

OPINION 6

DELHI SINKS IN CESSPOOL
OF GOVERNMENT APATHY

WORLD 8

'CHINA BEHIND 2021
CYBERATTACK ON GOVT AGENCY'

MONEY 10

STOCK MARKETS RISE
FOR 4TH DAY

RAIPUR, THURSDAY AUGUST 1, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

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www.dailypioneer.com

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADALate City Vol.13 Issue 209
*Air Surcharge Extra if ApplicableSINDHU STORMS INTO
OLYMPICS SINGLES
PRE-QUARTERFINALS
11 SPORTS

CM refutes Shah's alert claim on Wayanad tragedy



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

PTI

KUMAR CHELLAPAN ■
NEW DELHI/KOCHI

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

"On July 18, it was forecast that Kerala's western coast



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

eventuality of any disaster. "When the landslides struck Wayanad, the NDRF teams got the green signal from the Collector and relief operations were launched immediately," the Home Minister said.

Shah said about six years ago, experts from IIT-Delhi had suggested relocating people from the landslide-affected areas, but their advice was not heeded to. Even as the death toll in Tuesday's massive landslides crossed the 200 mark by Wednesday evening, Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan, reacted to Shah's statement.

"This is not the time for blame game. There are 91 people undergoing treatment in various hospitals in the

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

Khedkar's IAS career over

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) on Wednesday cancelled a trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Pujja Manorama Dilip Khedkar's candidature in the 2022 Civil Services Examination (CSE) and barred her from appearing for any future examinations of the commission, after finding she had violated rules by appearing for the exam more times than what was allowed.

It said her provisional candidature for the CSE-2022 (Civil Services Examination-2022) has been "cancelled" and she has also been "debarred permanently" from all future UPSC examinations or selections.

The UPSC had issued Khedkar a show-cause notice on July 18 for "fraudulently availing attempts beyond the permissible limit provided for in the Examination Rules by faking her identity". She was asked to submit her response to the notice by July 25, but she asked for further time till August 4. The UPSC allowed her till



UPSC gets new chief

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday appointed former Health Secretary Preeti Sudan chairperson of the Union Public Service Commission after Manoj Soni resigned from the UPSC's top post early this month, according to an official order.

Sudan, currently a member of the UPSC, will take charge on Thursday. A 1983-batch IAS officer of the Andhra Pradesh cadre, Sudan has served in various capacities.

3.30 pm on July 30 to make her submissions. According to a statement, the UPSC said it has examined the available records carefully and found her guilty of acting in contravention of the provisions of the CSE-2022 Rules.

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



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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Caste jibe rocks Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Ruling party BJP and Opposition members engaged in a verbal duel on Wednesday leading to adjournments of Parliament over the BJP MP Anurag Thakur's remarks a day earlier in the Lok Sabha during his attack on Congress MP and Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi when the former stated "whose caste is not known talks about caste census".

While Congress has moved a Privilege Motion against Thakur and the Prime Minister claiming that Narendra Modi encouraged a "serious breach of parliamentary privilege" by sharing Thakur's speech on social media, Opposition MPs slammed Thakur's speech as an insult to Dalits, Adivasis and OBCs.

As the row erupted in Parliament, the Congress said the Gandhi family's caste is martyrdom but the BJP-RSS will never understand that. Upon protests from the Opposition benches, the Chair, Jagadambika Pal, assured MPs that the comments will be expunged, he said. The BJP flayed the Congress for escalating the caste row and said what's wrong in asking the



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi arrives for the Congress Parliamentary Party meeting, at the Parliament House in New Delhi, on Wednesday

Leader of Opposition's caste when he can ask about the castes of others, including the Government officials, judges and even journalists. In the same vein, however, the ruling party clarified that Anurag did not ask about Rahul's caste while speaking on the Union Budget in the Lok Sabha and wondered why the Leader of Opposition took an offence and called it an insult to him when none of the other members raised any objection to the former Union Minister's remarks.

Congress MP Charanjit Singh Channi submitted a notice to move a Privilege Motion against Modi for having posted

on social media a video that allegedly contained portions of remarks made by Anurag that were expunged from the proceedings of the House by the Chair. Channi, a Dalit MP of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, submitted a notice to Speaker Om Birla seeking to move a Privilege Motion under Rule 222 of the Rules of Procedure against the Prime Minister. Samajwadi Party MP Dharmendra Yadav said his party has been saying BJP people have no place in their hearts for SCs, STs, OBCs and Muslims. RJD's Manoj Jha said Thakur had given proof of his feudal mindset.

Rain brings Delhi, NCR to a halt

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■
NEW DELHI

Sudden rain brought the National Capital and adjoining regions, including Noida and Ghaziabad, to a standstill on Wednesday evening with water woes, traffic congestion and major power cuts albeit there was respite for the residents who had been reeling for days from the muggy and sweltering weather due to high humid levels in the city. While several areas suffered power cuts, loadshedding, at least 10 flights were diverted from the Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport between 7.30 pm and 8 pm. The city has been put on a red alert and the National Flash Flood Guidance Bulletin has included Delhi in its list of 'areas of concern'.



