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INDIA'S RONAK WINS BRONZE IN 110KG 11 SPORTS

## Modi to discuss with Zelenskyy ways to end war

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE n NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he was looking forward to sharing perspectives with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on a peaceful resolution of the Ukraine conflict.

The Prime Minister's comments came on Wednesday shortly before he embarked on a two-nation trip to Poland and Ukraine. Modi on Wednesday said his maiden visit to Poland will add momentum to the bilateral friendship and benefit the people of the two countries as he arrived here on the first leg of his two-nation visit during which he will also travel to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv. Modi, who will meet Poland's President Andrzej Sebastian Duda and hold bilateral talks with Prime Minister Donald Tusk, said he was looking forward to the various programmes in the Polish capital here.

"Landed in Poland. Looking forward to the various programmes here. This visit will add momentum to the India-Poland friendship and benefit the people of our nations," Modi said in a post on X soon after his arrival at the Warsaw military airport here.

On the first leg of the visit, Modi is visiting Polish capital city of Warsaw on August 21



Prime Minister Narendra Modi gives his autograph on a portrait presented to him by the Indian community members upon his arrival at a hotel, in Warsaw, Poland, on Wednesday

and 22. Modi will be in Kyiv for around seven hours on August 23 in the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Ukraine since the country became independent in 1991. In a departure statement, Modi, referring to the Ukraine conflict, said as a "friend and partner," India hopes for an early return of peace and stability in the region. "From Poland, I will be visiting Ukraine at the invitation of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. This is the first-ever visit by an

Indian Prime Minister to Ukraine," he said. "I look forward to the opportunity to build upon earlier conversations with President Zelenskyy on strengthening bilateral cooperation and share perspectives on peaceful resolution of the ongoing Ukraine conflict," he said. "As a friend and partner, we hope for an early return of peace and stability in the region," he added. Modi said he was confident that his visit to Warsaw and Kyiv "will serve as a natural continuation of extensive

contacts with the two countries and help create the foundation for stronger and more vibrant relations in the years ahead." The Prime Minister will travel to Kyiv from Poland in a 'Rail Force One' train that will take around 10 hours. The return trip will also be of the same duration. A number of world leaders including US President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz visited Kyiv by train after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Modi's visit to Kyiv comes nearly six weeks after his high-profile trip to Moscow which drew criticism from the US and some of its Western allies. India has been calling for resolution of the conflict through dialogue and diplomacy.

In his summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow last month, Modi said "a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace talks do not succeed amidst bombs and bullets." Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Monday said Modi's visit to Ukraine would be a "landmark and historic" one.

"Lasting peace can only be achieved through options that are acceptable to both parties. And it can only be a negotiated settlement," said Tanmay Lal, Secretary (West) in the MEA.

"On our part, India continues to engage with all stakeholders," he said.

"My visit to Poland comes as we mark 70 years of our diplomatic relations. Poland is a key economic partner in Central Europe," he said.

"Our mutual commitment to democracy and pluralism further reinforces our relationship. I look forward to meeting my friend Prime Minister Donald Tusk and President Andrzej Duda to further advance our partnership," he said.



UPENDRA KUSHWAHA, MANAN KUMAR MISHRA, KIRAN CHOUDHARY, MAMATA MOHANTA, GEORGE KURIAN, DHAIRYASHEEL PATIL, NITIN PATIL, RAVNEET SINGH BITTU

## NDA's push for majority mark in Rajya Sabha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE n NEW DELHI

BJP leader Kiran Choudhary, former Union Minister Upendra Kushwaha, Supreme Court lawyer Manan Kumar Mishra, renowned Kudumi community leader Mamata Mohanta, Union Minister George Kurian, nominees of BJP and NCP, Dhairyasheel Patil and Nitin Patil, Mission Ranjan Das and Rameshwar Teli and Union Minister of State Ravneet Singh Bittu were among those who filed their nomination papers for election to the 12 vacant seats in the Upper House on Wednesday.

For the BJP, the by-poll is crucial for pushing the NDA's Rajya Sabha tally past the majority mark, a key factor in passing of Bills.

The current effective strength of Rajya Sabha is 229. Of this, the BJP has 87 MPs, with the NDA allies taking the number to 105. The support of six nominated MPs takes the NDA's strength further up to

111, four short of half-way mark.

The Opposition has 84 members — Congress 26 and allies 58. Several of the 12 seats fell vacant as the sitting members, including Union Ministers Piyush Goyal, Sarbananda Sonowal and Jyotiraditya Scindia, were elected to the Lok Sabha.

From Haryana, BJP leader Kiran Choudhary filed her nomination for the Rajya Sabha by-poll on Wednesday, with some JJP rebel MLAs also extending support to her candidature. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini, State BJP President Mohan Lal Badoli, several party MLAs, the party's co-in-charge for the State Biplab Kumar Deb and some JJP rebels were among those present when Choudhary submitted her nomination papers.

Wednesday was the last day for filing of nominations for the Rajya Sabha by-poll.

The BJP named Choudhary as its nominee shortly after she resigned from the

Assembly on Tuesday, nearly two months after she left Congress. She represented the Tosham seat in the Haryana Assembly.

The by-poll for the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Haryana was necessitated after Congress leader Deepender Singh Hooda was elected to the Lok Sabha from Rohtak. His Rajya Sabha term was to end in April 2026.

In Jaipur, Union Minister Ravneet Singh Bittu filed his nomination as a BJP candidate for the Rajya Sabha by-poll from Rajasthan. He was accompanied by Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma, Deputy Chief Ministers Premchand Bairwa and Diya Kumari, and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel. Before submitting his nomination paper, Bittu, during a meeting of the BJP Legislature Party, expressed gratitude for his selection as the Rajya Sabha candidate from Rajasthan. Rajasthan has a total of 10 Rajya seats, one of which is vacant.

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Firefighters douse a fire which broke out following an explosion in a reactor pharma unit of pharmaceutical company Escientia, in Anakapalle, Andhra Pradesh, on Wednesday

## 13 killed in Andhra pharma unit fire

PTI n ANCHUTAPURAM (ANDHRA PRADESH)

The death toll in the fire accident at a pharmaceutical unit here on Wednesday rose to 13, officials said. Anakapalli District Collector Vijaya Krishnan said the fire broke out at 2:15 pm at Escientia Advanced Sciences Pvt Ltd at Anchutapuram in Anakapalli district. "The factory operates with 381 employees in two shifts. The blast occurred during lunch time. Therefore, staff presence was less, Krishnan told PTI, adding that the explosion is suspected to be electricity-related. As many as 33 injured people were shifted to different hospitals in Anakapalli and Anchutapuram while the Fire Department is engaged in rescue operations, deploying six fire tenders. Further, the collector said 13 people trapped in the unit were rescued. Meanwhile, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed grief over the loss of lives. The CM assured that the Government will stand by the families of the workers who died, said an official press release.

## WB icons join march for justice in Kolkata horror case

SAUGAR SENGUPTA n KOLKATA

Kolkata continued to remain loyal to its age old insignia — Michhil Nagari or City of Processions — with players and engineers, IT personnel on Wednesday joining the doctors in their ongoing protest movement against the RG Kar Medical College rape and murder case. Veteran players from myriad fields like football swimming, athletics etc joined the march for "Justice" for the 31-year-old lady doctor who was allegedly raped and murdered in the wee hours of August 8.

