival of humanity. The horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki must serve as constant reminders of the devastating potential of human conflict and the urgency of finding peaceful solutions to disputes. But what does it mean to pursue peace in today's world? For one, it requires a commitment to diplomatic efforts that address the underlying causes of conflict. Governments and international organizations must work together to create spaces for dialogue and negotiation. International institutions, like the United Nations, have a crucial role to play, but they must go beyond making declarations in air-conditioned conference rooms. Real change comes from action, from a genuine investment in conflict resolution, and from efforts on the ground to build peace. Education and awareness are key components in fostering a culture of peace. Civil society organizations and grassroots movements must be at the

forefront, advocating for non-violence and holding governments accountable. The power of collective action has been proven time and time again, and nonviolent movements have the potential to bring about meaningful change in ways that violence never can. As we reflect on the 79th anniversary of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombings, we must renew our collective commitment to peace. The world cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past. And yet, with conflicts continuing to rise, it is clear that humanity has not fully grasped the lessons of history. We must strive tirelessly to address the root causes of violence, promote dialogue, and work for the betterment of all people. The pursuit of peace is not an easy journey, but it is a necessary one. It requires the efforts of individuals, communities, and nations alike. As Mahatma Gandhi warned, "Unless now the world adopts nonviolence, it will spell certain suicide for mankind." The time to act is now, before we find ourselves repeating the tragedies of the past once more. (The writer is programme executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DISAPPOINTING SHOW AT PARIS

Madam — Paris Olympics have left India in disappointment. The medal tally has gone down and also without a single gold than that of previous Tokyo olympics. The five medal winners had shown a great deal of professionalism and did it. That Vinesh Phogat, the real fighter for justice in sports world being disqualified on technical grounds at final bout stage is a great dampener of spirit for sport lovers in India. Anyway India have many lessons to learn for Paris olympics. It can not aim high without strengthening the ground. There should be all out efforts to increase its pool of world class players. It should build the strengths brick by brick, by pooling resources, going for world class stadia, professional coaching and encouraging youth towards sports. India should stand firm and perform well before claiming to conduct the Olympics in coming decade. DVG Sankara Rao | Vizianagaram

BLAMING THE US

Madam — It is true, blaming the US (article dt 14-8-24) for all the outcomes in Bangladesh is too trivial. No doubt, the U.S. is the leader of all imperial forces in the world and has its targets, strategy and programme pertaining to, perhaps, every nation. It indulges actively at an opportune time. Such opportune circumstances are mostly created by the vulnerable country. The fact that the US has its policy and strategy related to containing China and as a part of it it is actively searching for islands to base its forces is known to all. But the autocratic approaches and suppressing the dissenters have distanced the people from her. The students' agitation against the arbitrary reservation policy became a spark. It has been taken for advantage by many forces as known to all. Autocracy is bound to lose any time anywhere. Addressing the real issues are welcome but chauvinism, autocracy, fascism and dictatorship are ephemeral as recorded in the history. A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

Thaw in Indo-Maldivian relations



Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu's as the head of state from November 2023, did everything that could antagonise India. However, he was in attendance during the swearing-in of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government in June and also had a one-on-one meet with the PM. Now, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has attempted a damage control exercise by handing a massive water and sanita-

tion project to Maldives during his three day visit to Male. By describing Maldives as "no ordinary neighbour", Jaishankar has hit the nail on the head. The minister was at pains in explaining the long-standing friendship between the two nations. By the same token, Muizzu was liberal in depicting India as "one of Maldives' closest allies and invaluable partners". The president was clear in his country's commitment to solidify bilateral relations. Maldives is an integral part of India's "Neighbourhood first" policy and "India first" policy of Maldives is not unknown. Additionally, Male happens to be one of New Delhi's largest trade partners. Beijing's footprints on Maldivian soil is the main cause of heartburn for India. Nevertheless, India's generosity towards Maldives in calamities and distress has not gone unnoticed. All in all, New Delhi has to keep up the momentum set by its top leadership. Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

SC RELIEF FOR PATANJALI

Madam — The Supreme Court has closed contempt proceedings against Patanjali after the company agreed to stop issuing misleading advertisements and claims about its products. Ramdev and Balkrishna, key figures in the company, tendered an apology and took corrective steps, which the court accepted. However, the court issued a stern warning, cautioning that the case could be reopened if similar violations occur in the future. The court's warning emphasised the importance of staying vigilant regarding false advertising. This issue was also raised in the Rajya Sabha, where concerns were expressed about Ramdev's claims not being based on scientific data. Notably, Ramdev even claimed to cure neurological diseases like Multiple Sclerosis, which has no known cure in modern medical science. The contempt proceedings against Patanjali, Ramdev, and Balkrishna were initiated by the Supreme Court following a petition filed by the Indian Medical Association (IMA). The petition was in

response to Patanjali's advertisements that attacked allopathic medicine and made unfounded claims about curing certain diseases. On November 21, 2023, Ramdev and Balkrishna assured the court that they would refrain from making "casual statements claiming medicinal efficacy" or disparaging any system of medicine. Despite this, Ramdev held a press conference the very next day, where he made further statements, calling remedies for blood pressure "lies" spread by allopathy. In response to these continued violations, the court issued a contempt notice to Patanjali, Ramdev, and Balkrishna on February 27, 2024, accusing them of flouting previous orders and misleading the public. The Supreme Court's actions, prompted by the IMA's efforts, were seen as a necessary step to protect public health. Additionally, the court criticised the Uttarakhand government for failing to take action against Patanjali. Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

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FIRST COLUMN

INTEGRATE SPORTS
IN WORK ENVIRONMENTSports activities can create a positive
and dynamic work culture

SAKSHI SETHI

In the contemporary work environment, where stress, sedentary lifestyles and high demands are common, incorporating sports activities into the workplace has become increasingly important. Beyond traditional wellness programs, sports offer unique benefits that can enhance employee well-being, boost productivity and foster a positive work culture. One of the most compelling reasons to introduce sports activities in the workplace is their positive impact on employee's physical and mental health. Today, many modern jobs involve long hours of sitting, leading to issues such as obesity, cardiovascular problems and musculoskeletal disorders.

Regular participation in sports can counteract these effects by promoting physical fitness, improving posture and reducing the risk of chronic illnesses. Moreover, sports activities serve as a natural stress reliever. Various studies and research on sports activities in the workplace have consistently shown positive impacts on employee well-being, productivity, and overall organizational culture. The research also suggests that physical activity reduces the risk of chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and obesity, which are often exacerbated by sedentary work environments. Engaging in physical exercise releases endorphins, which help alleviate stress, anxiety and depression.

By providing employees with opportunities to participate in sports, companies too can contribute to a healthier and more resilient workforce, leading to reduced absenteeism and improved overall morale. The benefits of sports activities in the workplace extend far beyond individual



well-being to the overall success of the organization. A healthy, engaged and motivated workforce is more likely to contribute positively to the company's goals and objectives. Sports can enhance the company's image, making it an attractive place to work for potential employees and improving employee retention. Companies that invest in sports activities are likely to see a more positive work environment.

Moreover, companies that prioritize employee well-being through sports and other wellness programs are likely to experience reduced healthcare costs, lower turnover rates and higher levels of employee satisfaction. These factors contribute to a more positive work environment, where employees feel valued and supported. There is no denying the fact that sports serve as a unifying force in society, bringing together individuals from diverse backgrounds. Whether at a local, national or global level, sports events foster a sense of community and shared identity. For instance, national sports teams often serve as symbols of unity, bringing together citizens across different regions, ethnicities and social classes to support their country. Additionally, sports can bridge cultural gaps and promote international understanding and peace, as seen in events like the Olympics.

They are a vital part of society that contributes to physical health, character development, social integration and economic growth. The role of sports in shaping individuals and communities cannot be overstated. As society continues to evolve, the significance of sports will likely grow thereby offering new opportunities for fostering unity, promoting health and driving economic development. The need for sports activities in the workplace is clear. They offer a holistic approach to employee well-being by promoting physical and mental health, fostering team building and collaboration, boosting engagement, and motivation and contributing to overall organizational success. As companies continue to navigate the challenges of the modern work environment, incorporating sports into their wellness programs can provide significant benefits, leading to a healthier, happier and more productive workforce. By investing in sports activities, organizations can create a positive and dynamic work culture that supports both individual and collective success.

(The writer is an educator; views expressed are personal)

Natural regeneration for
reversing forest degradationPRODYUT
BHATTACHARYAA shift from plantation-focused efforts to natural regeneration offers a promising
solution to fight menace of forest degradation and reversing climate change

As a 'nature-based solution', shifting our approach from plantations to focus on natural regeneration is the way out to overcome forest degradation. A multi-prong strategy is required for more emphasis on reducing the drivers of degradation and restoring degraded forest lands by strengthening participatory forest management. Strengthening age-old practices of joint forest management (JFM), covering activities like assisted natural regeneration (ANR), enrichment plantation, contour trenching, native tree seed dissemination, soil, and improved water conservation practices with people's participation against millions of hectares of new plantation every year will enable us to bear a sustainable result. Forest Department make their huge plantation targets for planting within the forest areas, whereas, civil society organisation and industries do their plantation outside the forest areas. Rarely do we seek suggestions from common people of the area, as to which plants they like (choice of species) for selection of species during plantation. Mostly it is based on the availability of saplings in local nurseries. Hence, we achieve only about 55-60 % of success (rate of survival) from these plantation drives. Also, generally, we do not give proper care and attention after planting in such large areas. Natural regeneration should be our 'mantra' for restoring natural resilience and diversity in forest vegetation by supporting forest bio-diversity. Supporting natural regeneration is much more economical, than raising new plantations and the best strategy for restoration and rehabilitation to control forest degradation.

There is an urgent need for expanding research on specific conservation and restoration techniques and more funds are to be allotted to support natural regeneration in every state. Forests are our natural capital, providing a plethora of ecosystem services. Deforestation and degradation of forest and tree resources are accelerating in many parts of our country, due to our developmental target, other anthropogenic reasons, and natural disasters. Climate change is further exacerbating these challenges, and affecting natural resources, livelihood of people and public health. It is the poorest section of the society which is worst hit due to forest degradation.