A woman being assisted by a police official while wading through a waterlogged road during rain near Pusa Road area, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

PTI

Due to the moderate to heavy rain lashing whole of Delhi and its adjoining areas of Noida, Gurugram and Ghaziabad, commuters witnessed traffic snarls on large stretches of road while

going back to their homes from work due to waterlogging in several places including Chirag Delhi, Saket, Sainik Farms, Qutub Minar metro station, Chatta Rail Chowk, Minto

Bridge, ITO, Janpath, Karol Bagh, Gaffar Market, Nauroji Nagar, Pant Marg, Nigam Bodh Ghat, Connaught Place and Mayur Vihar. Rain on Saturday evening led to flooding in the basement of the Rau's coaching centre which claimed the life of three IAS aspirants, rain on Wednesday caused waterlogging yet again outside the institute. Local MLA Durgesh Pathak reached the site to make sure that the water is pumped out of the low-lying area. Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena also took to social media and said, "Have cautioned all officers to remain alert in light of the ongoing heavy downpour in Delhi. Apart from ensuring minimum

inconvenience to people, they are advised to specifically address issues at sites prone to waterlogging, including coaching centres." The Delhi Traffic Police issued an advisory to the commuters in a series of social media post, "Traffic is affected in the carriageway from Moolchand towards Chirag Delhi due to water logging at Chirag Delhi. Kindly plan your journey accordingly," it said. It also advised to plan one's journey keeping in mind the waterlogging at places, including Railway Under Bridge, Ram Bagh Road, Azad Market, and Anuvrat Marg. Residents in several parts of the city also witnessed power cuts including Sainik Farms, Patel Chowk, Kalkaji and Laxmi Nagar among others.

Crackdown on coaching centres mooted in Delhi

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

After the tragic death of three IAS aspirants by drowning in the basement of Rau's IAS study centre in Old Rajinder Nagar area, the Delhi Government is planning to relocate coaching centres in Narela and Rohini and develop it as an education hub. Meanwhile, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has formed a high-level committee headed by Chief Secretary to address issues related to the regulation of coaching centres. The committee will prepare an action plan for shifting coaching institutes from various places to well-planned areas.

Amid the IAS aspirants' protest for fourth day in a row against civic authorities and 'coaching mafia' near the Rau's coaching centre, braving scorching heat with their Mains exams less than one and a half months away, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) Additional Commissioner Tariq Thomas on Wednesday admitted the civic body's responsibility in the death of three students, stating that there are serious structural issues, which need to be addressed.

Interacting with the protesting students at UPSC coaching hub in old Rajinder Nagar, the senior civic body official said there can be no



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

Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

excuses for the incident and the agency should have done its duty better. Students who started their indefinite hunger strike on Tuesday ended it on Wednesday morning after their meeting with Thomas. Saxena has directed the Delhi Police Commissioner for cracking down on coaching institutes which take exorbitant rentals in cash transactions to evade tax.

Besides, the Lieutenant Governor has directed that a portal be established, with Aadhar based log-in credentials of all coaching institutes in the city and the enrolled students. This would help create a transparent database which would help the Government in shaping the policy framework from time to time.

Students' safety guidelines issued

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh killed in Iran

AP ■ BEIRUT

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

Detailed report on Page 8

Lord Shiva devotees



Kanwariyas or Lord Shiva devotees carry holy water during the 'Kanwar Yatra' in the month of 'Shravan', in New Delhi, on Wednesday

Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Viksit Bharat, Sashakt Uttarakhand

State top performer in SDG India Index 2023-24

Driven by the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the state of Uttarakhand, led by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, has demonstrated tremendous achievement in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as depicted in the **SDG India Index 2023-24**

PIC: DIPR, UTTARAKHAND GOVERNMENT



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami gifting 'Grain of Uttarakhand' to Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Uttarakhand has set a standard by leading in essential domains including healthcare, clean energy, reduction in poverty, urban sustainability, and environmental protection

benefits to remote places, and improving the quality of care. Ingenious health agendas and expanded investment in public health have additionally strengthened the ranking of Uttarakhand, positioning it among the highest achievers in this crucial domain.

PROVIDING AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY SOLUTIONS

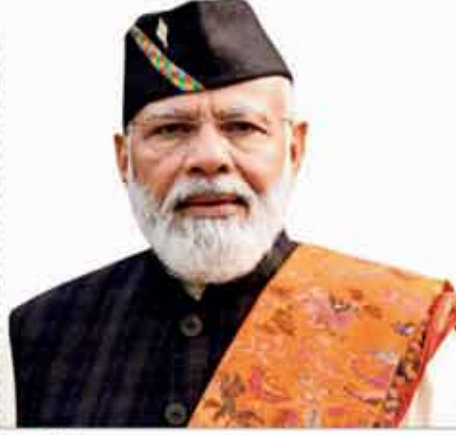
The accomplishments of Uttarakhand in the SDG India Index emphasise its adherence to assuring access to affordable, trustworthy, sustainable, and contemporary energy for everybody. The state has taken noteworthy steps in boosting renewable energy capability, especially in harnessing its hydroelectric potential. Further, Uttarakhand has concentrated on enhancing energy efficiency and extending the electricity grid to rural and isolated regions, assuring overall access to clean energy. These measures have improved energy security as well as contributed to environmental sustainability, making the state achieve a leading position in this classification.

CREATING INCLUSIVE AND SUSTAINABLE URBAN COMMUNITIES

The state has undertaken several metropolitan expansion to enhance infrastructure and improve various public services. Introduction of smart cities concept, affordable accommodation schemes, and integration of disaster threat reduction efforts into urban planning have greatly enhanced the quality of life for urban citizens.

CONSERVING TERRESTRIAL ECOSYSTEMS AND BIODIVERSITY

The commitment of Uttarakhand towards



I congratulate the Uttarakhand government on the remarkable progress achieved in the last few years. This has been made possible by sustained policy push and focus on key sectors such as tourism and renewable energy. Alongside, the state has made significant strides in infrastructure development, setting new benchmarks for sustainable growth. Uttarakhand's commitment to harnessing its natural resources and promoting tourism has not only bolstered its economy but also showcased its potential on the global stage. I applaud the state's dedication to inclusive development and look forward to its continued success in the years ahead.