Among who joined the march were Chess Grand Master Dibyendu Barua, swimmer Bula Chowdhury, sprinter Jyotirmoyee Sikdar and national soccer player Gautam Sarkar. "We have joined not to get justice for the young lady doctor but also for the whole society... enough is enough we cannot breathe anymore in this vitiated system where everything is rotting... tomorrow it can be my family members or anyone else's... you need a foolproof system in place," said Chowdhury. Sarkar too lent his voice saying, "It is not the culprits that have to



be hanged but the system in which they flourish that has to go to the gallows... this rule of the corrupt, by the corrupt and for the corrupt must end because in the mire of this corruption these devils are born... who else than the State can do it... we demand justice for the State... if a doctor is not safe inside her own hospital ... if a journalist is not safe inside her own office... if a policewoman is not safe inside the police station... if a player is not safe inside the camp... or for that matter if a politician is not safe inside the legislature then who is safe in which place?"

A former Ranji Trophy player said, "It is the voice that has risen from within the society and that has to be addressed or else it will turn into a volcano... society is scared... I am a father of a girl who too is in a profession that I won't name and I want her safe... "I can just imagine what the old parents of the ill-fated doctor who was killed so brutally must be going through... gradually this fire will subside but the pain of losing an 'aulad' (offspring) that is burning the old parents by the hour will never subside... so it is the duty of the society to see the end of it."

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## Google, Meta in trouble over ads linked to fake lotteries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE n THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala police have issued a notice to Google to remove apps from its Play Store that are selling fake lotteries online in the name of the lottery run by the state. A similar notice was issued to Meta to remove advertisements of such fake lotteries from social media platforms Facebook, Whatsapp and Instagram managed by it, the State Police Media Centre (SPMC) said in a release on Wednesday. Police took the action after cyber patrolling revealed that 60 fake lottery apps, 25 fake Facebook profiles and 20 websites are connected to the scam, the



SPMC release said. It said that stringent legal action will be taken against those who are behind the fraud. Giving details of the scam, the police said that fake advertisements in the name of 'Kerala Megamillion Lottery' and 'Kerala Summer Season Dhamaka' have been circulating on social media

platforms like WhatsApp, Telegram and Instagram for some time stating that lotteries run by the state government can be bought online.

People also get messages on their phones stating that the Kerala government has started an online lottery, and on spending 40 rupees there is a chance to win up to 12 crore, it said. When a person sends 40 on the number mentioned in the message, they get a fake lottery ticket image on WhatsApp. Later, when the draw time is over, the fraudsters send artificially fabricated results that show that the ticket held has won a prize of 5 lakh, the release said.

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## Bharat Bandh against SC's quota ruling evokes mixed response

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE n NEW DELHI

Amid protest against the Supreme Court's decision to permit the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs), a daylong nationwide strike called by Dalits and Adivasi communities led to partial disruption in rail and road services in the States of Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Rajasthan on Wednesday, evoked a mixed reaction. The response was tepid in other parts of the country.

The bandh was by and large peaceful with some sporadic incidents of violence. Several videos of cops lathicharging protesters were doing the rounds on the Internet. One such video from Bihar's Patna has grabbed

eyeballs after a policeman accidentally hit a Sub Divisional Magistrate (SDM) with a baton while managing law and order in Patna.

The bizarre incident occurred at the busy Dak Bangla square in Bihar's capital city. Having broken barricades at the JP Golambar intersection, the protesters reached Dak Bangla, where, to control the situation, security forces resorted to a lathi-charge. In a viral video, the policeman is seen hitting Khandekar, who was in civil dress, with a stick. While the SDM is taken away by his colleagues, who tell him about the mistake. The SDM identified as Shrikant Kundlik Khandekar.

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## Dosa, butter chicken, Indian street food popular in Poland

PTI n WARSAW

Dosa, butter chicken and mango lassi, an unlikely combo for some perhaps but topping the list of favourites for Polish diners who say the dishes remind them of their travels to the country. More than 45 Indian restaurants are offering a variety of traditional Indian food across Poland, with the capital Warsaw City having at least a dozen of them, as per the listing of the Embassy of India in Poland here. And not just dining out, Indian food is popular as a takeaway option too across Poland.



India and Indian food are the talk of the town yet again as Warsaw is excited to receive Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who will arrive here for his two-day visit on

Wednesday. This will be the first official visit of an Indian Prime Minister to this country in 45 years. In Warsaw, Chetan Nandani, a Gujarati businessman, recently opened a restaurant called 'Chaiwala', possibly alluding to the moniker that has stuck with Modi since 2014. Nandani, who already ran a restaurant called 'Curry House', opened the 'Chaiwala' owing to the popular demand for Indian food. He claimed to have introduced Indian street food to Warsaw.

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## Greed for big catch poses risk to fish eaters

ARCHANA JYOTI n NEW DELHI

Several fishermen are illegally using commonly available pesticides, particularly synthetic pyrethroids to harvest high-value crustaceans or prawns in the lower stretches of the River Ganga in West Bengal. The practice may cause significant harm to the river's ecosystem in the long run, scientists from ICAR-Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI) have sounded alarms. "Research has shown that pesticide residues are present in fish tissues from the River Ganga, although concentrations are currently below levels deemed hazardous to human health.

"However, long-term exposure to these chemicals can impact reproductive health in fish and pose risks to wildlife and human populations dependent on the river for drinking water and livelihood," the researchers warned, calling for urgent stringent regulatory actions and community awareness. The illegal fishing practice is particularly prevalent in areas extending from Nabadwip to Balagarh in the State, said the study. Also, as per the representation of the local communities in the studied area, the scientists found that illegal intruders appear from neighbouring areas, specifically the villages adjacent to the river. "They target the lucrative



freshwater prawn (Macrobrachium spp.), which commands high prices in the market. Apart from this, a variety of Small Indigenous

Fish species are caught rampantly as the bye catch, including Puntius spp., Gudusia chapra, Salmostoma," said Ajay Saha,

Archisman Ray, Kausik Mondal, Basanta Kumar Das from ICAR-Central Inland Fisheries Research Institute (CIFRI), Barrackpore, and Vikas Kumar from ICAR-CIFRI, Prayagraj. Presently, majority of the fish are harvested using gill nets, cast nets, passive fish traps, or occasionally plant-based fish poisons, the banned pesticides are being rampantly used despite being banned.

"Indiscriminate use of synthetic pyrethroids, such as cypermethrin and deltamethrin, disrupts aquatic ecosystems by causing imbalances in fish populations and damaging aquatic flora.

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# Ram Madhav appointed BJP poll in-charge in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI | JAMMU



Ending the four-year-long hiatus from active politics, Ram Madhav, a senior RSS functionary and former BJP General Secretary is all set to play an active role in bringing the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) closer to the corridors of power in Jammu Kashmir.

Late Tuesday evening, Party President JP Nadra sprung a surprise when he appointed Ram Madhav in charge of the Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir along with Union Minister G Kishan Reddy.

Expressing his gratitude Ram Madhav posted on the micro-blogging site X, "I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister for the assignment given to me as the BJP's Election Incharge for J&K. From conversations, I realized that PM's singular and statesmanly mission is to continue to provide good governance to the people of J&K after the historic abrogation of Art 370 by fulfilling his commitment of handing over reins of power to them through free and fair elections, just like the ones he conducted for the parliament a few months ago".