The recent incidents of heatwaves across North India or the ravaging floods in Kerala, Uttarakhand and Himachal Pradesh are witness to the devastation caused by disturbing the ecosystem. The forest ecosystem is the master control for our mountain, river, grassland and agricultural landscapes. Indian forests play a critical role in carbon sequestration, fixing atmospheric CO2 through foliage cover and acting as carbon sinks. Indian forests have 7,204 million tonnes of total carbon stock, to achieve the carbon sequestration target under the Paris Climate Convention. We need to generate an additional 2.5 to 3 billion tonnes of CO2 equivalents by 2030, which helps mitigate climate change. India is the world's 10th highest forest-covered country. As per FSI, the current forest cover of India is 7,13,789 square kilometres, which is 21.71% (forest cover) and 2.91 % tree cover outside the forest area.



THE RECENT INCIDENTS OF HEATWAVES ACROSS NORTH INDIA OR THE RAVAGING FLOODS IN KERALA, UTTARAKHAND AND HIMACHAL PRADESH ARE WITNESS TO THE DEVASTATION CAUSED BY DISTURBING THE ECOSYSTEM. THE FOREST ECOSYSTEM IS THE MASTER CONTROL FOR OUR MOUNTAIN, RIVER, GRASSLAND AND AGRICULTURAL LANDSCAPES

Together 24.62 % of the country's geographical area, and out of the total forest area 23.75% is the share of North Eastern states.

The per capita forest cover is less than 0.29 ha which is much lower than the global average 0.52 ha per person. Forests help regulate the local and regional climate by influencing temperature, humidity, and precipitation patterns.

The urban forest and vegetation play a role in reducing the urban heat island effect in cities. Forestry contributes significantly to India's bio-economy, providing timber, non-timber forest products (NTFPs), and employment to millions of people, particularly in rural areas. The sector supports livelihoods through activities like agroforestry, forest-based industries, and ecotourism, and sustains milk production by supplying free fodder for millions of cattle.

About 250 million people directly depend on forest resources for livelihood and income generation, more than 100 million people live in and around forests, and 2 million jobs are created annually because of forest dependency. Forestry is recognised as a sector that plays a positive role in poverty alleviation, eg. PVTGs (particularly vulnerable Tribal Groups) are majorly dependent on forests for their traditional livelihood. Forests act as a 'natural pharmacy', a rich source of herbal plants that support healthcare for a large section of rural areas.

Further, it is crucial for traditional medicine systems like Ayurveda. Natural forests supply more than 60% of plant-based raw

materials for about 8000 herbal pharmaceutical companies across the country. Currently, there is a very low capacity for natural forest regeneration, with only 8-10 % good regeneration, 18-25% fair regeneration, and 42 % poor regeneration. 33% forest does not have any tree regeneration at all, which needs urgent attention from MoEF & CC. The average biological productivity of Indian forests has fallen below the global average.

This is majorly due to severe biotic pressure in the form of overgrazing, firewood and fodder collection and illicit felling, forest fire, invasion of weeds, climate vulnerability and pressure on land diversion for development purposes. Most NTFP-yielding species of natural forest of the whole central Indian landscape (Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and part of Maharashtra) are very low due to over-harvesting, premature harvesting and unhealthy practices of fruits, bark, gum and resin harvesting, as unsustainable harvesting practices.

The National Forest Policy 1988 envisages that 33% of the geographical area should be under forest and tree cover, and we are far from achieving the target. Most natural forests have a limited number of plus trees which are potential seed-producing trees. The quality of the country's forest in terms of average productivity, per capita availability, growing stock, and forest composition and diversity has declined in the past three decades.

To restore ecosystem resilience and increase the forest cover in

the country, afforestation and tree plantation activities have been given high priority but the implementation result is far below the target, to achieve an additional 5 million ha of forest and non-forest land plantation in the Green India Mission (GIM).

Every year during rainy season all 28 states and 8 union territories of India make a reasonable effort towards afforestation activities under various programs and schemes of line departments such as the National Compensatory Afforestation Fund (CAMPA), Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, National Bamboo Mission, Sub-Mission on Agroforestry, National Afforestation Programme (NAP), Green India Mission, etc. aim to increase forest cover, restore degraded lands, and promote sustainable forest management and take actionable steps towards responding to climate change. Furthermore, investments in climate adaptations by implementing nature-based solutions will reduce the frequency and occurrence of natural disasters and stabilize the ecosystem services that are provided by forests.

There is an urgent need to strengthen forest land and resource rights for women and marginalised groups. Lastly, need to strengthen training, skills development resource management and transparent environmental monitoring in forest areas for the regeneration of forestry.

(The writer is professor of Ecology & Natural Resources Management, University School of Environment Management, GGSIPU; views are personal)

Substance abuse crisis threatens the future of Uttarakhand youth

Once confined to older adults, drug addiction is now entangling school-aged children, causing alarm and fear among families

The tranquil village of Ganigaon, nestled among the Himalayan mountains of Uttarakhand, is facing a growing menace that threatens its future—substance abuse among its youth.

This issue, once limited to older individuals, has begun to trap even the youngest members of the community, leading to a wave of fear and concern among residents. "In my school, some boys often come after using drugs. They even bring substances to share with others," says Anita (name changed), a 17-year-old student from Ganigaon. "When teachers try to counsel them, they don't listen and sometimes even threaten them. This behavior is not only disrupt-



BHAWANA RAWAL

ing their education but also instilling fear among the girls, whose parents are now hesitant to send them to school."

Anita's story is not an isolated case. Ganigaon, located 54 km from Bageshwar district and 32 km from Garur block, is a picturesque village with a population of approximately 1,746 people. However, the beauty of the landscape belies the growing

darkness within the community. Substance abuse, which has already taken hold of many adults, is now spreading rapidly among children and adolescents, affecting their education and futures. Devaki (name changed), a 44-year-old resident, echoes these concerns: "We send our boys to school hoping they'll study and build a better future. But instead, they are ruining their lives with drugs. This behavior is also disturbing the peace at home. If this continues, how will they study? How will they find employment?"

The impact of this growing trend is felt deeply within the families of Ganigaon. Malti Devi (name changed), 55, shares how this vice has

gripped her family: "My husband used to come home intoxicated, creating a tense environment. Now, my sons have picked up the same habit. They skip school and engage in substance abuse. Despite my efforts to counsel them, they continue down this dangerous path, even resorting to stealing money from home to feed their addiction. I'm at a loss about how to save them." The village head, Hema Devi, expresses her alarm over the situation: "Substance abuse is increasing rapidly in our village. People are selling cannabis and making homemade liquor, which is affecting everyone's health, but they won't stop. Now, even children are



falling prey to this. It's leading to more violence, with women bearing the brunt of it. Men spend all their money on alcohol, forcing

women to work in others' fields to make up for the financial shortfall." Recognising the severity of the problem, Hema Devi

mentions that the panchayat is working on launching a campaign to combat substance abuse. Social worker Neelam Grundy emphasizes the urgency of the situation: "The rise of substance abuse in the village is a dangerous trend. What started with the elderly has now spread to the youth and even school-aged children.

We need a comprehensive campaign to tackle this issue, but it can't just be the responsibility of the government. The elders in the village need to lead by example and give up this vice so that the younger generation can break free from its grip." The Uttarakhand government, recognizing the growing issue, has launched a campaign to make the state

drug-free by 2025. At the administrative level, efforts are being made to curb the spread of this menace. Between 2019 and 2023, over 119 kilograms of charas were seized in 89 cases in Bageshwar district alone, alongside 58 cases of smack trafficking.

These figures show the administration's commitment to tackling the issue, but society must also take responsibility. Only through a combined effort can the future of Uttarakhand's youth be safeguarded, and the state be freed from the clutches of this growing evil. (The writer is a student of Class 10th from Ganigaon Village, Bageshwar. Views expressed are personal. Charkha Features)

More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza: Territory's Health Ministry

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH (GAZA STRIP)

More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed in the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, the territory's Health Ministry said on Thursday.

Israel's offensive has also wounded 92,401 people and displaced over 85 per cent of the population from their homes, the ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said. It does not distinguish between civilians and militants in its toll.

The announcement came during yet another push from international mediators to broker a cease-fire in the war, now in its 11th month.

The conflict began October 7 after Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people - most of them civilians - and dragging roughly 250 hostages to Gaza.

Israel says 111 of the captives have not been released, including the bodies of 39. The hostages include 15 women and two children under the age

of 5.

In Gaza, health officials have struggled to fully identify the dead as bodies stream into overwhelmed hospitals and morgues where they say the count is compiled amid the chaos of war and displacement.

In its most recent detailed report on the dead, issued on Thursday, the ministry said 40,005 people have been killed. Health officials and civil defence workers say the true toll is likely thousands higher, since many bodies remain buried under the rubble of buildings destroyed in airstrikes.

Israel's air and ground offensive in Gaza has been one of the most devastating military campaigns in recent history.

The bombardment and shelling have killed entire Palestinian families. With cemeteries often unreachable, families fleeing Israeli airstrikes bury their dead wherever possible - in backyards, along roadsides and under the staircases of their



homes.

Israel says it aims to eliminate Hamas. It blames Hamas for civilian deaths because militants operate in civilian areas and have built extensive tunnel networks underneath them. Israeli forces have regularly targeted mosques, schools, hospitals and cemeteries where it claims fighters or tunnels are located, often causing civilian casualties.

The fighting has also killed 329 Israeli soldiers. The Israeli military claims around 15,000 Hamas fighters are among those killed in Gaza but has not provided evidence.

Nearly 85 per cent of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes, fleeing multiple times across the territory to escape ground offensives. During the war, thousands within Israel and in southern Lebanon have also been displaced.

The assault has created a massive humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The entire territory is at high risk of famine and over 495,000 people - more than a fifth of the population - are expected to experience the most severe level of hunger in the next months, according to the latest report by the leading authority on measuring hunger.

Sanitation systems have been destroyed, leaving pools of sewage and towers of garbage in tent camps packed with displaced families.

The offensive likely either damaged or destroyed 59 per cent of all structures in Gaza by July 3, including 70 per cent of buildings in north Gaza, according to an analysis of satellite data by Corey Scher and Jamon Van Den Hoek, experts in mapping damage during war.

The conflict has sparked fears of a wider regional war, with Lebanon's Hezbollah and the Israeli military trading fire almost daily over their countries' border.

More than 500 people have been killed on the Lebanese side, including some 350 Hezbollah members and 50 fighters from other militant groups, with the rest civilians.

Mediators set to hold new Gaza cease-fire talks

AP ■ DOHA (QATAR)

International mediators were set to hold a new round of talks on Thursday aimed at halting the Israel-Hamas war and securing the release of scores of hostages, with a potential deal seen as the best hope of heading off an even larger regional conflict.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt were to meet with an Israeli delegation in Qatar as the Palestinian death toll from the 10-month-old war nears 40,000, according to local health authorities. Hamas has not said whether it will participate, accusing Israel of adding new demands to a previous proposal that had US and international support and to which Hamas had agreed in principle.