Narendra Modi
Prime Minister

Under the visionary leadership of Hon'ble Prime Minister Narendra Modi, we are committed to the holistic development of our state, leveraging its natural beauty, rich cultural heritage, and immense potential. Through sustainable policies and strategic initiatives, we aim to foster economic growth, improve infrastructure, and enhance the quality of life for all our citizens. Our goal is to make Uttarakhand a model of progress, where tradition meets innovation, and every individual can thrive in a conducive environment for prosperity and well-being.

Pushkar Singh Dhami
Chief Minister

Uttarakhand has emerged as a top performer in the recently released SDG India Index 2023-24, ranking alongside Kerala with an impressive score of 79. Under the able leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami, the state has worked on comprehensive development, promoting renewable energy, augmenting healthcare infrastructure, evolving urban surroundings, and preserving biodiversity, underlining its dedication to sustainable evolution and effective policy execution, thus attaining a spot among the top five states in several SDG goals.

ALLEVIATING POVERTY AND SAFEGUARDING FINANCIAL SECURITY

The performance of Devbhoomi Uttarakhand in alleviating poverty is admirable, illustrating the state's victorious measures in its mitigation. The SDG India Index underscores that Uttarakhand has attained

important landmarks in lessening poverty levels, assuring financial security for its citizens, and implementing comprehensive social security programmes. The exhaustive strategy of the state contains targeted initiatives for the marginalised, livelihood generation agendas, and improving access to fundamental needs such as housing, education, and healthcare. These endeavours have collectively contributed to the top-tier ranking of the state in eliminating poverty.

PROMOTING HEALTH AND WELL-BEING FOR ALL

The state of Uttarakhand has exhibited remarkable advancement in boosting health and well-being. The healthcare system of the state has demonstrated outstanding progress in different health indicators, including mother and child health, immunisation coverage, and the management of infectious and

non-communicable diseases. The focus of the government has been on bolstering healthcare infrastructure, extending the coverage of health

SDG INDIA INDEX 23-24



Uttarakhand has undertaken a historic step to introduce the Gross Environmental Product (GEP) Index, becoming the first Indian state to introduce such a pioneering endeavour that connects ecology with the economy

U'khand aces in the introduction of gross environmental product index

The Gross Environmental Product (GEP) Index, was recently launched by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami and it evaluates the environmental health of the state based on the quality of four essential elements, viz. air, water, forest, and soil. The GEP shows relative data from 2020 to 2022, indicating a 0.9% growth, signalling favourable environmental trends amid expansion. CM Dhami highlighted the importance of this endeavour in facilitating a balance between financial growth and ecological

PIC: DIPR, UTTARAKHAND GOVERNMENT



Uttarakhand strives to lead by example with the introduction of the GEP Index, in balancing growth with environmental sustainability

conservation. The GEP Index will act as a vital instrument in forming prospective environmental conservation objectives and raising public understanding about the significance of protecting natural resources. The Chief Minister, while emphasising the rich natural legacy of Uttarakhand, highlighted the necessity for effective utilisation

of forest wealth and the revitalisation of water sources via comprehensive plantation of trees and water conservation measures.

The concept of GEP was envisioned by environmentalist Dr Anil Prakash Joshi. It allocates an economic worth to environmental services, providing a tangible standard of ecological influence. Uttarakhand strives to lead by example with the introduction of the GEP Index in balancing growth with environmental sustainability. This assures a brighter tomorrow for its residents and establishing a standard for other states to pursue.



Under the leadership of PM Narendra Modi, the 'One District Two Products' scheme launched by CM Pushkar Singh Dhami aims to promote local products and create self-employment opportunities across all 13 districts of the state

ODTP Scheme: A step towards local economic empowerment

Uttarakhand's 'One District Two Products' (ODTP) Scheme is an innovative initiative launched by Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami in October 2021. The scheme aims to promote local products and create self-employment opportunities across all 13 districts of the state.



CM Pushkar Singh Dhami inquiring about the products made by local artisans

By promoting these products on a larger scale, the scheme seeks to enhance their visibility and demand. The government's efforts to improve packaging, branding, and marketing are expected to play a significant role in this endeavour. Tourism also plays a crucial role in the ODTP scheme's market strategy. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has encouraged tourists to spend at least 5% of their total expenditure on local products. This initiative not only boosts the local economy, but also promotes the state's cultural heritage.

EMPLOYMENT IMPACT

One of the key aspects of the ODTP scheme is its potential to generate employment opportunities at the local level. By developing products based on market demand and utilising modern technology, the scheme creates jobs in various sectors, including packaging, testing, and logistics. The increase in business and export opportunities is expected to further bolster employment, benefiting local farmers, artisans, and craftsmen. Notable products from various regions include Almora's tweed and Bal Mithai, Bageshwar's copper craft and Manduwa biscuits, Champawat's iron crafts and handwoven products, Chamoli's

handlooms, handicrafts, and aromatic herbs, Dehradun's bakery and mushroom products, Haridwar's jaggery and honey, Nainital's Aipan art and candle craft, Pauri's herbal products and wooden furniture, Pithoragarh's woolen carpet and Munsiyari rajma, Rudrapur's handcrafts temple shapes and prasad products, Tehri's natural fiber and Tehri Nath, Udham Singh Nagar's mentha oil and Moonj grass products, and Uttarkashi's woolen handicrafts and apple-based products.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

Skill development and design enhancement are also crucial components of the implementation strategy. By equipping local artisans and craftsmen with modern skills and design techniques, the scheme ensures that the products meet contemporary market demands.

MARKET & EXPORT POTENTIAL

The ODTP scheme aims to position Uttarakhand's local products in both domestic and international markets.