Madhav also thanked Home Minister Amit Shah, party President JK Nadra, and his

parent organization RSS for extending their support in the new assignment.

According to insiders in the party, Ram Madhav was brought back to the party fold at the behest of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) to iron out differences within the Jammu Kashmir party unit and explore the possibilities of stable government formation after the culmination of the poll process.

His entry into the political landscape of Jammu Kashmir at this juncture is set to change the poll matrix after the culmination of the poll process. His contacts in the regional parties may come in handy during the government formation.

Ram Madhav was earlier removed as general secretary in September 2020. After the vot-

ers handed over a fractured mandate during the 2014 Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir, Ram Madhav along with Haseeb Drabu of the Peoples Democratic Party came together to stitch an alliance after which Mufti Mohd Sayeed took the oath of office as Chief Minister. After Mufti's demise on January 7, 2016, Ram Madhav again negotiated on behalf of the party with the PDP leadership to form the government headed by PDP Chief Mehbooba Mufti.

Meanwhile, Leader of the opposition Rahul Gandhi also arrived in Srinagar late Wednesday evening ahead of finalising a pre-poll alliance with the top brass of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference. He is accompanied by Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, KC Venugopal, and others. Rahul is scheduled to address party workers and senior leaders on Thursday at a private hotel while the party leaders may take time off to formalize the contours of the pre-poll alliance on the sidelines of the day-long meeting. Rahul Gandhi is also scheduled to visit Jammu later in the day to address a workers convention before heading back to New Delhi.

# Petition filed in HC for ED probe into irregularities in Kolkata RGK Hospital

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | KOLKATA

Even as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) subjected former principal of the RG Kar Medical College Sandip Ghosh to marathon grilling for sixth consecutive day on Wednesday trouble continued to pile up for him with a former Superintendent of the Hospital moving the Calcutta High Court seeking and order for the Enforcement Department to investigate the financial irregularities that had been taking place in the medical college for the past several years.

The petition was filed by Dr Akhtar Ali a former superintendent of the hospital who has claimed that he had brought the alleged financial issues before the vigilance commission and the State Health Department but nothing happened.

"Sandip Ghosh has so much of clout that he was transferred twice and was reinstated in his post within a matter of days" adding "as I raised my voice I was transferred out of the college and at present I fear for my life after moving the High

Court as I am receiving threats." Incidentally after about an year of such issues being raised the State Government formed a Special Investigation Team comprising several senior IPS officers on Monday to look into the alleged complaints of financial irregularities. The SIT has issued summons to Sandip Ghosh to appear before it.

"This is a ploy to take him into custody and destroy evidence before CBI or any other agency can get hold of him ... so this petition has been filed before the High Court so that this medical scam that has plagued the entire Health Department and all the State-owned hospitals gets brushed under the carpet like the previous scams ... this has to be unearthed because the doctors murder is not a one-off case ... it should be found out whether some people were trying to silence her,"

said one of the lawyers of Ali adding the scam could run into hundreds of crores and that Ghosh was only one of many fixers that was working for a Statewide "medical mafia."

# Health scam of crores exposed, Delhi Govt Minister should resign: Vijender

STAFF REPORTER | NEW DELHI



Leader of Opposition in Delhi Assembly Vijender Gupta reacted sternly over the corruption in the construction of hospitals exposed in a note sent by three senior officers of Delhi Government to the Health Minister of Delhi regarding the lack of health services and has demanded resignation of the Health Minister. He said that the note sent by the officers of Delhi Government to the Minister has exposed the claims of the Delhi Government which is boasting about the health services of Delhi all over the world. Corruption worth crores of rupees has taken place.

According to Gupta, the construction of 24 hospitals, including major facilities like LNJP Hospital and Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar Hospital, has seen cost escalate by up to 100 per cent. Many of these projects are severely behind schedule. For instance, the new block at LNJP Hospital is only 60 per cent complete after nearly 4 years, despite an initial 30-month timeline. The misuse of funds extends to the polyclinic project as well. Out of 94 planned polyclinics, only 52 have been constructed, despite expenditures

exceeding the sanctioned budget. He mentioned that the Delhi government had planned the construction/renovation of 94 polyclinics, for which a sum of Rs 168.58 crore was sanctioned and given to PWD. However, PWD spent Rs 220 crore on constructing only 52 polyclinics. Similarly, there has been massive corruption in the construction works carried out in 24 hospitals of the Delhi government, including LNJP Hospital, Satyawadi Harishchandra Hospital, Bhagwan Mahavir Hospital, Guru Gobind Singh Hospital, Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Hospital, Sanjay Gandhi Memorial Hospital, Acharya Shri Bhikshu Hospital, Rao Tula Ram Hospital, Dada Dev Hospital, Chacha Nehru Bal Chikitsalaya, Aruna Asaf Ali Hospital, Deepchand Bandhu Hospital, etc. Gupta mentioned that the cost of these 24 under-construction hospitals has increased by 100 per cent, and the construction work has come to a standstill.

Gupta highlighted a specific case study of the LNJP Hospital new block project, which was initially contracted at Rs 465.52 crore but has now seen costs spiral to Rs 1125 crore. "This scandal exposes the hollow claims of the Delhi government about world-class healthcare," Gupta stated. "The note from senior officials to the Health Minister reveals corruption worth hundreds of crores of rupees."

In response to these findings, the Delhi BJP leadership plans to meet with the anti-corruption branch (ACB) chief to file an official complaint. They are demanding a thorough investigation into all aspects of this multi-crore scam and calling for the immediate resignation of Delhi's Health Minister. Gupta added, "The people of Delhi deserve answers and accountability. We will pursue this matter to ensure that those responsible for this gross mismanagement and potential corruption are brought to justice."

# ICGS Sujay makes port call at Jakarta



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE | NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard's Offshore Patrol Vessel (OPV) ICGS Sujay with integral helicopter made a port call at Jakarta, Indonesia on Wednesday as part of its ongoing overseas deployment to East Asia. This marks a pivotal milestone in diplomatic maritime engagements.

During the two-day visit, the crew of ICGS Sujay will engage in professional interactions focusing on Marine Pollution Response (MPR), Maritime Search and Rescue (M-SAR) and Maritime Law Enforcement. Activities include professional interactions with BAKMALA (Indonesia Coast Guard), Cross deck training, joint yoga sessions, friendly sports events and Passage Sea Exercise (PASSEX) with the BAKMALA. The visit aims not only to strengthen ties between the Indian Coast Guard and their Indonesian counterparts but also to showcase India's ship-building capabilities, supporting the concept of "Atamirbhar Bharat."

Additionally, the 10 National Cadet Corps (NCC) cadets aboard ICGS Sujay will partici-

partate in a Environment Protection Walkathon towards marine plastic pollution in collaboration with local youth organisations, contributing to the GoI initiative "Puneet Sagar Abhiyan" and enhancing international outreach. In a maiden initiative, two women ICG officers embarked onboard for the Overseas Deployment will also be representing "Women in Maritime Security and Safety" while interacting and participating in bilateral cooperative engagements. ICG signed a Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with BAKMALA on 06 Jul 2020 towards enhanced maritime cooperation and institutionalised its cooperative engagements.

The overseas deployment is in line with the Indian Coast Guard's commitment to fostering bilateral relationships under the ambit of MoU and holds significance in reinforcing bilateral relationships with key maritime agencies, crucial for ensuring safety, security, and environmental sustainability of the seas in the region, while addressing contemporary maritime challenges.