A cease-fire in Gaza would last, saying Israel remains committed to "total victory" against Hamas and the release of all the hostages.

The two sides are also divided over the details of the hostage-prisoner exchange, including who among the Palestinian prisoners would be eligible for release and whether they would be sent into exile.

Hamas has demanded the release of high-profile militants convicted of orchestrating attacks that killed Israelis.

The most intractable dispute has been over the transition from the first phase of the cease-fire - when women, children and other vulnerable hostages would be released - and the second, when captive Israeli soldiers would be freed and a permanent cease-fire would take hold.

Hamas is concerned that Israel will resume the war after the first batch of hostages is released. Israel worries that Hamas will drag out the talks on releasing the remaining hostages indefinitely. Hamdan provided documents showing Hamas had agreed to a US bridging proposal under which talks on the transition would begin by the 16th day of the first phase and conclude by the fifth week.

More recently, Hamas has objected to what it says are new Israeli demands to maintain a presence along the Gaza-Egypt border and a road dividing northern and southern Gaza. Israel denies these are new demands, saying it needs a presence along the border to prevent weapons smuggling and that it must search



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Palestinians returning to northern Gaza to ensure they are not armed.

The demands were only made public recently. Hamas has demanded a full Israeli military withdrawal, which was also part of all previous versions of the cease-fire proposal, according to documents shared with the AP that were verified by officials involved in the negotiations.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed across the heavily guarded border on October 7 in an attack that shocked Israel's vaunted security and intelligence services. The fighters rampaged through farming communities and army bases, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

They abducted another 250 people. Over 100 were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November, and around 110 are believed to still be inside Gaza, though Israeli authorities believe around a third of them died on October 7 or in captivity. Seven were rescued in military operations.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed nearly 40,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were militants. The offensive has left a swath of destruction across the territory and driven the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes, often multiple times.

Successive evacuation orders and military operations have driven hundreds of thousands of people into a so-called humanitarian zone along the coast where they live in crowded tent camps with few services. Aid groups have

I-Day celebrated in Israel virtually due to escalating tensions

PTI ■ JERUSALEM

Amidst escalating tensions in West Asia, the Indian embassy in Israel celebrated the 78th Independence Day virtually, with the envoy seeking an early and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Gaza.

Ambassador Sanjeev Singla hoisted the national flag at his residence in the presence of the embassy's staff. The Indian community members participated in the event through social media links of the mission.

Singla noted that India "strongly and unequivocally" condemned the October 7 attack against Israel by Hamas but at the same time "we have been reiterating our concerns over the loss of civilian lives and the need for continued humanitarian aid for the affected population of Gaza".

"We have also emphasised an early and peaceful resolution of the conflict in Gaza, including the release of all the hostages



through dialogue and diplomacy," the Indian Ambassador stressed.

He advised the Indian community to remain vigilant, follow diligently the instructions of the Home Command, restrict unnecessary movement and keep following the social media handles of the mission for advisories.

Touching upon bilateral ties,

Singla said that the mission continued on the "unifying vision" embraced over the past decade by the two countries in the "pursuit of the common good on a bilateral, regional and global scale" also during the past year maintaining the same "vigour".

He emphasised that Prime Minister Narendra Modi remained in regular touch with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu throughout the year.

Prime Minister Modi met Israeli President Isaac Herzog on the sidelines of COP 28, Israel's Minister of Transport Miri Regev visited India in February and India's National Security Advisor Ajit Doval visited Israel in March, he pointed out as signs of continued cooperation at the bilateral level.

Describing the Indian diaspora and the Indian Jewish community in Israel as a "powerful link" between the two countries, the Indian envoy asserted that "we remain focused on enhancing people-to-people relations".

Singla expressed "profound grief" at the passing away last year of two of the Pravasi Divas Samman awardees in Israel, Prof. Lael Anson Best and Sheikh Md. Munir Ansari.

He also applauded the Indian Cultural Centre for spearheading "our outreach in Israel" by regularly organising cultural programmes.

Ukrainian drone attack damages 2 hangars, satellite images show, as fighting in Russia grinds on

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

A Ukrainian drone attack on Russian air bases damaged at least two hangars and other areas, satellite images analyzed by The Associated Press on Thursday show.

Images taken Wednesday by Planet Labs PBC analyzed by the AP show that two hangars at Borisoglebsk Air Base had been struck, with a field of debris seen around both. It was not immediately clear what purpose the hangars served. There also appeared to be damage potentially done to two fighter aircraft at the base.

Separately, at Savasleika Air Base, one burn mark could be seen on the apron in images Wednesday, though there was no apparent damage visible to the fighter jets and other aircraft there.

Kursk acting Governor Alexei Smirnov on Thursday ordered the evacuation of the Glushkovo region, about 45 kilometers (28 miles) northwest of Sudzha, where heavy battles are taking place, as Ukraine's daring incursion into the bordering Kursk region entered its second week.

The evacuation order suggests Ukrainian forces are gradually advancing toward the area.



Russia also declared a federal-level state of emergency in the Belgorod region. A regional-level state of emergency had been declared a day earlier in Belgorod, and the change in status suggests officials believe the situation is worsening and hampering the region's ability to deliver aid.

Residents who suffer severe health damage will be eligible to receive payments of up to 6,000,000 Rubles (USD 6,600). Those who experience a loss of property are eligible for up to 1,500,000 Rubles (USD 1,700), Russia's Emergency Ministry said.

Ukraine's chief military officer, Gen Oleksandr Syrskyi declared that Ukrainian forces have taken 1,000 square kilometers of the Kursk region. That claim couldn't be independently verified. The contact lines in Kursk have remained fluid, allowing both sides to maneuver easily unlike the

static frontline in eastern Ukraine where it has taken Russian forces months to achieve even incremental gains.

Russian military bloggers have claimed that Russian reserves arriving in the region have stemmed Ukrainian advances, but they also noted that Ukrainian small mechanized groups have continued to probe Russian defenses.

Speaking to reporters at the UN on Wednesday, Russia's Deputy UN Ambassador Dmitry Polyansky dismissed Syrskyi's claim of having gained 1,000 square kilometers of the Russian territory. "What's happening in Kursk is the incursion of terrorist sabotage groups, so there is no front line as such," Polyansky said. "There is an incursion because there are forests that are very difficult to control."

He said Ukrainian troops in the forests will be singled out and eliminated within "a very brief period of time."

Polyansky called the Ukrainian incursion an "absolutely reckless and mad operation," and said Ukraine's aim to force Russia to move its troops from eastern Ukraine is not happening because "we have enough troops there."

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida vowed to step up his country's effort to defend a rules-based international order in a peace pledge made Thursday on the 79th anniversary of Japan's defeat in World War II.

"We will never again repeat the tragedy of war" and will stick to the country's postwar pacifist resolve, he said at a solemn ceremony at the Budokan hall.

"In the world where tragic battles have persisted, Japan will continue its effort to maintain and strengthen the rules-based, free and open international order" and endeavor to resolve difficult global issues, Kishida said.

Kishida noted the more than 3 million Japanese killed, the

Kishida vows to push rules-based order as Japan's defence chief visits Yasukuni 79 years after WWII

destruction and the lives lost from bloody ground battles on Japan's southern island of Okinawa, fire-bombings across Japan, and the atomic attacks on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. He did not mention or apologize for Japanese aggression across Asia or millions of lives lost there.

The omission follows a precedent set by then-Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in his speech in 2013, a move critics call a whitewashing of Japan's wartime atrocities.

Earlier Thursday, three of

Kishida's ministers, including Defence Minister Minoru Kihara, prayed at the Yasukuni Shrine - seen by Asian neighbours as a symbol of militarism.

The controversial shrine honours convicted war criminals among about 2.5 million war dead. Victims of Japanese aggression, especially China and the Koreans, see visits to the shrine as a lack of remorse, and visits by defense officials are considered especially controversial.

Kihara is the first serving



defense chief to pray at the shrine on the anniversary since then-Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi's 2021 visit.

Kishida abstained from praying at the Yasukuni Shrine just a block away and sent a religious ornament instead.

Asian neighbors criticized the ministers' visit to Yasukuni on Thursday.

China's official Xinhua News Agency said that "Visits and ritual offerings made by Japanese officials to the controversial shrine have consistently sparked criticism

and hurt the feelings of the people of China, South Korea and other countries brutalized by Japan during the war."

In Seoul, South Korea's Foreign Ministry in a statement expressed "deep disappointment and regret" over the ministers' visits to the shrine and said, "Our government calls for the responsible leaders in Japan to squarely face history and demonstrate through actions a humble reflection and genuine remorse for the past and we emphasize again that

this would be an important foundation for the development of future-oriented Korea-Japan relations."

Emperor Naruhito, who also attended the ceremony, repeated his "deep remorse" over Japan's actions during the war that was fought in the name of the wartime emperor Hirohito, his grandfather.

Kishida accelerated Japan's military buildup and spending as the country further deepens military cooperation with the United States and their Indo-Pacific partners in the face of growing threats from China and North Korea.

Kishida, who took office in 2021, announced Wednesday that he plans to step down after his governing party leadership vote in September.