FUTURE PROSPECTS
The ODTP scheme is a promising step towards the sustainable economic development of Uttarakhand. By focusing on local products and creating self-employment opportunities, the scheme aims to foster economic resilience in the state's rural areas. The successful implementation of this scheme could serve as a model for other states to follow, highlighting the potential of local industries to drive economic growth.

District-wide crafts get recognition

Local products find national & global platforms



PM Narendra Modi interacting with women entrepreneurs (SHG) during Uttarakhand Investor Summit 2023

The 'One District One Product' (ODOP) scheme is an endeavour under the Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan, striving to boost regional products and promote financial evolution in districts across India. By recognising and showcasing outstanding products from each district, the scheme seeks to facilitate manufacturing, help regional craftspeople, and furnish a forum for these products in nationwide and global markets. Recently, Uttarakhand and its border district, Uttarkashi, obtained nationwide acclaim under this scheme, marking a notable accomplishment for the state. The state's commendation came during the Atmanirbhar Bharat Utsav 2024 awards, where Uttarkashi district

won the second award for its production of Red Rice in the agriculture category. Different districts in Uttarakhand have been recognised with special products under the ODOP scheme, including Almora's apricot-based products, Bageshwar's kiwi-based products, Chamoli's fish-based products, Champawat's *tejpatta* and spices, Dehradun's bakery products, Haridwar's mushrooms, Nainital's fruit juice and squash (peach, etc), Pauri's citrus-based products (Malta), Pithoragarh's turmeric-based products, Rudrapur's *amaranth*-based products, Tehri's ginger-based products, and Uttarkashi's mango-based products, and Uttarkashi's apple-based products. This is supported by the Common Facility Centre (CFC) Scheme, which furnishes up to 90 percent of the project expenditure in economic aid. This allows local producers to improve their production establishments and enhance their product quality. The Marketing Development Assistance Scheme presents economic support to participants of nationwide and multinational exhibits and fairs, letting them demonstrate and market their ODOP-selected products. Further, the Finance Assistance Scheme (Margin Money Scheme) offers assistance to set up projects, assuring that financial limitations do not restrict the development of local enterprises.

States (Category B)		
Rank	State	Award
1.	J&K	Gold
2.	Uttarakhand	Silver
3.	Meghalaya	Bronze
4.	Sikkim	Bronze

AYUSH POLICY: TOWARDS WELLNESS



CM's visit to Adi Kailash further promoted the area as a notable pilgrimage destination

The AYUSH Policy of Uttarakhand summarises enterprising strategies to incorporate conventional healthcare procedures with contemporary methods, striving for holistic wellness and financial development. The policy strives to capitalise on this legacy by encouraging the cultivation of over 1,000 rare medicinal plants native to the area. Endeavours such as the Chief Minister Medicinal Plant Development Programme are set to involve 50,000 farmers in growing these plants, promoting sustainable farming approaches, and augmenting regional revenues. In the domain of AYUSH production, Uttarakhand already has a strong drive, backed by ample raw materials and promising business necessities. The state hosts multiple GMP-certified manufacturing departments making a vast array of AYUSH medicines and consumer items. Under the new policy, more incentives and assistance will be

offered to enable more units to attain WHO GMP certification and adhere to global quality norms. This action is anticipated to greatly improve the sector's contribution to the state's GDP, presently evaluated at Rs 4,000-5,000 crore. The policy encapsulates strategies to accredit all specified government AYUSH healthcare centers under the NABH (National Accreditation Board for Hospitals & Healthcare Providers) within five years.

#ExploreUttarakhand



@DIPR_UK

Budget balances growth, livelihood, cooperative federalism: FM

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

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

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

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



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

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

she said, adding that during the Congress-led UPA era, the capex allocation was ₹ 13.19 lakh crore between 2004-05 to 2013-14.

"Whereas during our tenure from 2014 to 2024, the allocation for capex has been ₹ 43.82 lakh crore from 2014-15 to 2023-24," she said.

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

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

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

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

Rescue operations continue in landslides-ravaged Wayanad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

The Indian Army is coordinating closely with state authorities to ensure swift and effective relief efforts, the officials said. "Construction of a bridge on the Meepadi-Chooraimala Road will commence, including the induction of certain earthmoving equipment to the other side of the stream utilising air effort," the army said on Wednesday.

A navy spokesperson here said that on a request from the Kerala State Disaster Management Authority (KSDMA), the Kochi-based Southern Naval Command (SNC) dispatched a disaster relief team comprising 68 personnel from INS Zamorin at Ezhimala to the landslide hit site on Tuesday.

The rescue team comprising skilled personnel along with a medical team and necessary equipment reached the site at 10 pm on Tuesday. Additional teams have been kept on standby for deployment at short notice and will be mobilised as required, he said.

An advanced light helicopter (ALH) detachment in search and rescue (SAR) configuration was deployed from Kochi to Calicut at 7.30 am on Wednesday to augment the rescue efforts, the spokesperson said.

The adverse weather conditions due to incessant rains pose challenges in the area. All-out efforts are underway to provide immediate relief and support to the local populace impacted by the disaster, the official said.

SC confirms staying premature release of Gawli

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



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

The High Court had directed State authorities to consider Gawli's application for premature release under the 2006 remission policy. "We are not inclined to grant any interim relief.

The interim stay granted by us is confirmed. Post the appeals for hearing on November 20," the bench said. At the outset, senior advocate Raja Thakare, appearing for the Maharashtra Government, submitted that Gawli has over 46 cases, including around 10 cases of murder, against him.

The apex court asked the senior lawyer whether Gawli had done anything in last five to eight years.

Thakare replied that the gangster has been behind bars for over 17 years.

Asking whether Gawli is reformed or not, the bench asked, "How society will know that when he is behind the bars? He is 72 years old."