# Bharat Bandh against SC's quota ruling...

From page 1

Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Rajeev Mishra described the incident as a human error, and said the police officer did not recognise the official. The Patna District Administration later confirmed that the incident was an honest mistake and said no disciplinary action will be taken against the police officer.

Meanwhile, the response to the Bharat Bandh or pan-India shutdown has been largely mixed; its maximum impact was seen in Bihar, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh. As many as 21 organisations including the National Confederation of Dalit and Adivasi Organisations (NACDAOR) have called for Bharat Bandh against the Supreme Court's decision to permit the sub-classification of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs). Left parties, Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), Congress, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Bahujan Samajwadi Party have extended support to the nationwide bandh.

In Jehanabad district, clashes occurred between protesters and security personnel on National Highway-83 near Unta Chowk, leading to the detention of five persons. In other districts, including Madhepura, Muzaffarpur, Saran, Begusarai, Hajipur, and Purnea, protesters attempted to block traffic and burned tyres, but were quickly dispersed by security forces. At Darbhanga and Buxar railway stations, a large number of protesters halted the Bihar Sampark Kranti and Farakka

Express trains, following which the Railway Protection Force (RPF) and district police were deployed to cleared the stations. East Central Railway Chief Public Relations Officer Sharswati Chandra confirmed that train services were disrupted in Ara, Chausa (Buxar), Darbhanga, Begusarai, and Rajgir, but the situation was promptly controlled.

The bandh had little impact on normal life in Uttar Pradesh, even as Dalit groups and political parties held demonstrations and marches in parts of the state. A group of protesters held a march and raised slogans in Agra. BSP workers disrupted traffic on MG road, climbed atop the gate of the collectorate and raised slogans.

They also tried to shut shops in the city. The protesters presented a memorandum to the district magistrate. In Lucknow, traffic was affected on key routes in and near Hazratganj as BSP workers held a demonstration. In Kanpur, some shops near the BSP's office were closed while public buses plied as usual. Similar scenes were witnessed in Unnao, Aligarh, Muzaffarnagar, Sambhal, Jalaun, Etawah, Mathura, Hathras and Gorakhpur, among other districts.

The bandh has voked a mixed response in Chhattisgarh, barring tribal-dominated regions. Several shops and commercial establishments remained closed in parts of Bastar and Surguja divisions, largely inhabited by tribals, and Mohla-Manpur-Ambagarh Chowki and Dhantari districts.

# SC resumes hearing on LMV...

From page 1

The bench, also comprising justices Hrishikesh Roy, P S Narasimha, Pankaj Mishra and Manoj Misra, said as it has already heard the matter for some time and hence, it will proceed with the hearing without waiting for Parliament to clear amendments in the MV Act. The legal question has given rise to various disputes over payment of claims by insurance companies in accident cases involving transport vehicles being driven by those having licences to drive LMVs.

Earlier on April 16, the bench had deferred the hearing on the issue after the attorney general submitted a note indicating that the consultations carried out by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways have culminated in proposals for amending the MV Act that will be put before the newly-constituted Lok Sabha following general elections.

"By its communication dated April 15, 2024, the Ministry has placed on record the details of the proposed amendment to the statute. "In view of the impending General Elections, the Attorney General for India requests that these proceedings may be deferred until the last week of July 2024 so as to enable the Union government to bring forth a proposal for the amendment of the Motor Vehicles Act 1988 before the newly constituted Parliament following the General Elections," the bench had said.

The impact, if any, of the amendments which are

proposed on the reference will be decided in the course of the hearing, it had said while deferring the hearing. Prior to this, the apex court had asked the Centre if a change in law is warranted on the legal question of whether a person holding a driving licence for a light motor vehicle is entitled to legally drive a transport vehicle of a particular weight. It had also sought the assistance of the attorney general in dealing with the legal question. Observing that these are policy issues impacting "the livelihood of lakhs of people", the court had said the government needs to take a "fresh look" at the matter, which needs to be taken up at the policy level.

"Whether a person holding a driving licence in respect of a light motor vehicle (LMV) could, on the strength of that licence, be entitled to drive a transport vehicle of light motor vehicle class having unladen weight not exceeding 7,500 kg," reads the legal question being dealt with by the court.

The bench had said ascertaining the position of the union ministry will be necessary after it was told that the apex court's 2017 verdict in the case of Mukund Dewangan versus Oriental Insurance Company Limited was accepted by the Centre and rules were amended to align those with the judgment.

In the Mukund Dewangan case, a three-judge bench of the top court had held that transport vehicles, the gross weight of which does not exceed 7,500 kg, are not excluded from the definition of an LMV.

# INBRIEF

**QR CODE MACHINES FOR TICKETS AT NFR**  
Maligaon: In order to promote the vision of 'Digital India' and facilitate cashless transactions at booking counters across the railway stations over Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR), a total of 191 QR code machines have been provided at 422 locations over five divisions at Kathar, Rangliya, Alipurduar, Lumding and Tinsukia. 587 counters at these locations have been covered till date. Further, 189 additional QR code machines are in advance stage of procurement, and will soon be installed at selected stations.



**ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND GREEN HYDROGEN WORKSHOP**  
Amritsar: An open-door workshop titled "Energy efficiency and green hydrogen for rural India of 2047 and beyond" was organised by the Department of Chemistry, Guru Nanak Dev University, in collaboration with Brunel University London, UK. Expert lectures were delivered by leading global experts

**GNDU RELEASES EXAM FORM, FEE SCHEDULE**  
Amaravati: The online examination form submission and fee payments for December 2024 exams of under graduate Semester 1,3,5,7,9 and post graduate Semester 1, 3 (except BEd Sem-1st and Law TYC/FYC Sem-1st) for regular and private students through online portal collegeadmissions.gndu.ac.in/loginNew.aspx has been scheduled as per below mentioned dates. Examination forms for annual system examinations (special chance/additional subject, re-appear, improvement) will be submitted manually at university cash counter, said Prof Shalini Babel, Professor Incharge Examination

**RPF OF NFR NABS 225 ILLEGAL MIGRANTS**  
Maligaon: Continuing the fight to detect illegal migrants (Bangladeshis and Rohingyas) the Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway has nabbed 225 illegal migrants and 16 Indian agents during checks across various stations of N.F. Railway from January 1 to August 15, 2024. In the present month itself till 15 th of August, RPF of N. F. Railway has detained 22 illegal migrants. In an incident on 01 st of August 2024, RPF team of Agartala jointly with GRP/Agartala conducted a routine drive at Agartala Railway Station.



**PRITHVI AWARDS 2024 ON SEP 14**  
New Delhi: Prithvi Awards 2024 and ESG Global Conference is a groundbreaking initiative by ESG Research Foundation, (Section 8 Not for Profit organisation registered with Govt. of India) to recognise sustainability icons and leaders in ESG and bring together ESG experts to have evocative discussions related to

**RAJ IV-A POWER HANDED OVER TO APRAAVA**  
Gurugram: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPCDL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharatna CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power, handed over a project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle), viz, Rajasthan IV-A Power Transmission Limited to M/s Apraava Energy Private Limited (AEPL). The project will facilitate evacuation of power from Rajasthan Renewable Energy Zone Ph-IV (Jaisalmer/Barmer Complex).