BNP seeks arrest, trial of Hasina

PTI ■ DHAKA
Former Bangladesh premier Khaleda Zia's party on Thursday held sit-in programmes across the country, demanding the arrest and trial of ousted leader Sheikh Hasina and her accomplices for the recent violence in the country. Hasina resigned on August 5 as prime minister and left following massive protests against her government. An interim government headed by Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in on August 8 along with 16 advisers to lead the government. Activists and workers of the Dhaka Metropolitan unit of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) gathered at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque's South Gate, in front of Hasina's Awami League party's offices, and at the Central Shaheed Minar to press for their demands. Over 230 people died in Bangladesh in the incidents of

violence that erupted across the country following the fall of the Hasina government on August 5, taking the death toll to 560 during the three weeks of violence. The interim government has already initiated an investigation against Hasina and nine others on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity that took place from July 15 to August 5 during the students' mass movement against her government. Activists and workers of the Dhaka Metropolitan unit of the BNP and its affiliate organisations are holding sit-in programmes at the Baitul Mukarram National Mosque's South Gate, in front of the Awami League offices, and at the Central Shaheed Minar to demand that 'autocrat' Hasina and her 'accomplices' be brought to justice for the loss of lives in the recent violence. Several hundred BNP activists also gathered in front of the BNP's central offices in Naya Paltan. BNP Dhaka City South Convener Rafiqul Islam



Majnu led the protests at Baitul Mukarram on Thursday. "We have announced a programme for today. The BNP and its affiliate organisations are taking part in the programme in Dhaka and across the country. We have one demand - the arrest and trial of fascist autocrat Sheikh Hasina and her accomplices. They have conducted a brutal genocide in Bangladesh." Over a hundred activists and leaders of the Savar Jubo Dal were in front of the destroyed Awami League offices on

Bangabandhu Avenue. They chanted slogans calling for Hasina to be brought to justice. Members of the Chhatra Dal, the affiliate student wing of the BNP, also gathered at the Central Shaheed Minar. Nearly a thousand leaders and activists of the organisation chanted slogans demanding trials for the ousted Hasina administration while waving the national and party flags. The Dhaka Metropolitan Unit of the BNP and the Jubo Dal - the youth wing of the BNP also held marches in Malibagh, Mouchak, Shahjahanpur, and Kaptan Bazar. The protest by the BNP came on the 49th anniversary of the assassination of the country's founder and deposed prime minister Hasina's father Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. Several students and general people this morning were seen near Mujibur Rahman's residence in Dhanmondi-32 attacking and obstructing people apparently going there to pay their respects.



Record number of candidates in Sri Lankan presidential race

PTI ■ COLOMBO
A total of 39 candidates, including three minority Tamils and two Buddhist monks, are in the fray for next month's presidential election in Sri Lanka, the election commission announced here on Thursday. However, there was not a single woman candidate among the 39 presidential aspirants for the September 21 election. In the last presidential election in 2019, there were 35 candidates while there were only six candidates in the first-ever presidential election held in October 1982. On the last day to file papers on Thursday, nominations were accepted from 9 am to 11 am local time after Wednesday's closure of paying deposits to the contest. There were 40 deposits paid but one of them has chosen not to file nominations. R M A L Rathnayake, the election commission chief, said there were three objections against three candidates, which were rejected by the commission. There were more than 17 million eligible voters in the 22 electoral districts throughout the island nation. Besides incumbent President Wickremesinghe, the other prominent candidates are Namal Rajapaksa, the 38-year-old heir to the Rajapaksa dynasty, the main opposition leader Sajith Premadasa and the Marxist JVP leader Anura Kumara Dissanayake. This will be the first election since Sri Lanka plunged into economic crisis when the island nation declared sovereign default in mid-April of 2022, its first since gaining independence from Britain in 1948. Almost civil-war-like conditions and months of public protests led to the fleeing of the then president Gotabaya Rajapaksa. Significantly, amongst the 39 is one candidate representing a faction of the public protest movement of 2022 against the Rajapaksa. Called 'Aragalaya' or 'struggle in the ring', the months-long protest was launched to hold the Rajapaksa family accountable for the unprecedented economic crisis leading to the ouster of Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

Thailand's populist Pheu Thai party gets endorsements to nominate prime ministerial candidate

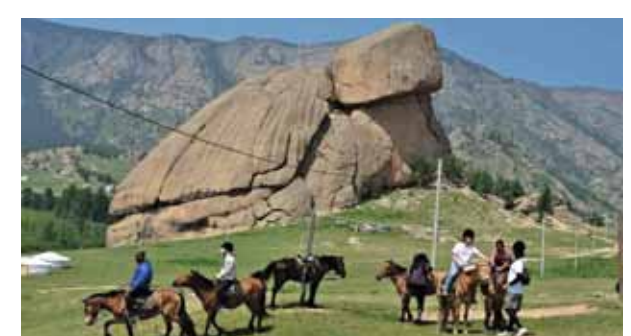
AP ■ BANGKOK
Thailand's populist Pheu Thai party on Thursday was given support by its major coalition partners to nominate one of its two candidates as the new prime minister, a day after former Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin was removed by court order over an ethical violation. Sorawong Thienthong, secretary-general of Pheu Thai, told reporters at Parliament on Thursday that the party executives are meeting later in the day to decide on its prime ministerial nomination in Parliament, with a vote scheduled for Friday. Pheu Thai's Srettha was ousted on Wednesday after less than a year in office. The Constitutional Court found him guilty of a serious ethical breach regarding his appointment of a Cabinet member who was jailed in connection with an alleged bribery attempt. It was the second major ruling in a



week to shake Thai politics. The same court last week dissolved the progressive and main opposition Move Forward party, which won last year's general election but was blocked from power, saying it violated the Constitution by proposing an amendment to a law against defaming the country's royal family. The party has already regrouped as the People's Party. Pheu Thai's ruling coalition partners have already given their endorsement for the party's candidate, including the Bhumjaithai party, which came

Pheu Thai. Another is Chaikasem Nitisiri, 75, a former Minister of Justice who served in the Pheu Thai government led by Thaksin's sister Yingluck Shinawatra and was removed by a coup in 2014. Pheu Thai finished second in last year's election but was given a chance to form a government after the winners, reformist Move Forward party, was blocked from taking power by the previous Senate, a military-appointed body. Move Forward was then excluded from the coalition by Pheu Thai, who went on to join hands with parties affiliated with the previous military-backed government that ousted it in a coup. The move drew criticism from some of its supporters but party officials say that it was necessary to break the deadlock and start reconciliation after decades of deep political divisions. The former senators were given special power to veto a prime

ministerial candidate by the constitution adopted in 2017 under a military government. That power expired when their term ended in May, however. New members of the Senate, selected in a convoluted process last month, do not retain the veto. A candidate now needs just a majority from the lower house, or at least 247 votes. The House of Representatives now has 493 sitting members after six were banned from politics as a result of Move Forward's dissolution. Another lawmaker of the Bhumjaithai party is suspended awaiting a court ruling. While Pheu Thai's key coalition partners endorsed its candidate, all of them reiterated that they would not support a proposal to amend the royal defamation law which became a key issue during last year's election. Pheu Thai discussed the issue during the election campaign but has toned down significantly after becoming the government.



Mongolia is in tourism spotlight and making it easier to visit

AP ■ ULAANBAATAR (MONGOLIA)
With its reindeer sleigh rides, camel racing and stunning landscapes with room to roam, Mongolia is hoping to woo visitors who are truly looking to get away from it all. Like most countries, its tourism industry was devastated by the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has launched a "Welcome to MonGOLia" campaign to win people back. The government has added flights and streamlined the visa process, offering visa-free visits for many countries. At least 4,37,000 foreign tourists visited in the first seven months of this year, up 25 per cent over the same period last year, including increasing numbers from Europe, the US and Japan. Visitors from South Korea nearly doubled, thanks in part to the under-four-hour flight. Despite the gains, Mongolia's government is still short of its goal of 1 million visitors per year from 2023-2025 to the land of Genghis Khan, which encompassed much of Eurasia in its 13th-century heyday and is now a landlocked nation located between Russia and China. With a population of 3.3 million people, about half of them living in the capital, Ulaanbaatar, there's plenty of open space for the adventure tourist to explore, said Egijmaa Battsooj, who works

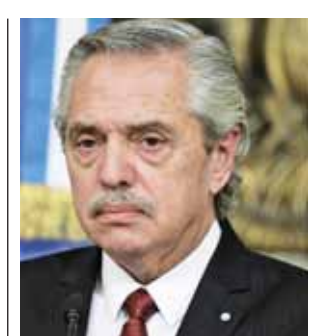
for a tour company. Its customized itineraries include horseback trips and camping excursions with the possibility of staying in gers, the felt-covered dwellings still used by Mongolia's herders. There's little chance of running across private property, so few places are off-limits, she said. "You don't need to open a gate, you don't need to have permission from anyone," she said, sitting in front of a map of Mongolia with routes marked out with pins and strands of yarn. "We are kind of like the last truly nomad culture on the whole planet," she added. Lonely Planet named Mongolia its top destination in its Best in Travel 2024 report. The pope's visit to Mongolia last year also helped focus attention on the country. Its break dancers became stars at last year's Asian Games. And some local bands have developed a global following, like The Hu, a folk-metal band that incorporates traditional Mongolian instruments and throat singing with modern rock. Still, many people know little about Mongolia. American tourist Michael John said he knew some of the history about Genghis Khan and had seen a documentary on eagles used by hunters before deciding to stop in Ulaanbaatar as part of a longer vacation.

Taliban have deliberately deprived 1.4 million Afghan girls of schooling through bans: UNESCO

AP ■ KABUL
The Taliban have deliberately deprived 1.4 million Afghan girls of schooling through bans, a UN agency said Thursday. Afghanistan is the only country in the world with bans on female secondary and higher education. The Taliban, who took power in 2021, barred education for girls above sixth grade because they said it didn't comply with their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law. They didn't stop it for boys and show no sign of



taking the steps needed to reopen classrooms and campuses for girls and women. UNESCO said at least 1.4 million girls have been deliberately denied access to secondary education since the takeover, an increase of 300,000 since its previous count in April 2023, with more girls reaching the age limit of 12 every year. "If we add the girls who were already out of school before the bans were introduced, there are now almost 2.5 million girls in the country deprived of their right to education, representing 80% of Afghan school-age girls," UNESCO said. The Taliban could not be immediately reached for comment. Access to primary education has also fallen since the Taliban took power in Aug. 2021, with 1.1 million fewer girls and boys attending school, according to UNESCO data. The U.N. Agency warned that authorities have "almost wiped out" two decades of steady progress for education in Afghanistan. "The future of an entire generation is now in jeopardy," it added.



Argentina's ex-President charged with committing violence against former first lady

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES (ARGENTINA)
A federal prosecutor on Wednesday formally charged Argentina's former President Alberto Fernández with committing violence against former first lady Fabiola Yáñez. Prosecutor Ramiro González charged Fernández with the crimes of "minor and serious injuries, doubly aggravated" and "coercive threats" against his ex-partner, according to a ruling seen by The Associated Press. González also requested additional evidence measures including taking testimonies from former presidential doctor Federico Saavedra and former secretary of the president María Cantero, among others. Fernández, a left-leaning Peronist politician who was president of Argentina from 2019 to 2023, vigorously denied her allegations and promised he would prove to the courts "what really happened." Yáñez testified Tuesday before an Argentine federal court as part of a case in which she denounced Fernández for alleged gender violence. The former first lady gave a testimonial statement via video call from Argentina's consulate in Madrid, where she resides, confirming to prosecutor González the complaint she had filed last week in writing.