Challenging the High Court order, Thakare said there is a requirement under the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act

(MCOCA) for convicts to undergo imprisonment for at least 40 years for remission. This is as per the policy of 2015.

Senior advocate Nitya Ramakrishnan, appearing for Gawli, said other co-accused had been given bail in the matter and the Bombay High Court was right in granting premature release.

"The State Government has changed its remission policy (in 2015) but your lordships have held that the policy will apply which was applicable when he was convicted. The 2006 policy will apply since he was convicted in 2009. This policy allows remission on account of age and infirmity," she said.

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

Elaborating on Gawli's health condition, Ramakrishnan told the court that he is suffering from heart disease and has a lung defect.

To this, the counsel for the Maharashtra Government said this was so because of continuous smoking for 40 years.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Congress Parliamentary Party chairperson Sonia Gandhi on Wednesday said the "mahaul (public mood)" is in the party's favour but cautioned against complacency and over confidence after the goodwill generated for it in the Lok Sabha elections.

Noting that elections will be held in four States, the longest serving Congress's former President said leaders to sustain the momentum and goodwill that had been generated for the party in the Lok Sabha elections.

Assembly polls in Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand as well as Jammu and Kashmir are scheduled this year.

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

trend that we witnessed in the Lok Sabha elections, national politics will undergo a transformation," Sonia said at the CPP meet in Parliament.

During the general body meeting of the CPP in Central Hall, Samvidhan Sadan, a resolution authorising Sonia Gandhi to appoint other office-bearers of the CPP was also passed.

Sonia claimed that the Modi Government had not drawn the right lessons from "their significant decline" in the Lok

Sabha elections and alleged that it was persisting with its policy of "dividing communities and spreading an atmosphere of fear and animosity".

"Fortunately, the Supreme Court intervened at the right time," she said in an apparent reference to the stay on the orders passed by Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand Government asking eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display the name of owners."

But this can only be a temporary respite. Look at how the rules have been suddenly changed to permit the bureaucracy to participate in the activities of the RSS. It calls itself a cultural organisation but the whole world knows that it is the BJP's political and ideological base," she said.

She also slammed the Union Budget, saying that the pressing demands of farmers and youth in particular, have been totally ignored.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

He said the analysis of the data shows a "mixed trend with periodic ups and downs" in the occurrences of landslides.

"To infer conclusively about the exact nature of the trend of landslide incidents, long-range (at least 20 years of) data with exact date of occurrence is required," the minister said.

According to the data presented in Parliament, the northeastern region reported 28 landslides in 2017-18; 49 in 2018-19; 45 in 2019-20; 65 in 2020-21; 78 in 2021-22; 102 in 2022-23; 29 in 2023-24; and 196 in 2024-25 so far.

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



Railways have sanctioned 9,784 bridges for repairs: Vaishnav

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

These members were concerned about the status of collapse of railway bridges in the last three years and the number of persons killed and injured as a result of that. They also wanted to know the steps taken by the Government to repair all the old railway bridges across the country.

"There is a well established system of inspection of railway bridges on Indian Railways. All the railway bridges are inspected twice a year, one before the onset of monsoon and one detailed inspection after the monsoon," Vaishnav said.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over 76.02 lakh women had sought helpline assistance till May 31 on Government's helpline number while about 1.94 lakh complaints regarding child pornography and rape or gang rape have been registered on the Government's National Cybercrime Reporting Portal (NCRP) till April 30, Union Minister Annapurna Devi said on Wednesday in Parliament.

In a written reply to a question in the Rajya Sabha, the Women and Child Development Minister said since its inception, the NCRP has received over 16.18 crore

visitors.

"As of April 30, 2024, approximately 1.94 lakh complaints regarding child pornography and rape or gang rape have been reported," she said.

Till March 31, more than 69.05 lakh cyber tipline reports had been shared with the relevant States and union territories, she said.

According to the Minister, the Emergency Response Support System (ERSS-112) is operational in all 36 States and Union Territories and had handled more than 36.29 crore calls till April 30, with more than 14.36 lakh downloads of the '112 India'



mobile app.

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

Monitoring centres for the

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

Under the Integrated Emergency Response Management System (IERMS) project, CCTV systems have been installed in 489 railway stations nationwide. Additionally, 2,034 tabs have been procured and distributed to Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel to assist women travelling alone or those in need of help on trains, she said.

An AI-based Facial Recognition System (FRS) has been integrated with video surveillance systems at seven major railway stations for a pilot project, the Minister said.

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

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

repurposed in the blind to strengthen these other senses. This reorganisation allows the blind to develop extraordinary abilities to navigate and interpret their environment through alternative sensory inputs.

By mapping these unique brain connectivity patterns, researchers aim to advance our understanding of sensory adaptation and brain plasticity.

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

organisation.

"We don't see this level of variation in the visual cortex connectivity among individuals who can see," said Dr Striem-Amit, who heads the Sensory and Motor Plasticity Lab at Georgetown.

"The connectivity pattern in people born blind is more distinct across individuals, like a fingerprint, and remains stable over time."

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



analyse neural connectivity and found that the visual

cortex in these individuals exhibited remarkable stability

in its connectivity patterns, regardless of the task.

"Our study found that these patterns did not change significantly based on the task—whether participants were localising sounds, identifying shapes, or resting," explained Dr Amaral.

"Instead, the connectivity patterns were unique to each individual and remained stable over the two-year period."

Dr Striem-Amit emphasised that these findings highlight the brain's plasticity and its ability to develop in diverse ways, especially in the absence of sight.

"Our findings suggest that experiences after birth shape

the diverse ways our brains can develop, potentially even for different uses of the visual cortex among those born blind," she said.

The implications of this discovery are significant. It suggests that personalised approaches to rehabilitation and sight restoration could be developed based on an individual's specific brain connectivity profile, potentially optimising sensory and cognitive functions for those with visual impairments.