**NMDC STEEL FIRST MAJOR PRODUCTION MILESTONE**  
Hyderabad: NMDC Steel Limited (NSL) proudly announces a landmark achievement of its production capabilities. Today, this ultra-modern, state-of-the-art plant has successfully produced 1 Million Ton (MtT) of Hot Rolled Coil (HRC), reaching this milestone four days ahead of the first anniversary of commencement of HR Coil production. These achievements highlight NSL's commitment to operational excellence and innovation. The company continues to push the boundaries by aspiring to be a leader in the steel manufacturing sector with a sole focus on efficiency, sustainability, and technological advancement.



# WB icons...

From Page 1

Elsewhere at the College Street a swarm of retired and working engineers joined a procession demanding "justice." One of them who worked with the State Government for 35 years said, "I retired in 2005 ... went through the hoodlum years of the 1970s when Bengal lost hundreds of young people to naxalite movement and police atrocities ... but not like this ... I was not scared then as I am scared now."

Samar Mahapatra another mechanical engineer who worked on a top post with the Indian Railways said he had severe arthritis and could not walk properly "but see the dead doctor has brought me here and I am walking with a stick to demand justice for her ... my daughter is in the US ... I hope she remains safe there... my solidarity with the family ... and when this hue and cry subsides I will visit the family of the victim and continue to be by their side till I die."

Meanwhile, even a day after the Supreme Court ordering deployment of Central

Industrial Security Force for the security of RGKMCH there was no sign of the ongoing medical strike ending with the several thousand junior doctors on Wednesday marching to the Swasthya Bhawan (Health Headquarters). "We came to seek solution to a number of issues like foolproof security, inquiry into complains of corruption in all the State-run medical colleges and hospitals and appointment of full-time principals in medical colleges but there was no assurance coming from the authorities ... it seems that the Health Department is under serious pressure from higher authorities," said an agitating doctor from the RG Kar Hospital.

The doctors' march came in tandem with a DIG of the CISF on Wednesday visiting the hospital with a posse of security personnel. "The CISF officials had come to make a survey and inspect the hospital premises before they take charge ... they visited the principal's chamber and some other areas and then left," a source in the hospital said.

# NDA's push for majority mark...

From Page 1

Of the nine seats, BJP has four and Congress has five. Bittu, grandson of former Punjab chief minister Beant Singh, joined BJP in March this year and contested the Lok Sabha polls. He lost, but was appointed as the Union Minister of State for Food Processing Industries and Railways.

Former Union minister Upendra Kushwaha and Supreme Court lawyer Manan Kumar Mishra, filed their nomination papers for the by-polls to two Rajya Sabha seats in Bihar. Top leaders of the NDA in the State, including Chief Minister Nitish Kumar and his deputies, Samrat Choudhary and Vijay Kumar Sinha, were present at the Vidhan Sabha secretariat during the filing of nomination papers by the two candidates. The by-polls have been necessitated by the election to the Lok Sabha of sitting Rajya Sabha MPs Vivek Thakur (BJP) and Misa Bharti (RJD). Mishra, who began his political career with the 2009 Lok Sabha election he contested unsuccessfully from Valmiki Nagar on a BSP ticket, switched over to the BJP five years later and canvassed in favour of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Kushwaha, who heads Rashtriya Lok Morcha, is seeking election to the Upper House after having lost the recently held Lok Sabha polls. He asserted that as a member of the Upper House, he will press for judicial reforms and doing away with the Collegiums System

Notably, in the last 10 years, despite enjoying a comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha, the NDA numbers have remained short in the Rajya Sabha compelling the Government to rely on 'neutral' parties such as BJD and YSRCP to get Bills passed. With the two parties having changed tack - the BJP defeated BJD in Odisha this time, and allied with YSRCP's rival TDP in Andhra Pradesh - a boost in the Upper House will provide the NDA much-needed relief.

# Greed for big...

From Page 1

"These chemicals trigger a knock-down effect in crustaceans, leading to their immediate death and impacting other aquatic life forms, the authors said adding that there is an urgent need for stringent regulatory actions and continuous outreach programs to curb the illegal use of pesticides. "They might also cause mutations in amphibians and insects. Moreover, juvenile fishes are more susceptible to these chemicals, and such detrimental effects on juvenile fishes and reproductive adults may threaten river fish population dynamics. The threat of bioaccumulation looms as birds and otters consume poisoned fish while wild animals drink water from poisoned rivers," said the study.

"Raising awareness about the harmful effects and enforcing laws against toxic fishing practices is crucial to preserving the Ganga's ecological integrity.

Also, the scientists suggested that "further research is needed to quantify the extent of pesticide use, its environmental and health impacts, and to develop effective strategies for monitoring and controlling this destructive practice." Based on the information gathered from the fishermen, the researchers revealed that there is continuous poaching in the lower and some areas of the upper Hooghly estuary, using pesticides belonging to the synthetic pyrethroid group. Our study also demonstrated that long-term exposure to cypermethrin, even at an environmentally relevant dose, may affect the reproductive potential of fish. Therefore, fishermen have been warned to be vigilant and avoid eating contaminated fish, noted the authors.

Measures like strict fishing regulations and continuous outreach programmes are necessary to maintain the natural river system, they added.

# Google, Meta in trouble over ads linked to fake lotteries

From Page 1

Subsequently, someone claiming to be a government representative calls on the phone and asks the 'ticket holder' to transfer a certain amount to a bank account towards 'GST' and 'stamp duty' to receive the prize money, it said. After the demanded amount is transferred, they ask for more money claiming that the RBI

is holding on to the prize. "Victims are provided with artificially produced documents and videos to make every step seem believable," the SPMC release said. The police have urged the public to be careful not to fall prey to such online lottery scams and to immediately call on the number 1930 if they suspect that a financial fraud is taking place.

# e-office system launched in C'garh to ensure transparency in administration

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

In a major move towards transparency and good governance, Chhattisgarh Chief Minister on Wednesday launched the e-office system. Swagatam, and his office online portals at the Mahanadi Mantralaya in Raipur.

Home Minister Vijay Sharma and Food Minister Dayaldas Baghel were present.

Sai said his government was promoting the use of IT in all departments for transparency and zero tolerance against corruption in government work.

The Swagatam Portal will provide appointments to common people in the ministry through an online application facility for redressal of their grievances.

They won't have to face inconveniences like long queues and



delays. They will be informed about the time of appointment through SMS and e-mail. This will save them a lot of time.

The Chief Minister's Office (CMO) portal will provide information about welfare schemes. People will be able to know about the

art, culture, history and other features of Chhattisgarh.

The e-office system has been launched to make government functioning transparent and organised.

Sai launched this system by issuing online instructions to Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain to implement it in all government departments.

It will be first implemented in the General Administration Department. An official communiqué said that the documents will be digitised for convenience and time efficiency.

It will eliminate the possibility of document manipulation, documents getting lost or missing, and improve security.

Issues will be resolved within the time limit, and monitoring work progress will be easier.

It will also be easy for the general public to know about the status of their applications.

# 'Rang Parab' cultural event from today

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

The Chhattisgarh Culture Department will organise a three-day 'Rang Parab' drama series from Thursday at the Mahant Ghasidas Museum in Raipur to provide a glimpse of folk culture.

The aim is to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the state.

Artists will portray the tribal and folk culture of Chhattisgarh through plays.

On the first day, the 'Gudna' play will depict the lifestyle of the Dewar tribe. On the second day, 'Kalankar' will present the true events from the lives of local folk artists.