White House says deals struck to cut prices of popular Medicare drugs that cost USD 50 billion yearly

AP ■ WASHINGTON
The Biden administration is taking a victory lap after federal officials inked deals with drug companies to lower the price for 10 of Medicare's most popular and costliest drugs, but shared few immediate details about the new price older Americans will pay when they fill those prescriptions. White House officials said Wednesday night they expect US taxpayers to save USD 6 billion on the new prices, while older Americans could save roughly USD 1.5 billion on their medications. Those projections, however, were based on dated estimates and the administration shared no details as to how they arrived at the figures. Nonetheless, the newly negotiated prices - still elusive to the public as of early Thursday morning - will impact the price of drugs used by millions of older Americans to help manage diabetes, blood cancers and prevent heart failure or blood clots. The drugs include the blood thinners Xarelto and Eliquis and diabetes drugs Jardiance and Januvia. Medicare spent USD 50 billion covering the drugs last year. It's a landmark deal for the Medicare program, which provides health care coverage for more than 67 million older and disabled Americans. For decades, the federal government had been barred from bartering with pharmaceutical companies over the price of their drugs, even though it's a routine process for private insurers. "This meant that drug companies could basically charge whatever they want for life-saving treatments people rely on, and all Americans paid the price," White House adviser Neera Tanden told reporters in a Wednesday



night call. The drug deals will become a focal point for Vice President Kamala Harris' presidential campaign, especially since she cast the tie-breaking vote to pass the law. She will join President Joe Biden Thursday to announce the drug prices, their first joint speaking appearance since she replaced him at the top of the Democratic ticket, as they both struggle to convince voters that costs will trend down after years of above-normal inflation. The pair last appeared publicly together to welcome back to the US Americans detained in Russia who were freed as part of a massive prisoner swap earlier this month. Powerful pharmaceutical companies unsuccessfully tried to file lawsuits to stop the negotiations, which became law in 2022, when a Democratic-controlled Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act, overhauling several Medicare prescription drug regulations. But executives of those companies have also hinted in recent weeks during earnings calls that they don't expect the negotiations to impact their bottom line.



Trump scheduled to hold news conference at his New Jersey golf resort

AP ■ BEDMINSTER (USA)
Former President Donald Trump invited reporters to his New Jersey golf club Thursday for his second news conference in as many weeks as he adjusts to a newly energized Democratic ticket ahead of next week's Democratic National Convention. Trump will meet the press as he steps up his criticism of Vice President Kamala Harris for not holding a news conference or sitting down for interviews since President Joe Biden ended his reelection campaign and endorsed her to replace him. The vice president has barely engaged with reporters since becoming the Democratic nominee, though she travels with journalists aboard Air Force Two and sometimes answers shouted questions while boarding or leaving the plane for campaign stops. In one brief interaction last week, she told reporters she wants "to get an interview together by the end of the month." Trump on Wednesday made little effort to stay on message at a rally in North Carolina that his campaign billed as a big economic address, mixing pledges to slash energy prices and "unleash economic abundance" with familiar off-script tangents.

India imports USD 2.8 bn worth of crude oil from Russia in July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India, the world's third largest oil consuming and importing nation, in July bought USD 2.8 billion worth of crude oil from Russia, second only to China which remains the largest importer of Russian oil, a report said. Russia emerged as India's biggest supplier of crude oil, which is converted into fuels like petrol and diesel in refineries, after Russian oil was available on discount following some European nations shunning purchases from Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Imports from Russia, which were less than one per cent of the total oil imported in pre-Ukraine war period, now make up for almost 40 per cent of India's total oil purchases. China bought 47 per cent of Russia's crude exports, followed by India (37 per cent), the EU (7 per cent), and Turkey (6 per cent), the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) said in a report.



Not just oil, but China and India also bought coal from Russia. "From 5 December 2022 until the end of July 2024, China purchased 45 per cent of all Russia's coal exports followed by India (18 per cent). Turkey (10 per cent), South Korea (10 per cent) and Taiwan (5 per cent) round off the top five buyers list," it said. CREA however did not provide absolute numbers for imports. China was the largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels in July, accounting for 43 per cent

(Euro 6.2 billion) of Russia's monthly export earnings from the top five importers. Crude oil comprised 63 per cent (Euro 3.9 billion) of China's imports from Russia. In July, China's global import volumes of seaborne crude (40.2 million tonnes) dropped to their lowest levels since February 2023. Seaborne crude imports from Russia (4.3 million tonnes) also dropped to their lowest levels since December 2022 and may be linked to reduced processing margins for refineries amidst low fuel

demand. "India was the second-largest buyer of Russian fossil fuels in July. Almost 80 per cent of India's imports (valued at Euro 2.6 billion or USD 2.86 billion) comprised crude oil," the report said. India, which is more than 85 per cent dependent on imports to meet its oil needs, spent USD 11.4 billion in July on import of 19.4 million tonnes of crude oil, according to official data. In July, the discount on Russian Urals grade crude oil widened by 9 per cent month-on-month to USD 16.76 per barrel compared to Brent crude oil. The discounts on the ESPO grade and Sokol blends remained relatively stable and modest at USD 4.23 per barrel and USD 6.11 per barrel, respectively. According to CREA, 36 per cent of Russian seaborne crude oil and its products in July were transported by tankers subject to the oil price cap. The remainder was shipped by 'shadow' tankers and was not subject to the oil price cap policy.

Gold imports dip 4.23% to USD 12.64 billion in April-July

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's gold imports, which have a bearing on the country's current account deficit (CAD), dipped by 4.23 per cent to USD 12.64 billion during April-July 2024-25 due to global economic uncertainties, according to government data. The imports stood at USD 13.2 billion in April-July 2023. In July alone, the imports declined by 10.65 per cent to USD 3.13 billion as against USD 3.5 billion in the same month last year. The inbound shipments were also in negative during June (-38.66 per cent) and May (-9.76 per cent). In April, the imports jumped to USD 3.11 billion from one billion in April 2023. According to a jeweller, the high prices are discouraging the imports but it will go up from September as festive season will start in India and the import duty cut benefit is also there. The government has slashed the customs duty on gold and silver to 6 per cent from 15 per cent. Gold prices rose Rs 300 to Rs



73,150 per 10 grams in the national capital on August 14 amid a jump in precious metal rates in the international markets. In 2023-24, India's gold imports surged by 30 per cent to USD 45.54 billion. Switzerland is the largest source of gold imports, with about 40 per cent share, followed by the UAE (over 16 per cent) and South Africa (about 10 per cent). The precious metal accounts for over 5 per cent of the country's total imports. Despite the dip in gold imports, the country's trade deficit (difference between imports and exports) widened to USD 23.5 billion in July and USD 85.58 billion during the first four months

of this fiscal. India is the world's second-biggest gold consumer after China. The imports mainly take care of the demand by the jewellery industry. The gems and jewellery exports during April-July this fiscal contracted by 7.45 per cent to USD 9.1 billion. India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter. For FY24, the current account deficit narrowed to USD 23.2 billion or 0.7 per cent of GDP against USD 67 billion or 2 per cent of GDP in FY23. A current account deficit occurs when the value of goods and services imported and other payments exceeds the value of the export of

goods and services and other receipts by a country in a particular period. As per the government data, silver imports jumped to USD 648.44 million during April-July 2024 as against USD 214.92 million in the year-ago period. India is seeking review of certain provisions of the free trade agreement with the UAE, which came into force on May 1, 2022. The review assumes significance as experts have raised serious concerns over the spurt in imports of precious metals from the UAE under the trade agreement. Seeking an urgent review of the pact, think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) has stated that the India-UAE CEPA allows unlimited imports of gold, silver, platinum, and diamonds from the UAE into India with zero tariffs in the coming years. This will lead to significant annual revenue losses, move import business from banks to a few private traders, and replace top suppliers with Dubai-based firms, the GTRI report has said.

AC makers' profits soar in April-June amid blistering heat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Air-conditioner makers have logged a high double-digit growth in revenue and several of them had over two-fold jump in profits during April-June quarter amid increased demand due to the blistering summer. Companies such as Voltas, Blue Star, Whirlpool of India, Johnson Hitachi, and Havells which owns Llyods brand have reported a high growth trajectory in their top-line and bottom line, led by record sales in the April-June period. Tata group firm Voltas, a leading player in the room AC segment, reported over two-fold jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 335 crore and its revenue from operation went up 46.46 per cent to Rs 4,921 crore. Voltas also reported achieving the 'milestone' of one million units of AC sales in the first quarter of FY25 and its total income crossed the Rs 5,000 crore-mark during the period. In the first quarter of this financial year, Voltas' revenue from "unitary cooling products for comfort and commercial use" that come under its room AC business vertical was up



51.24 per cent to Rs 3,802.17 crore. Its overall volume grew by 67 per cent in the AC segment in the April-June period. "The unitary cooling products business continued to outperform the market and maintained its growth momentum," it said, adding, "Voltas continues to be a market leader both in split and window air-conditioners with an exit market share of 21.2 per cent as on June 2024. Blue Star also reported a two-fold increase in consolidated net profit at Rs 168.76 crore, while its revenue from operations rose 28.72 per cent to Rs 2,865.37 crore in the June quarter. Its revenue from unitary

products business, which includes room AC sales, registered a 44.31 per cent rise to Rs 1,729.52 crore during the period. "With most parts of the country witnessing extremely high temperatures and an overall harsh summer, the increase in demand led to an unprecedented growth in the room air-conditioners business," it said. During the quarter demand exceeded inventory plans of the business and while the company met most of the excess requirements through an increased production, it still lost some opportunities to cater to the entire demand that the season offered, Blue Star said.

Edible oil imports dip 1.6% in first 9 months of 2023-24 marketing year ending Oct: SEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's edible oil imports declined marginally by 1.6 per cent to 119.35 lakh tonnes in the first nine months of 2023-24 marketing year ending October, according to industry body SEA. Imports of cooking oils stood at 1,19,35,227 tonnes during November 2023-July 2024 period as against 1,21,22,711 tonnes in the corresponding period of 2022-23 marketing year. Oil marketing year runs from November to October. More than 50 per cent of India's cooking oils demand is met through imports. Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA) data showed that imports of non-edible oils, however, increased to 1,88,955 tonnes from 1,32,242 tonnes. The total import of vegetable oils (edible and non-edible oils) during the first nine months of the current oil year stood at 121.24 lakh tonnes, down 1 per cent compared to 122.55 lakh tonnes in the year-ago period. In the first nine months of the 2023-24 oil year (November 2023-July 2024), India



imported 15,18,671 tonnes of refined edible oil, a 7 per cent decrease from the 16,40,960 tonnes imported during the same period of preceding oil year. Imports of crude edible oils fell 1 per cent to 1,04,16,556 tonnes from 1,04,81,751 tonnes. During the first nine months of the 2023-24 oil year, the total palm oil imports decreased by 4 per cent to 68,45,097 tonnes, compared to 71,17,834 tonnes in the year-ago period. In contrast, soft oil imports increased to 50,90,131 tonnes from 50,04,877 tonnes. Indonesia and Malaysia are the primary suppliers of RBD Palmolein and crude palm oil (CPO) to India. Crude soybean degummed oil is primarily imported from Argentina and Brazil while crude sunflower oil from Russia, Romania, Ukraine and Argentina.