The study is published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS).

Karnataka Gov seeks response from CM on MUDA 'scam'

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

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

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

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



doubts if he crosses the threshold. There are suspicions that politics is happening," Parameshwara told reporters in the district headquarters town of Bagalkote. "The Governor has moved further to issue a show cause notice. We will have to consider it as politically-motivated," he added.

Karnataka Information Technology and Biotechnology Minister Priyank Kharge alleged that the Governor is being "misused" by the BJP. "You have seen Governors in

Tamil Nadu, earlier in Maharashtra and West Bengal. In some places these Governors are misusing their Constitutional position. Even the Supreme Court has made its observations. Several articles have also appeared on how the Governors are interfering in the functioning of the Government exceeding their limits," Kharge told reporters.

"It appears, here too, the same thing is happening. Already we have said that I-T (Income Tax Department) and ED (the Enforcement Directorate) are

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

The DMK MLAs had then displayed the sachets to claim they were available freely during the then AIADMK regime. Allowing a batch of appeals from the Secretary, Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly, a division bench comprising Justices S M Subramaniam and C Kumarappan set aside the order of a single judge, which set aside the show cause notices issued by the Privilege Committee.

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

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

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

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



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

The bench said, "it is we the people of India who constituted the Assembly under the Indian Constitution. The assembly proceedings are to be conducted in the manner prescribed. Actions initiated must be concluded by following the procedures as stipulated under the rules", the bench added.

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

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

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

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

Such privileges were to be valued in the interest of the people for whom the legislative assembly functions. In a democracy, people were always supreme and the assembly functioning in the interest of the people must ensure that its sovereignty and dignity remain protected under all circumstances, the bench added.

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

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

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

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

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

Villages in South Goa oppose Sunburn fest for promoting drug culture

PTI ■ PANAJI

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

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

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

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

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

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



PTI ■ RAJKOT

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Zika virus disease is transmitted through the bite of an infected Aedes mosquito, which is also known to transmit infections like dengue and chikungunya. The virus was first identified in Uganda in 1947. Thirteen cases of Zika virus — three from Karnataka and 10 from Maharashtra — were reported till July 22 this year, Minister of State for Health Anupriya Patel had said in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. In 2023, the country had witnessed 23 cases of Zika virus, while two infections were seen in 2022 and 234 in 2021.

Gujarat had last reported three cases of the disease in 2017. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had inaugurated Gujarat's first AIIMS at Rajkot on February 25 this year. Spread across 201 acres, Rajkot AIIMS is a world-class hospital with 720 beds, including the ICU. The multispecialty medical facility was built at a cost of Rs 1,195 crore.

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



PTI ■ AMARAVATI

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Moreover, he also directed officials to design policies to turn the southern state into a green hydrogen and green energy hub. Similarly, he called for the drafting of proposals to create four new industrial clusters and procure Central Government approvals, adding that the clusters could come up at Kuppam, Mulapeta, Chilamathuru and Donakonda or Pamuru. Naidu also deliberated on the Rs 11,542 crore bulk drug park at Nakkapalli, Rs 60,000 crore NTPC green hydrogen hub and others.

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

PTI ■ SHIMLA

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

They never underwent any such treatment in any of these hospitals, the ED claimed.

The accused hospitals made claims for treatments, surgery, admission which were actually never given or performed upon the patients, it said.

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

Gujarat court orders FIR for group's Muslim boycott call

PTI ■ PATAN (GUJ)

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

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

The petitioner had moved the court alleging that some persons

in Balisana misused the "unfortunate incident of a communal riot" on July 16, 2023, to incite locals to boycott Muslims and force them out of business by cancelling the rent agreement of their shops.

The move has affected the businesses and livelihood of Muslims living in the area, and some have even been compelled to leave the place, he said in the petition. The court directed that the group be booked under the Indian Penal Code for promoting enmity between different groups (153-B) and circulating or publishing statements containing rumour or alarming news with intent to create or promote the feeling of enmity - 505 (2). At the same time, the court also



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

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

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

In an earlier order, the court had

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Halwa politics

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

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



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

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

PICTALK



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

PTI

Budget prioritises applied research but neglects basic science

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

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



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

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

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



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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

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



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

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

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

Delhi sinks in cesspool of Government apathy



SIDHARTH MISHRA

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



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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEED FOR RAILWAY SAFETY AUTHORITY

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

TRAGIC LOSS OF LIVES OF IAS ASPIRANT

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

Manu Bhaker's historic Olympic win



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

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

Bidyut Kumar | Faridabad

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

CRICKET HAS CHANGED

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

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

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

FIRST COLUMN FROM HURT TO HEALING

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Reforming the personal income tax regime



UTTAM GUPTA

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

The OTT platforms are redefining star power and entertainment

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

In today's rapidly changing entertainment landscape, Over-the-Top (OTT) platforms have emerged as a powerful force in redefining how we consume content and perceive celebrity status. These platforms have not only revolutionized the way stories are told but also introduced a new breed of superstars, offering actors opportunities to gain recognition and connect with audiences on a global scale that rivals traditional commercial movie stardom. The accessibility of content through platforms like Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Disney+ has disrupted the established order in both Hollywood and Bollywood. Unlike conventional cinema, where fame often dictated success, OTT platforms prioritize diverse