On the concluding day, the 'Adigatha' play will present the ancient history of Sitabengra and art culture based on Kalidas' Meghdoot.



# Sick pigeon fails to fly at I-Day function, SP seeks action

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

After a pigeon which was possibly sick failed to fly when it was released as a symbol of peace and freedom, the Superintendent of Police in Mungeli in Chhattisgarh sought action against officials responsible for the lapse.

At the Independence Day function, BJP MLA and chief guest Punnul Mohle, Mungeli Collector Rahul Deo and Superintendent of Police Girija Shankar Jaiswal were handed pigeons to release them.

The birds released by the MLA and the Collector flew off. However, when the SP released the pigeon, it fell to the ground.

The video of the bird falling on the ground went viral on social media.



Official sources on Wednesday said Jaiswal has written to the Collector, seeking disciplinary action against the officials responsible.

"This (happened) as a sick pigeon was presented," Jaiswal wrote. "Certainly, the officer responsible for this work has not discharged his responsibility properly."

# Bharat Bandh evokes mixed response in C'garh

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh gave a mixed response to a Bharat Bandh called on Wednesday. Shops and schools were shut in the tribal pockets of regions like Bastar and Surguja which also saw major traffic jams on major highways.

The shutdown was called by Dalit and Adivasi organizations in protest against the Supreme Court ruling permitting the principle of the creamy layer within Scheduled Castes (SC) and ST reservations.

While the Congress extended moral support to the protest, business communities in Chhattisgarh were divided. The Bastar Chamber of Commerce supported the bandh but the Raipur Chamber of Commerce did not back the



protest.

In Raipur, the bandh had minimal impact. Most schools remained open in the Chhattisgarh capital.

However, activists went around urging residents in various neighborhoods to participate in the shutdown.

Durg and Bhilai also experienced little disruption, with routine activities continuing largely unaffected.

In districts like Gariyaband, Mungeli, and Kanker, the shutdown evoked a mixed response. Public transport was crippled and schools, colleges and markets were shut.

In Ambikapur, the Sarva Adivasi Samaj took out a rally from the Collectorate Chowk, in support of the bandh. But transport services were operational. The most

pronounced impact was observed in the Bastar division where there were major disruptions on key highways in southern Chhattisgarh, with significant traffic jams reported.

The Jagdalpur-Sukma route, a vital link between Chhattisgarh and the states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, was blocked by protesters, leading to long queues of vehicles.

Similarly, the Jagdalpur-Bijapur National Highway 63 was jammed. Members of the Adivasi community took to the streets and blocked the road, bringing traffic to a standstill.

In Kanker district, protesters entered the Shaheed Ram Kumar Yadav Government Girls Higher Secondary School, dismissing students for the day. Demonstrators also blocked a section of the National Highway by felling trees, causing major traffic disruptions.

In Kondagaon, SC-ST community members gathered at the Ambedkar statue and enforced the closure of shops.

The bandh received support from several political parties including the Bhim Army and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP).



New generation students from a private school on Wednesday visited the photo exhibition at the Town Hall in Raipur to gain knowledge about freedom fighters from Chhattisgarh.

# Urban bodies to get Rs 900 crore for augmenting civic amenities: Sao

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

In a bid to augment civic amenities in urban areas, the Urban Administration Department in Chhattisgarh is going to allocate Rs 900 crore to urban bodies.

Minister for Urban Administration Arun Sao on Wednesday said the allocations were made as per the demands of people in Jan Darshan programmes and proposals given at the 'public grievances' fortnight.

To strengthen the urban infrastructure, Rs 450 crore has been allocated while Rs 450 crore is to be approved under the 15th Finance Commission, he said.

A total of around 1,30,000 applications during the redressal fortnight, and 48,000 were sorted out at the camps itself, said the Minister.



The demands of construction works have not commenced due to the rainy season.

The complaints received about door-to-door garbage disposal, cleaning of drains, water logging and issues of

**To strengthen the urban infrastructure, Rs 450 crore has been allocated while Rs 450 crore is to be approved under the 15th Finance Commission**

cleanliness were resolved on the spot, he said.

**कार्यालय आयुवत**  
आदिम जाति तथा अनुसूचित जाति विकास  
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क्रमांक/07/पीएमटी-पीईटी/2024-25/5264 नवा रायपुर दिनांक 20/08/2024

युवा कैरियर निर्माण योजना (यथा संशोधित 2021) के अंतर्गत वर्ष 2024-25 में पी. ई.जी.नियंत्रिका एवं पी. नैडिकल की प्रवेश परीक्षाओं की तैयारी हेतु प्रतिष्ठित कोचिंग संस्थाओं से ऑनलाइन "स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति" का तृतीय आनंजग

कार्यालयीन "स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति" क्रमांक/07/पीएमटी-पीईटी/2024-25/4504, दिनांक 31.07.2024 निविदा क्रमांक 155726 में पी. ई.जी.नियंत्रिका एवं पी. नैडिकल प्रवेश परीक्षाओं की तैयारी हेतु कोचिंग करने के लिए कोचिंग संस्थाओं से ऑनलाइन "स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति" के द्वितीय आनंजग के तहत दिनांक 16.08.2024 तक आवेदन केवल 02 संस्थाओं से प्रस्ताव प्राप्त हुए हैं। पृष्ठि स.ग. शासन गण्डार क्रय निरयन 2002 (यथा संशोधित 2022) अनुसार कम से कम 03 संस्थाओं से प्रस्ताव प्राप्त होने पर ही प्रस्ताव खोलने की प्रक्रिया की जावेगी। अतः उक्त स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति के तहत ऑनलाइन प्रस्ताव प्राप्त करने की अंतिम तिथि में निम्नानुसार बुद्धि की जाती है।

1	स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति का ऑनलाइन प्रदर्शन की तिथि	22.08.2024 दोपहर 12:00 बजे से
2	निर्धारित प्रश्न में प्रस्ताव ऑनलाइन प्रेषित करने की अंतिम तिथि	02.09.2024 सायं 5:00 बजे तक
3	ऑफलाइन स्टडी मटेरियल एवं एफ.डी.आर. गमा करने की तिथि	03.09.2024 सायं 5:00 बजे तक
4	प्राप्त प्रस्ताव को समिति के समक्ष खोला जाना	04.09.2024 दोपहर 03:00 बजे
5	तकनीकी मूल्यांकन एवं अन्य कार्यवाही/जानकारी की सूचना	पृथक से दी जावेगी

पूर्व में जारी "स्वच्छि की अभिव्यक्ति" में निरयन / निर्देश यथावत् रहेंगे।

(नरेन्द्र कुमार दुर्गमा)  
आयुवत  
G-242501932/4 आदिम जाति तथा अनुसूचित जाति विकास नवा रायपुर अटल नगर (छगम0)

**UBI's U Genius Quiz Competition tomorrow**

**Union Bank of India**

STAFF REPORTER n RAIPUR

The Union Bank of India (UBI) will hold the U Genius Quiz Competition for school students at the Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Auditorium in Raipur on Friday.

About 800 students from 84 schools in Chhattisgarh will participate.

UBI is organising this competition nationally. One winner will be selected from each city, and the final round will be held in Mumbai.

The winners will be awarded Rs 2 lakh as first prize and Rs 1 lakh as second prize.