Investment advisers, research analysts should disclose AI tool usage to clients: Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has proposed that Registered Investment Advisers and Research Analysts who employ artificial intelligence (AI) tools in their services must disclose the extent of usage to clients, emphasizing the importance of strong security measures to avoid unintended data exposure. This transparency is crucial for clients to understand how AI tools contribute to their investment decisions and to make informed choices about their advisory services. "The possibility of unintended data exposure highlights the need for strong security measures and clear disclosure to clients about the extent of AI tool usage", Trivish D, COO at Tradejini, a stock trading platform, told PTI. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), in its consultation paper earlier this month, highlighted the growing usage of AI tools in Investment Adviser (IA) and Research Analyst (RA) services. With technological innovations and advancements, many AI tools



are currently available in chatbot form such as OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, etc. AI-based tools allow one to have human-like conversations and receive human-like responses with the chatbot. These tools assist various tasks such as summarising and analysing data and may help in improving efficiency and productivity. "These AI tools, however, may not adequately safeguard sensitive data shared during conversations, potentially leading to unintended data exposure and concerns related to data security," Sebi said in its consultation paper issued last week. Feroze Azeez, Deputy CEO, Anand Rathi Wealth Ltd said "while embracing this innovation, we must be

mindful of its implications and responsibilities". IAs provide personalised services according to client-specific requirements based on risk profiling and suitability. Similarly, RAs provide recommendations based on certain parameters and methodology adopted and are required to keep records of the research report, research recommendations and rationale for arriving at research recommendations. While AI tools can provide significant assistance in the work of IAs and RAs, they may not always give meaningful outputs that are expected to be based on the understanding of complex security-specific or client-specific scenarios/requirements such as personal/financial conditions or goals, Sebi stated.

Textiles, apparel exports rise 4.73% in July on improved demand: CITI

PTI ■ MUMBAI



India's textiles and apparel exports in July grew by 4.73 per cent to USD 2,937.56 million compared to the same month last year mainly driven by an increase in demand for apparels, the Confederation of Indian Textile Industry (CITI) said on Thursday. Textiles and apparel exports stood at USD 2,805.01 million in July 2023, CITI said. While the textile exports were steady at USD 1,660.36 million in July compared to USD 1,663.06 million, apparel shipments during the month surged by 11.84 per cent to USD 1,277.20 million from USD 1,141.95 million during the same time last year. "This year has shown promising progress for India's T&A exports, particularly when compared to last year. The growth in exports is largely attributed to the expanding share of Indian

apparel in key markets such as the US, alongside increased exports to the European Union and the UK," CITI Chairman Rakesh Mehra said. The industry, he said, remains optimistic about export orders in the upcoming months, and is poised to further leverage the concluded Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) like the India-Australia Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement (ECTA) and the India-UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). "These agreements are expected to provide additional momentum to our exports. The industry anticipates continued growth and is strategically positioning itself to capitalise on these opportunities, ensuring that India remains a key player in the global textiles and apparel market," he added.

SBI, PNB in talks with K'taka Govt for amicable resolution of ban issue

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Hit by the surprising decision by the Karnataka government to stop all transactions with them, State Bank of India and Punjab National Bank on Thursday said they are engaged with the state for an "amicable resolution" on the matter. In the first official comments after the Karnataka government decision, the state-run lenders issued separate statements, saying the matter at the root of the problem is subjective. "As the matter is currently subjective, we are unable to

provide any specific comments at this time. However, we remain in ongoing discussions with the Government of Karnataka to resolve the issue amicably," the SBI statement said. SBI's peer Punjab National Bank, also had a similar statement and pointed out that it will not be prudent to offer a specific comment on the matter. "The Bank is committed for an amicable resolution of the matter and is in discussion with Government of Karnataka," the PNB statement said. Karnataka government



ordered all its departments, boards, corporations, public sector units and universities to withdraw all their deposits and investments in the State Bank of India and the Punjab

National Bank and stop any business with these institutions on August 12. The order was reported on August 14. The order came after the

denial to redeem Rs 12 crore deposited by the Karnataka Industrial Area Development Board (KIADB) following a scam involving bank employees. A state government said the meeting with the bank officials did not yield any result and the matter is now sub judice. Similarly, Rs 10 crore deposited by the Karnataka State Pollution Control Board (KSPCB) was not returned by the bank owing to a scam by the bank officials, the circular said. The government also directed the government institutions to close their accounts in these

two banks and submit the certified closure report and send details of deposits and investment reports in the prescribed format to the finance department by September 20, 2024. The ban by one of the most prosperous states in the country comes at a time when the banking system is reeling under a "war for deposits" where challenges on liability accretion dominate all discussions. A senior banking source on Wednesday said that the relationship is as important for the state as well, for it has borrowings from the lenders.

Majority of big enterprises plan to enhance spending on AI/ML by 10-30% this year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Majority of leading business houses in India, with annual turnover of over Rs 5,000 crore, are planning to increase their investment in artificial intelligence and machine learning technology by 10-30 per cent in 2024, a survey by CIO&Leader said on Thursday. The 2nd Annual CIO&Leader State of Enterprise Technology (SET) Survey, conducted in partnership with research firm BM Nxt claims to have covered over 350 chief information officers and IT decision-makers found that 78 per cent of respondents



want to invest in AI and ML to improve customer experience and engagement. "With 76 per cent of organizations planning to invest more in AI/ML projects, the survey underscores the growing recognition of these technologies as pivotal drivers

of competitive advantage and operational excellence," the survey said. The study, based on a survey combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches, was conducted between May to July 2024. "In 2024, 37 per cent of enterprises foresee a significant increase (25 to 30 per cent and above increase) in their AI and ML budgets, reflecting a marked rise from 25% in 2023. By comparison, 39 per cent of enterprises plan to somewhat increase their spending (10-24 per cent) versus 43 per cent in the previous year," the survey said.

According to the survey report, 72 per cent want to enhance the use of AI and ML for discovering useful insights to improve decision-making, 74 per cent for innovation or improving products and services, 67 per cent to make processes more efficient and cut costs, 64 per cent to increase operational agility, 61 per cent to develop new data-driven business model, 60 per cent to increase revenue etc. "The significant investments in these technologies signal a shift towards more data-driven decision-making and a greater focus on leveraging AI for strategic advantage.

India's medicine, antibiotics exports gaining share in US, Italian markets: Data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With the government focusing on boosting domestic manufacturing of pharmaceutical products, India's medicine and antibiotics exports have started gaining significant market share in the US. According to the commerce ministry data, India is the third largest import source of 'medicine put up for retail sale' for the US. The top two are Ireland and Switzerland. In 2023, the country exported these medicines worth USD 9 billion as against 7.33 billion in 2022.

With this increase in the shipments, India's share went up to 13.1 per cent in 2023 from 10.08 per cent in 2022. Share of the top exporter Ireland fell to 13.85 per cent in 2023 from 17.18 per cent in 2022 because its sales in the US went down to USD 9.5 billion in 2023 from USD 12.5 billion in 2022. The second biggest exporter Switzerland also saw its share decline to 13.7 per cent last year from 17.4 per cent in 2022. Similarly, India has increased its share among exporters of antibiotics in the Italian market.



The remarkable rescue of 41 workers trapped in Uttarakhand's Silkyara Tunnel is now a gripping book *Woh Satrah Din*. The book was released by Uttarakhand Chief Minister PUSHKAR SINGH DHAMI

SEVENTEEN DAYS OF HOPE AND RESILIENCE



On November 12, 2023, a routine workday at the Silkyara tunnel in Uttarkashi, Uttarakhand, turned into a nightmare when a section of the tunnel collapsed between 205 and 260 meters from the Silkyara side. Forty-one workers, who were on the other side of the collapse, found themselves trapped with their only exit blocked. What ensued was a harrowing 17-day ordeal, culminating in a remarkable rescue that captivated the nation. In a breathtaking 17-day rescue operation, 41 workers trapped deep within the collapsed Silkyara tunnel in Uttarakhand were successfully rescued. This monumental effort, marked by extraordinary perseverance and

collaborative expertise, has been hailed as one of India's most triumphant rescue missions. It stands as a testament to human resilience, innovation, and the unwavering commitment to saving lives. The success story of the rescue operation is now a gripping book *Woh 17 Din (Those 17 Days)* by Rajiv Ranjan Singh. Chief Minister Dhama recently released a book titled *Woh 17 Din (Those 17 Days)*. The book chronicles the dramatic events of the rescue operation. Dhama praised the book for its positivity and the detailed account of the mission. "It was one of a kind rescue operation watched by the world. The unprecedented situation called for innovative ideas and resilience on the



Rajiv Ranjan Singh

part of rescue workers, government and the trapped workers who showed exemplary courage to hold on for 17 day. Just imagine how does one feel when trapped inside of an elevator for a few minutes and here were people trapped for 17 days, initially without any contact food or life support. I wrote this so that this great effort is not forgotten and inspires future generations," Rajiv Ranjan Singh said. The collapse of the tunnel sparked immediate action from local and national authorities. With the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the concerted efforts of the

Uttarakhand Government, a full-scale rescue operation was launched. Initially, the rescue teams deployed heavy machinery to drill through the debris, but the complexity of the situation soon became apparent as the equipment faltered. It was at this critical juncture that the rescuers turned to an unconventional yet effective method: rat-hole mining. A team of skilled miners from Uttar Pradesh, led

by Vakeel Hasan, was brought in to apply this technique in the rescue mission. The emotional impact was palpable as both rescuers and those they saved experienced a profound sense of relief and accomplishment. The operation was further bolstered by the expertise of Australian tunnel specialists Arnold Dix and Chris Cooper, whose insights proved invaluable. The collaboration between local, national, and international teams exemplified a seamless coordination that ultimately ensured the safe evacuation of all 41 workers. The successful rescue of these 41 workers is not just a feat of engineering and determination, but a reminder of the enduring human spirit.