CHAITANYA KUMAR PRASAD

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

Stock markets rise for 4th day

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

The 30-share BSE Sensex settled higher by 285.94 points or 0.35 per cent at 81,741.34 — its all-time closing high — with 20 of its components advancing and 10 ending lower. The index opened higher and jumped 372.64 points or 0.45 per cent to hit an intra-day high of 81,828.04. The NSE Nifty rose 93.85 points or 0.38 per cent to close at an all-time high of 24,951.15. During the day, it surged 127.3 points or 0.51 per cent to hit a high of 24,969.35. “The domestic market is attempting to cross above the psychological threshold of 25,000, as subdued Q1FY25 earnings and stretched valuations are curbing the challenge, while positive global trends and sector rotation are supporting the



traction,” Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. Positive global sentiment driven by expectations of an easing interest rate cycle by the US Fed and the RBI in the medium term, owing to benign inflation, ignited the rally, he added. As expected, the BoJ raised its interest rate while all eyes are on US Fed policy to be announced later in the evening. Among the Sensex stocks, JSW Steel, Asian Paints, Maruti Suzuki India, NTPC, Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone, Bharti Airtel, ITC and Tech Mahindra were the major

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

set on Jerome Powell’s commentary, Tapse said. The US Federal Reserve (Fed) will announce its fifth interest rate decision for this year later in the night, after a two-day meeting of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC). From this meeting, the Fed might offer hints about a possible rate cut in September. “Indian shares began Wednesday on a positive note, buoyed by strong cues from other Asian markets amid expectations for additional stimulus measures from Beijing to support its ailing economy,” Avdhit Bagkar Technical and Derivatives Analyst at StoxBox, said. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies jumped to a life-time peak of Rs 462.38 lakh crore (USD 5.52 trillion) on Wednesday helped by a four-day rally in benchmark indices, making investors richer by Rs 5.45 lakh crore. At the market close, the BSE smallcap gauge fell 0.14 per cent to in the broader market. However, BSE MidCap gauge jumped 0.86 per cent. During the day, both the indices hit their all-time high level.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India’s smartphone shipments fell two per cent year-on-year in June quarter, hurt by the heatwave and slower demand, as per a report by global research firm Counterpoint that showed Xiaomi reclaimed top spot in volume share and Samsung led in value terms. Notably, 5G smartphones captured their highest-ever share of 77 per cent in the overall shipments, according to Counterpoint’s Monthly India Smartphone Tracker. Another key takeaway was that India’s smartphone market hit its highest ever Q2 value, driven by the ongoing trend of premiumisation. “India’s smartphone shipments fell 2 per cent YoY in Q2 2024 (April-June),” it said. The decline was influenced by a heatwave, a seasonal slump, and slower demand from Q1 2024. “In response, OEMs (Original Equipment Manufacturers) hosted sales



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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Automaker Toyota Kirloskar Motor on Wednesday said it will set up a new manufacturing plant in Maharashtra at an investment of around Rs 20,000 crore. The company has inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Maharashtra government to examine the setting up of a greenfield manufacturing facility at Chhatrapati Sambhaji Nagar, Toyota Kirloskar Motor (TKM) said in a statement. Headquartered in Karnataka, TKM already has two manufacturing units located at Bidadi near Bengaluru. In Karnataka, the automaker, including its group companies, has invested more than Rs 16,000 crore and created close to 86,000 jobs in the entire value chain, it said. Toyota’s cumulative export contributions also stand at around Rs 32,000 crore thus representing the company’s export focus, it added. “Today’s MoU signing



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

X, Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnis shared the investment figure of Rs 20,000 crore for the plant. “Transforming Maharashtra, Developing Marathwada! Reaffirming its commitment to India; Toyota Kirloskar Motors is set to launch a Green Field Manufacturing Facility in Maharashtra!” he posted. TKM currently has an installed production capacity of 3.42 lakh vehicles at its two Bidadi-based units.

Encora expands strategic partnership with Cloud Software Group

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Encora has announced plans to expand its strategic relationship with Cloud Software Group to include extended product engineering and support. The pact includes product development and engineering services under a managed services model, supporting the evolving needs of global businesses of Cloud Software Group (CSG), a release said on Wednesday. As part of the existing partnership, Encora has established and operates a ‘TIBCO’ Center of Excellence (CoE) and Academy in India. The centre employs over 350 engineers across technologies, contributing to the development, quality assurance, and support for the TIBCO platform and other key products. “With the intent to build on the existing strategic relationship, Encora and Cloud Software Group have expanded the scope of engagement to include



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

SoftBank-backed Unicommerce to float IPO on August 6

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

SoftBank-backed SaaS platform Unicommerce eSolutions Ltd will launch its Initial Public Offering (IPO) on August 6. The initial share sale will conclude on August 8 and the bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on August 5, according to the Red Herring Prospectus (RHP). The issue is entirely an Offer For Sale (OFS) aggregating up to 2.56 crore equity shares by the selling shareholders. Since the IPO is completely an OFS, the entire proceeds will go to the selling shareholders. Under the OFS, SB Investment Holdings (UK) Ltd, an affiliate of Japan’s SoftBank, will offload 1.61 crore shares and promoter AceVector Limited (formerly known as Snapdeal Limited) will sell up to 94.38 lakh shares. Founded in 2012, Unicommerce eSolutions is India’s leading e-commerce enablement Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform. The company’s suite of SaaS solutions enables end-to-end management of e-commerce



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

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

Rupee closes 1 paisa higher at 83.72 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 1 paisa at 83.72 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, as the support from positive domestic equities was negated by month-end Dollar demand from importers. Forex traders said significant foreign fund outflows and overnight surge in crude oil prices weighed on the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the domestic currency opened 1 paisa higher than the previous day’s close. It slipped to 83.75 during the day and settled for the day 1 paisa higher at 83.72 (provisional) against US dollar. On Tuesday, the rupee closed flat at 83.73 against the American currency.