# 'Inculcating family values needed to stop women's harassment'

STAFF REPORTER n BILASPUR

The Vice Chancellor of Guru Ghasidas Vishwavidyalaya, Prof Alok Kumar Chakrawal, on Wednesday said that promoting family values was essential to avert sexual harassment of women at the workplace.

He said this at a workshop on sexual harassment. This was held at the university auditorium under the joint aegis of the Women's Study Centre and the Internal Complaints Committee of the central university.

He highlighted that there was a tradition in India of propagating values that each individual should uphold. It is



the responsibility of families to ensure that children learn not only academics but also social values and respect for women.

At the workshop, Naushina Ali, an advocate at the Chhattisgarh High Court, provided information about various acts available to ensure women's safety and stressed the need to remain vigilant and sensitive to sexual harassment.

Annapurna Tiwari, another advocate at the High Court, said both women and men were equal and there should be mutual respect and cooperation between them.

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# 16 MPs, 135 MLAs face charges of crimes against women, WB tops: ADR

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

As many as 151 sitting MPs and MLAs have declared cases related to crimes against women in their election affidavits, with West Bengal having the highest number of lawmakers facing such cases, according to a recent report by a poll rights body.

For the report, the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) examined 4,693 out of 4,809 affidavits of sitting MPs and MLAs submitted to the Election Commission of India during elections between 2019 and 2024.

The organisation identified 16 MPs and 135 MLAs facing cases related to crimes against women. West Bengal tops the list with 25 sitting MPs and MLAs facing charges related to crimes against women, followed by Andhra Pradesh with 21 and Odisha with 17,



according to the report that comes amid the nationwide protests over the alleged rape and murder of a trainee doctor in a State-run hospital in Kolkata and sexual assault of two children in Thane. According to the report, there are 16 sitting MPs and MLAs who have declared cases related to rape under Indian

Penal Code (IPC) section 376, which carries a minimum sentence of 10 years and can be extended to life imprisonment. Of these, two are MPs and 14 MLAs. The charges include repeated offences against the same victim, further underscoring the gravity of these cases. Among political parties, the

Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has the highest number of representatives (54 MPs and MLAs) with declared cases related to crimes against women, followed by the Congress with 23 and the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) with 17, according to the report. Both BJP and Congress have five sitting lawmakers each facing rape charges.

The ADR has issued strong recommendations in response to these findings. It stressed on the need for political parties to refrain from giving tickets to candidates with criminal backgrounds, especially those with charges of rape and other crimes against women. The report called for the fast-tracking of Court cases against MPs and MLAs, ensuring professional and thorough investigations by police. The ADR urged voters to avoid electing candidates with such charges.

# India-US to review defence ties, during Rajnath's four-day visit



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

India and the US will review the entire gamut of their defence ties during Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's four-day visit there commencing Friday, Defence Ministry announced here on Wednesday. The forthcoming visit will further boost the comprehensive global strategic partnership between the two countries.

In Washington, Rajnath will hold talks with Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin and National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan among others.

He is also likely to review the situation in the Indo-Pacific during talks with Austin, sources said. China is flexing its muscle in this strategically crucial region and has all along opposed Quad combine claiming it will lead to militarization of the zone. Quad comprises, India, US, Australia and Japan. Sources also said Rajnath may also discuss the issue of non-state players using drones to target merchant shipping after the Israel military action in Gaza. India's plan to procure 31 MQ-9B Predator drones, the proposed joint manufacturing of Stryker

infantry combat vehicles and co-production of GE F414 engines in India are likely to figure prominently in Rajnath's parleys with US defence establishment, officials said.

"The visit is expected to further deepen and broaden the India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership," the Defence Ministry said announcing Singh's trip to the US from August 23 to 26. "The visit comes in the backdrop of the growing momentum in India-US relations and defence engagements at multiple levels," it said.

Rajnath will also chair a high-level roundtable meeting with the US defence industry on the ongoing and future defence collaborations. He will also interact with the Indian community during the visit. US has emerged as one of the biggest defence exporter to India in the last two decades with figures touching 15 billion dollar mark.



# Desi 700 MW reactor now fully operational

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

India's second home-built 700 MW nuclear power reactor at Kakrapar Atomic Power Station (KAPS) in Gujarat on Wednesday started operating at its full capacity, the plant operator said.

The Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) said Unit 4 at KAPS had been operating at 90 per cent capacity before raising it to full power of 700 MWe.

"The full power operation of KAPS-4 after the smooth operation of its twin unit KAPS-3 at full power demonstrates the strength of the first of a kind indigenous 700 MW Pressurised Heavy Water Reactor (PHWR) design," the NPCIL said. The KAPS-4 unit achieved first criticality on December 17 last year and commenced commercial operations on March 31.

The power level of the unit, which commenced commercial operation on March 31, 2024 was raised in line with the permissions of the regulatory authority, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB).

India is building 14 more 700 MW nuclear power reactors of the same design which are expected to commence operations progressively by 2031-32.

The NPCIL presently operates a fleet of 24 reactors with a total capacity of 8180 MW and has eight units with a capacity of 6800 MW under construction. In addition, 10 more reactors with a total capacity of 7000 MW are in pre-project activities.

These are expected to be completed progressively, taking the installed nuclear power capacity in the country to 22480 MW by 2031-32, the NPCIL said.



# Shah to review Naxal coordination, security at meeting in Chhattisgarh

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah will review the inter-state coordination among the Naxal-affected States at a high-level meeting to be held in Chhattisgarh's Raipur on Saturday.

At a separate meeting on the same day, Shah will also review security and development initiatives in Maoists-hit areas of Chhattisgarh, sources said here on Wednesday.

The Chief Secretaries and Directors General of police of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, besides top security officials of the central Government are expected to attend the inter-State coordination meeting.

During his three-day tour of Chhattisgarh, Shah will also visit the Mahaprabhu Vallabhacharya Ashram in Raipur, review the functioning of the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) in the State Capital and attend a meeting related to the Ministry of Cooperation. Earlier, Shah had said after a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government assumed charge in the Central Indian State late last year, about 125 Naxals were killed, more than 352 arrested and about 175 had surrendered in just five months.

On April 16, security personnel gunned down 29 Naxals, including some senior cadres, in Chhattisgarh's Kanker district. This was the highest number of fatalities suffered by the red ultras in a

single encounter in the history of the State's fight against left-wing extremism.

According to the Union Home Ministry's data, the number of incidents of left-wing extremism has reduced from 14,862 in the decade from 2004 to 2014 to 7,128 from 2014 to 2023.

The number of deaths of security forces personnel due to left-wing extremism has declined by 72 per cent, from 1,750 in the 2004-to-2014 period to 485 between 2014 and 2023, and the number of civilian deaths has declined by 68 per cent, from 4,285 to 1,383, in the said period. The number of districts with violence was 96 in 2010. It declined by 53 per cent to 45 in 2022.

Along with this, the number of police stations reporting violence decreased from 465 in 2010 to 176 in 2022.

In the last five years, more than 5,000 post offices were set up in 90 districts that has Maoists presence or where the ultras had presence in the past. As many as 1,298 bank branches were opened and 1,348 ATMs made operational in the 30 most-affected districts, officials said. A total of 4,885 mobile towers were constructed at a cost of Rs 2,690 crore in the Naxal-hit areas and 9,356 km of roads were laid at a cost of Rs 10,718 crore.