The Spiritual Significance of Satvik Food in Daily Life

From ancient Vedic teachings to contemporary food science, our understanding of food has undergone significant changes. This review of two insightful books shows how our dietary choices influence not just our physical health, but also our mental well-being, spiritual life, and societal norms, says KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Brahmarpanam Brahmahavir,
Brahmagnau Brahmanaa Hutam

Brahmaiva Tena Gantavyam,
Brahmakarmasamadhina

The lines make it clear that according to the Indian knowledge system and Vedas consumption of food is as important as offering pooja to the presiding deity of a temple or in our mind. Vedic scholar Unnikrishnan Panickar, in his discourses reiterates the necessity of maintaining dignity, decency and devotion while consuming food. One should eat with happiness, peace of mind and serenity when the food is served and should never get angry or provoked over any issues. For the benefit of Dravidians, let me make it clear that the term Brahman mentioned in the sloka has nothing to do with Brahmins and the word represents universal truth.

Modern scientific research has proved that whatever food we consume should be satvik. The person who cooks the food, the ingredients that we use to cook it and above all, the person who cooks the food should be satvik, which means he/she should be pure in their words and deeds. The cooking and serving food should follow the pattern of offering homa materials to Agni while the person who eats the food should bear in mind that he too is offering haviss (pooja material) to Agni (his stomach). Two books on diet that caught the attention and which speak about dietary nature were found to be interesting. Dr Jayant Athavale, addressed Gurudev by his disciples and devotees, has authored a 65 page book "Harmful Effects of Modern Diet". Gurudev Athavale is the first



Indian to practice hypnotherapy and has found that one should wear clothes that generate positive energy in body and mind. His work on modern diet should be comprehended by all those who want a contented and peaceful life. What one consumes plays a significant role in his physical and psychological development, says Dr Athavale. "The disadvantages of adopting the modern dietary norms outnumber those of not following dietary norms. We are missing out on meals and breakfast prepared by our mothers and sisters. Chapatis are out while breads and cakes have taken over their places. The chutney, salad and gulamba have vanished and sauces and jams have taken their place" write the authors.



The authors (all engaged in research in institutes like Maharshi Adhyatma Vishwavidyalaya and Spiritual Science Research Foundation) share with readers their inference and findings on the effect of consuming Satvik, Rajas and Tamas diets. Dr Nandini Samant of MAV says that the kind of food we eat plays a significant role in developing our character and way of thinking. "Even the children's physical and mental constitution depends on the kind of food consumed by their parents before they are conceived and during pregnancy," says Dr Samant. There is more than what could be seen by naked eyes. The nature of the person who cooks and serves the food is

equally important. If only the food is cooked and served by a person having positive energy, it would create positivity as well as satvik nature in the one who consumes it. While the Indian philosophy and system of knowledge are vast, the westerners who were considered as trendsetters in all spheres of life had their own idea about food. Whereas Indians always considered cooking and consumption of food as part of their spirituality, the westerners had different ideas. For them food was not only for addressing hunger but for enjoyment. They never had any reservations about consumption of non-vegetarian stuff. Instead of kitchens in homes, people in the west

preferred food items cooked and manufactured in vast factories, as we can see in the lifestyle TV channels. The food which originated in farms and ended up in forks travelled through a network of wholesale and retail markets before finding their positions in shelves as junk food packed in glossy covers in super markets. Over the last few decades, the term junk food itself is replaced by the new name "Ultra Processed Food" of UPF for short. This writer is coming across the term for the first time in the book "Ultra Processed People" authored by Chris van Tulleken published by Penguin Books and rated as No 1 Best Seller by Sunday Times. Tulleken is an infectious disease

doctor at the Hospital for Tropical Diseases in London. His research focusses on how corporations affect human health. The author has opened the gates to a new world on the crass commercialization of food which has been hitherto uncovered from ordinary people. While uncovering the detailed information about why we all eat stuff that isn't food, he provides the answer for why can't we stop the consumption of UPF. According to Tulleken, 'UPF is a new parallel ecosystem, one with its own arms races that are powered not by the flow of energy but by the flow of money.' This is the new system of industrial food production. In this system we are the prey, the course of the money

that powers the system. "The competition for that money which drives increasing complexity and innovation. Occurs between an entire ecosystem of constantly evolving corporations, from giant transnational groups to thousands of smaller national companies. And their bait for extracting the money is called ultra processed food" writes Tulleken. This doctor says that almost 60 per cent of the average diet consumed in the USA and Britain belongs to the category UPF. The book, made up of five parts, covers topics like what I eat?, can't I just control what I eat, the reasons behind belly aches, what the hell am I supposed to do in this world of upf and how to stay safe from this phenomenon? Before concluding this review, the attention of the readers is drawn to a book published by Raders Digest "Eat Better, Live Better" in 1980. It had specified the significance of meat, beef, pork, fish and eggs in our food basket. By 2020, the doctors and nutritionists are unanimous in their view that non-vegetarian stuff of all kinds should be kept away from our food intake. The ever increasing cases of cancer, cardiovascular issues play an important role on our dining table. And, Prof B M Hegde, our own cardio vascular scientist, after studying thousands of patients opine that there is a direct link between junk foods, UPF and cancer and heart ailments.

Harmful Effects of Modern Diet
Dr Jayant Athavale, Anjali Gadgil & Yoya Vall anatan
Publication Rs 75/-

ULTRA PROCESSED PEOPLE
By Chris van Tulleken
Penguin Rs 599/-

WE NEED TO SCORE MORE FIELD GOALS TO WIN FREQUENT OLYMPIC MEDALS: SREEJESH

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

If there is one thing that goalkeeping stalwart P R Sreejesh would like to see change in Indian hockey, it is the team's dependence on penalty corners for scoring as he believes that field goals need to go up for the country to win an Olympic medal every four years.

India scored 15 goals and conceded 12 en route their second consecutive Olympic bronze medal in the just-concluded Paris Games. Out of 15, nine were penalty corners, three were penalty strokes and a mere three were field goals.

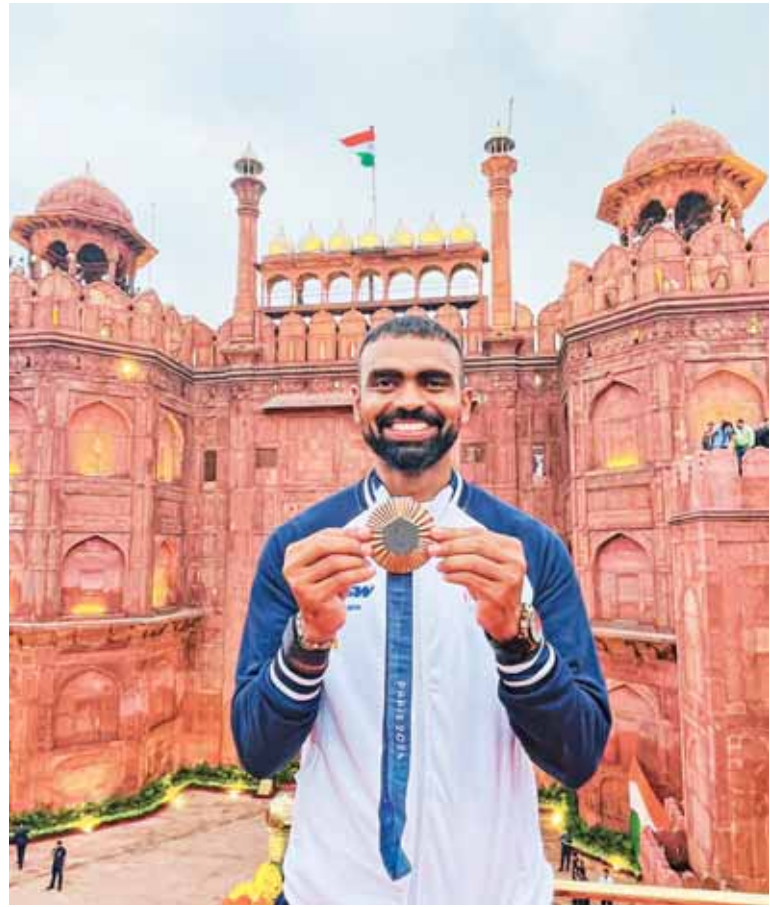
"Most of the times, when the forwards are getting into the circle the first thing that comes into their mind is to go for a penalty corner because that's what we are good at. I am not saying that our forwards are not trying to score field goals," Sreejesh, who retired at the end of the Games, told PTI editors at its headquarters in an interaction.

In comparison, gold winners Netherlands and silver-medallist Germany scored 14 and 15 field goals respectively, while fourth-place finishers Spain found the net 10 times from field efforts.

In all, the men's competition in Paris witnessed 78 field goals and 62 from short corners in total.

A penalty corner is awarded when a player commits a foul within the striking circle even if it is not necessarily to stop a possible goal-scoring move. The most common cause for a penalty corner is the ball touching a player's feet in the circle.

Sreejesh, who ended his glorious 18-year career after winning two



consecutive Olympic bronze medals, felt the Indians will have to do away with heavy reliance on penalty corners and find a way to score more field goals in future.

win Olympic medals, we need to score more field goals as well because defence has got some limitations," he said.

"I shouldn't say this but we are not Germany who can defend one goal for 60 minutes because they are disciplined, they are cultured. The style and strategy is different than us.

"I strongly believe that we made some mistakes and conceded a few goals but we need to sharpen our forwards to score more goals so that the defence gets more comfort," the 36-year-old added.

NOT EASY TO BE IN LEAGUE OF GREATS: With two Olympic bronze, two Asian Games gold and a bronze, two Champions Trophy titles and as many Commonwealth Games silver medals in his kitty, Sreejesh has become a legend of Indian hockey, joining the likes of Major Dhyhan Chand, Balbir Singh Sr, and Dhanraj Pillay among others. Sreejesh said it is not easy for any player to be in that elite league.

"It is not easy to be in that league. When you are getting into that senior role, when you are getting into limelight, it gets higher because your responsibility then is not only to perform for your country," he said.

He said the elevation to that elite status is a huge responsibility.

"Your responsibility is also towards the juniors, to develop them, to support the coaching," he said.

"You are going to be a mediator between the players and the coaching staff. You are getting into the shoes of a spokesperson for the team, you are becoming an ambassador for your country. So what all things you do should be an example."