“We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on month-end dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies (OMCs). However, a positive tone in the domestic markets and weak US dollar may support the rupee at lower levels,” Anuj Choudhary, Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, said. Any fresh intervention by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) may also support the rupee, he said. “Investors may watch out for the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting outcome on Wednesday and

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Omaxe will consider challenging market regulator Sebi’s order that barred the company, its Chairman Rohtas Goel, Managing Director Mohit Goel and three others from the securities market for two years for misrepresentation in the company’s financial statements. The Sebi order had a negative impact on the company’s share prices. The stock of the company on Wednesday declined 4.99 per cent to Rs 152.20 apiece -- its lower circuit limit -- on the BSE.



It fell 5 per cent to hit the lower circuit limit of Rs 154.19 per piece on the NSE. Asked about the Sebi order and its future course of action, the Omaxe spokesperson said, “The company has not received any order from Sebi. Once received, the content will be verified and appropriate remedy available under the law, including filing of appeal will be contemplated.” “As per news articles, it appears more in the nature of accounting interpretations, which were duly explained through documentation, market practice and case laws. Rest we will be filing our response to stock exchanges within the stipulated time frame, on receipt of order,” the spokesperson added. In its 126-page final order, Sebi has also restrained three others -- Sudhangshu S Biswal, Arun Kumar Pandey,

misrepresentation/misstatement/manipulation in financial statements by Omaxe, the scrip price was directly or indirectly manipulated to maintain the value of the collateral kept by the promoter against the loan, Sebi noted. Furthermore, the fraud was never disclosed to shareholders of Omaxe, which misled them to remain invested in its shares or deal in its securities. Also misrepresentation of the books and accounts of Omaxe misled the investors in the securities market, it added. Accordingly, Sebi has barred six entities, including Omaxe, Rohtas Goel, Mohit Goel, and three others from “accessing the securities market and further prohibited from buying, selling or otherwise dealing in securities, directly or indirectly, or being associated with the securities market in any manner, whatsoever, for a period of two years.” The order came after the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) received a complaint against Omaxe alleging that the company conducted fraudulent transactions, diverted/siphoned of funds, misrepresented the financial statements, inflated turnover among others. As these allegations were serious in nature, the matter was taken up for further examination by Sebi, including a forensic audit into the affairs of Omaxe.

Key jute sector issues feature at advisory committee meeting

PTI ■ KOLKATA

The Indian Jute Mills Association highlighted several pressing issues at the 32nd Standing Advisory Committee (SAC) meeting in New Delhi, including the challenges faced by the sector due to declining demand for jute bags, officials said. Key stakeholders such as representatives from the sugar and plastic industry bodies participated in the meeting on Tuesday. The SAC makes recommendations to the Union government on the mandatory use of jute packaging materials, and packaging norms for essential commodities such as foodgrains and sugar. The Jute Commissioner’s Office (JCO) stressed upon the need for supporting the sector, the IJMA officials said. An estimated 40 million farmers and 3.5 lakh jute mill workers are dependent on the industry. The representatives of sugar industry bodies raised concerns about the pricing and quality of jute bags, urging the government to fix rates for sugar jute bags. “They also noted the reluctance by major buyers like some beverage giants to use jute bags, despite environmental benefits,” said industry sources present at the meeting. The non-compliance with government notifications by the sugar industry was also a



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

Gold rises ₹350; Silver jumps ₹1,100

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 350 to Rs 71,950 per 10 grams in the national capital on Wednesday, taking cues from domestic demand and global trends. In the previous session, the precious metal had closed at Rs 71,600 per 10 grams. Silver prices jumped Rs 1,100 to Rs 85,600 per kilogram on Wednesday. It had closed at Rs 84,500 per kg in the previous trade, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also increased by Rs 350 to Rs 71,600 per 10 grams from the previous close of Rs 71,250 per 10 grams. The commodity market experts suggested that the gold demand in the Indian markets remains high, driven by the recent import duty cuts and the upcoming festive season. “Participation in gold has been on an increasing trend. The prices of the yellow metal may further firm up correction as some participation continues to increase. We believe that prices of gold will increase from its current prices,” Chintan Mehta, CEO of Abans Holdings, said. Globally, Comex gold is trading higher at USD 2,465.50 per ounce, up by USD 13.60 per ounce from the previous close. “Comex gold extended gains following a 1 per cent gain yesterday, holding well above USD 2,400 per ounce buoyed primarily by safe-haven buying in response to the recent airstrike in Beirut by Israel,” Kaynat Chainwala, at Kotak Securities, said.



Sindhu storms into Olympics women's singles pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS The 29-year-old PV Sindhu stormed into the pre-quarterfinals of the Olympic Games' women's singles competition after beating Kristin Kuuba of Estonia in straight games here on Wednesday.

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

world as against the 13th position of the Indian, was completely out of sorts in the first game which Sindhu pocketed in 14 minutes. The 27-year-old Kuuba gave a fight in the second game, making a lot of retrievals, but Sindhu was just too good for her.

Olympics bet against climate change with Seine swimming

AP ■ PARIS With plans for athletes to swim the Seine River through the heart of Paris, Olympic organisers essentially bet against climate change's extreme weather. For several days it appeared they would lose - by ditching the swimming portion of triathlon races.

Government of India Ministry of Corporate Affairs Centre for Processing Accelerated Corporate Exit (C-PACE) IICA Building, 7th Floor, Plot P-6.7.8, Sector-5, IMT Manesar, Gurgaon, Haryana - 122050.

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

PTI ■ PARIS India's Lakshya Sen progressed to the pre-quarterfinals of the Olympic men's singles badminton competition with a stunning straight-game win over Indonesia's world number 4 Jonatan Christie in the final group match here on Wednesday.



In the first game, Christie opened up a 5-0 lead and soon moved to 8-2. However, Sen regrouped quickly, kept the shuttle flat and waited for his opponent to make mistakes.

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