Vinesh inspiration for younger generation, says Indian Diaspora

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The Indian diaspora in Singapore, who sent Vinesh Phogat their best wishes for her courageous wrestling bouts to reach the final of the 50-kg event at the Paris Olympics, said she is an inspiration to Indians around the world for her achievements.

"She deserved at least a silver medal. But I am happy to note that she is an inspiration to the younger generation to work hard and excel in sports," said Bhojpuri Association of Singapore President Neeraj Chaturvedi, who was among the Indian diaspora at the High Commission in Chancery on Thursday to celebrate India's 78th Independence Day.

"Vinesh should not give up wrestling," said Chaturvedi as the Court of Arbitration for Sports rejected Phogat's appeal for at least a silver medal.

The 29-year-old ace wrestler was disqualified on the morning of the women's 50kg freestyle final last week.

Her hopes of securing a belated Olympic silver medal were dashed on Wednesday when the ad-hoc division of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) rejected Phogat's appeal against her disqualification from the final. Resilient Phogat should rebound and continue her endeavours in a challenging world of sports, he added.



"Vinesh Phogat is an inspiration for all. One miss doesn't determine a lifetime of achievement and we love her and look forward to her life unfolding in future," added Mamta Mandal, Founder and CEO of Global Hindi Foundation (Singapore) Pte Ltd, a promoter of Hindi language here.

"Vinesh, you have been and will always be the pride of India," added Divya Dhar, a media consultant based in Singapore.

"Your journey is inspiring and unique, some temporary setbacks push us towards greater goals and we urge you to continue pursuing your passion with your never-dying dedication and efforts for your wrestling career," said Dhar.

"Every step you take and you push through is a victory over the limits you once believed you had. Remember, champions aren't made in comfort zones; they're forged in the fire of perseverance," corporate videographer-communicator David Anil Sharma said in his message to Phogat.

"Keep pushing, stay focused, and let your passion drive you toward greatness. You've got this!" Phogat should not lose heart as she has worked very hard and fit into the criteria of a finalist at the Olympics, Ganesh Somawanshi, a consultant in corporate communications, said in his message to the wrestler.

Phogat has already set an example of hard work and become an inspiration for the country and the world at large, he said.

"Vinesh is one among the people of this world that have demonstrated their strength on an international platform -- the Olympics," Somawanshi said.



Chennaiyin FC strengthen backline by signing Indian left-back Vignesh

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC have completed the signing of 26-year-old defender Vignesh Dakshinamurthy on a four-year deal, the club said on Thursday.

Primarily a left-back, Vignesh has also played in midfield and adds versatility and experience to the Chennaiyin backline. He becomes the club's 12th signing of the summer, joining the likes of Mandar Rao Desai and PC Laldinpuia.

Welcoming Vignesh into the club, head coach Owen Coyle said: "Delighted to sign another talented young Indian player who has already shown fantastic ability in the ISL. We faced a lot of competition from other clubs to sign him. Vignesh is a great addition to our squad and we look forward to working with him."

Vignesh began his career with Bengaluru's Ozone FC, for whom he played for six years - three in the academy and three with the first team. He made his senior debut at 17 and was one of Ozone's star performers en route to their 2018 I-League 2 Final Round run.

That same year, Vignesh

French prosecutors investigate gender-based cyber harassment of Algerian Olympic champ Imane

AP ■ PARIS

French prosecutors opened an investigation into an online harassment complaint made by Olympic boxing champion Imane Khelif after a torrent of criticism and false claims about her sex during the Summer Games, the Paris prosecutor's office said Wednesday.

The athlete's lawyer Nabil Boudif filed a legal complaint Friday with a special unit in the Paris prosecutor's office that combats online hate speech.

Boudif said the boxer was targeted by a "misogynist, racist and sexist campaign" as she won gold in the women's welterweight division, becoming a hero in her native Algeria and bringing global attention to women's boxing.

The prosecutor's office said it had received the complaint and its Office for the Fight against Crimes against Humanity and Hate Crime had opened an investigation on charges of "cyber harassment based on gender, public insults based on gender, public incitement to discrimination and public insults on the basis of origin."

Khelif was thrust into a worldwide clash



over gender identity and regulation in sports after her first fight in Paris, when Italian opponent Angela Carini pulled out just seconds into the match, citing pain from opening punches.

Claims that Khelif was transgender or a man erupted online. The International Olympic Committee defended her and denounced those peddling misinformation. Khelif said that the spread of misconceptions about her "harms human dignity."

Among those who referred to Khelif as a man in critical online posts were Donald Trump and J. K. Rowling. Tech billionaire Elon Musk reposted a comment calling Khelif a man.

Khelif's legal complaint was filed against "X" instead of a specific perpetrator, a common formulation under French law that leaves it up to investigators to determine which person or organization may have been at fault.

The Paris prosecutor's office didn't name specific suspects.

The development came after Khelif returned to Algeria, where she met with President Abdelmadjid Tebboune on Wednesday and will be welcomed by family later this week in her hometown of Ain Mesbah.

In Algeria, Khelif's former coach Mustapha Bensou said the boxer's complaint in France was initiated by the Algerian authorities and should "serve as a lesson in defending the rights and honor (of athletes) in Algeria and around the world."

"All those involved will be prosecuted for violating Imane's dignity and honor," Bensou said in an interview with The Associated Press. He added: "The attacks on Imane were designed to break her and undermine her morale. Thank God, she triumphed."



Devon, Allen opt out of NZC contract, focus on franchise cricket

PTI ■ AUCKLAND

Top-order batters Devon Conway and Finn Allen on Thursday turned down New Zealand central contracts to pursue a career in franchise cricket, announced the country's cricket board.

However, Conway will be available for New Zealand's international assignments through a casual agreement similar to the one Kane Williamson signed with NZC recently.

It means that Conway will play international matches unless they do not overlap his franchise commitments.

"Firstly, I'd like to thank New Zealand Cricket for their support through this process," Conway said in a video posted by Blackcaps on X.

"Playing for the Black Caps is still the pinnacle for me and I'm hugely passionate about representing New Zealand and winning games of international cricket."

However, Conway said the decision to opt out of the central contract was taken in the best interest of his family.

"The decision to move away from a central playing contract isn't one I've taken lightly, but I believe it is the best for me and my family at this present time," he added.

Recently, Williamson decided to skip the white ball series against Sri Lanka in January to play in the SA20. Pacers Adam Milne and Lockie Ferguson also have similar understanding with the NZC.

"We're delighted with Devon's decision to commit to the Blackcaps - he's a quality player who's made a strong contribution to the team over the past few years," said NZC chief executive Scott Weenink.

"In the current environment it's important to have flexibility in our system to navigate some of the challenges posed by franchise cricket - and this is another example of how we're working hard to retain our best players," he said.

While Conway is a central figure for Chennai Super Kings, the 25-year-old Allen is not a regular in the IPL circuit. But he has other avenues such as stints with the likes of San Francisco Unicorns in Major League Cricket (MLC), and for both Southern Brave and Birmingham Phoenix in 'The Hundred' in England.

Top-ranked Swiatek, Sinner advance in Cincinnati Open

AP ■ MASON (USA)

Top-ranked Iga Swiatek survived in her return to hard courts in the Cincinnati Open, outlasting Varvara Gracheva 6-0, 6-7 (8), 6-2.

Playing for the first time since finishing third for Poland in the Paris Olympics, Swiatek set up a third-round match against Marta Kostyuk - a 6-3, 7-5 winner over Lulu Sun.

Swiatek won her third straight French Open title in May and has six WTA Tour victories



this season.

On the men's side in the U.S. Open tuneup event, top-ranked Jannik Sinner got past American Alex Michelsen 6-4, 7-5 in his first match.

In the late match, Jiri Lehecka upset fourth-seeded Daniil Medvedev 7-6 (2), 6-4.

Earlier in women's play, 17-year-old Mirra Andreeva beat 11th seeded Emma Navarro 6-2, 6-2. Andreeva was playing her first match since taking a silver medal in doubles in Paris.

win a match, and I think I did it," Andreeva said.

Andreeva will face 2016 Cincinnati champion Karolina Pliskova.

Toronto semifinalist Diana Shnaider of Russia, Andreeva's doubles partner in Paris, beat Zhang Shuai 6-1, 6-4.

Sinner improved to 25-2 on hard courts this season and advanced to a third-round meeting with Australia's Jordan Thompson. Sinner is trying to reach the quarterfinals in Cincinnati for the first time.

Scottie's PGA Tour post-season amounts to a Super Bowl at East Lake

AP ■ MEMPHIS (USA)

Scottie Scheffler goes into the SPGA Tour's postseason as the No. 1 seed and it's not even close. Winning the FedEx Cup and its \$25 million bonus still feels far away.

The FedEx Cup playoffs begin Thursday at the St. Jude Championship for the top 70 from the season standings. The leading 50 players after this week move on to the BMW Championship, and from there it's the top 30 who reach the season finale at the Tour Championship.

Scheffler doesn't see this as a chance to put an exclamation point on his remarkable season

of winning the Masters, an Olympic gold medal, The Players Championship and four signature events against the strongest fields.

The FedEx Cup playoffs are so fickle that no matter what he has done since January, and no matter what he does the next two weeks, the best he can do is start the Tour Championship at East Lake with a two-shot lead.

Scheffler was the No. 1 seed going into the Tour Championship each of the last two years. He lost a six-shot lead on the final day in 2022, and last year shot 73 in the third round to fall out of contention. East Lake has gone



through a renovation, so maybe that will help.

"At the end of the day, it really comes down to East Lake," he said Wednesday. "I didn't have my best stuff at East Lake the last couple years. I'm kind of excited that they changed the course a little bit. It may give me some new vibes around there."

For the PGA Tour, it was a choice between bringing some excitement to its version of a Super Bowl by having all 30 players with a mathematical chance, or rewarding someone with a dominant year that Scheffler has produced.

Since the PGA Tour moved to this format in 2019 - two

playoff events with quadruple the points, and then the top seed starting the Tour Championship at 10-under par

with a two-shot lead - none of the top seeds going into the postseason has won the big prize.

"You've got to figure out a way to strike a balance between it being a good TV product and it still being a season-long race," Scheffler said. "Right now ... I know for a fact you can't really quite call it the season-long race when it comes down to one stroke-play tournament on the same golf course each year."

If it were a true season-long race, this would be something akin to a ceremonial three weeks before crowning Scheffler.

"That's not good, either," he said. "It would be great for me. But those aren't the rules." The system now is great for Rory McIlroy, the only three-