Local youngsters are being engaged by setting up 121 Eklavya residential schools, 43 ITIs and 38 skill-development centres in the Naxal-affected areas, the officials said.

# EC halts recruitment results in Haryana until Assembly polls

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In order to maintain the level playing field and to ensure that no undue advantage is accrued to anyone, the Election Commission (EC) has directed the Haryana Government not to declare the results of these recruitments till completion of Assembly polls in the State.

The Assembly elections in Haryana will be held in a single phase on October 1 and results will be declared on October 4. The EC's model code instructions do not bar the continuing regular recruitment process or promotion through the UPSC, the State public service commission or the staff selection commission

or any other statutory authority. But States that take "recruitments through non-statutory bodies will require prior clearance of the commission".

The commission took cognisance of a complaint from Congress Leader Jairam Ramesh regarding violation of the MCC in the process of recruitment against 5,600 vacancies in the post of constable in the Haryana Police, 76 posts of two categories of teachers by the HSSC and recruitment for various posts by the HPSC. After ascertaining the facts from the State Government and in view of the existing Model Code of Conduct (MCC) instructions, the commission found no violation of the code in the ongoing

recruitment processes by the Haryana Staff Selection Commission (HSSC) and the Haryana Public Service Commission (HPSC). The commission has found that the recruitment processes were initiated before the announcement of the election on August 16 and is within the existing MCC instructions as stated above, where statutory authorities can continue their work. However, in order to maintain level playing field and to ensure that no undue advantage is accrued to anyone, the EC has directed that announcement of results of these recruitments by the authorities concerned (HSSC and HPSC) will not be released till completion of the Assembly poll in the State.

# Govind to succeed Ajay as Union Home Secretary



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Senior IAS officer Govind Mohan on Thursday will take charge as the new Union Home Secretary from Ajay Kumar Bhalla, who completes his five year tenure at the sensitive post, official sources said. Mohan, a B.Tech from Banaras Hindu University and PG Diploma from IIM, Ahmedabad, was serving as Union Culture Secretary before his appointment to the top bureaucratic post, next only to the Cabinet Secretary.

A 1989 batch IAS officer of Sikkim cadre, Mohan has already joined the Union Home Ministry as an Officer on Special Duty. He has a wide experience of serving both the Sikkim and the Central Governments in various capacities. Mohan is considered to be one of the brilliant officers presently serving in the Government and known for his diligence. He had earlier served the Home Ministry as additional Secretary handling several key divisions, including Union territories.

A seasoned bureaucrat, Mohan was also the Government's key officer during the COVID-19 pandemic and tasked with overseeing implementation of decisions taken for various protocols and ensuring smooth coordination with States.



# IAF aircraft malfunctions, drops air store at Pokhran

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

An IAF fighter aircraft on Wednesday reportedly faced a technical malfunction resulting in the inadvertent release of an "air store" near the Pokhran firing range in Rajasthan, officials said. The incident occurred earlier in the day, prompting air force authorities to initiate an investigation to determine the cause of the technical issue that led to the inadvertent release.

No casualties or damage to property has been reported in the incident.

"An inadvertent release of an air store from an Indian Air Force (IAF) fighter aircraft took place near Pokhran firing range area, due to technical malfunction, today. An enquiry by the IAF has been ordered to investigate into the incident. No damage to life or property has been reported," IAF said in a social media post.

During a routine operation, an unexpected malfunction led to the accidental deployment of an air store, which generally includes munitions, bombs, or other military equipment carried by aircraft. IAF, however, has not disclosed the specific type of air store involved in the incident.

# Brazilian Navy chief visits India for talks on maritime, cooperation, training

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

Admiral Marcos Sampaio Olsen, Commander of Brazilian Navy is on an official visit to India from August 19-24. The visit aims to enhance maritime cooperation between the two countries as well as showcases the commitment of like-minded navies to collaborate and cooperate on shared challenges in the maritime security.

He called on Navy chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi here on Wednesday and held discussions on various aspects encompassing operational engagements, technical cooperation, and training.

Indian Navy cooperates with the Brazilian Navy through various initiatives, which include operational interactions, training cooperation and other maritime avenues. The two navies have also been interacting in multilateral forums like MILAN and India-Brazil-South Africa Maritime (IBSAMAR).

Bilateral Defence Cooperation between the two countries is conducted through the Joint Defence Committee, steered by respective Ministries of Defence.

As part of his official engagements, the Commander of Brazilian Navy is also scheduled to meet Defence Secretary, National Maritime Security Coordinator, and Vice Chief of Army Staff in Delhi.

During this visit, Admiral Marcos Sampaio Olsen would also visit Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) at Gurugram and will hold interaction with various Defence Industry representatives.

In addition to New Delhi, the Commander of Brazilian Navy, would also visit Mumbai, where he would be interacting with Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, as well as visit indigenous warships and submarines, Naval Dockyard and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders limited.

# Empowering women in tribal Odisha linked to improved child nutrition: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI | NEW DELHI

The adage 'Educate a woman, and you educate an entire family' holds good in the realm of child nutrition too, as has been confirmed by a team of researchers who in their recent study found that empowering females women in tribal areas of Odisha, India, significantly improved child nutrition and reduced underweight and wasted children.

The study is crucial given India's pressing health challenge as highlighted by the 2023 National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) which reports that over 40 per cent of tribal children are underweight and stunted, and about 30 per cent are wasted.

Published in PLOS ONE, the study analysed the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) to measure empowerment among 1,900 farm households.

It found that women's empowerment in agricultural decision-making, income, and access to resources led to better household dietary diversity and higher weight-for-age and weight-for-height scores in children.

However, the study also suggested that complementary interventions are necessary to enhance dietary diversity further. Sylvester Ogutu, a researcher for the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT and the paper's lead author, explained that by using this score and then comparing it to outcomes like the number of different foods found in the household and the weight



of children for their age, a clear picture emerged.

"As primary care-givers, the empowerment of women contributes to improved child nutrition, health, and education," he said and added, "Women's empowerment in agricultural input use, sales, income, and other (access to credit, group membership and employment) decision-making domains was associated with fewer underweight and wasted children."

Jonathan Mockshell, an agricultural economist at the Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT, study lead, and a coauthor of the paper chipped in saying that in terms of the effects of women's empowerment on the household dietary diversity score (HDDS) — a snapshot of the economic ability of a household to access a variety of foods dietary diversity — the study found women's empowerment contributes to

improved food production and dietary diversity.

"The magnitude of the effect of women's empowerment on dietary diversity was relatively small, which suggests that complementary interventions may be required to achieve higher household dietary diversity," he said in the study. "Women's empowerment, household dietary diversity, and child anthropometry among vulnerable populations in Odisha, India". The researchers also measured the height and weight of children and discovered that women's empowerment significantly increased children's weight-for-age z-scores (WAZ), and weight-for-height z-scores (WHZ), but not their height-for-age scores (HAZ).

"The improvements in the z-scores contributed to reduced prevalence of underweight and wasting in children with mother's with a higher empowerment score," Mockshell said.

# Congress blames hydel projects for Sikkim landslides, environmental damage

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI

In the wake of landslides in Sikkim, the Congress on Wednesday hit out at the Government and said hydel projects in ecologically fragile regions have been coming up over the past few years without giving adequate thought to their cumulative environmental impact. The Opposition party also asserted that dams on the Teesta river are the prime example of how ecology is being fundamentally altered with grave consequences for this and future generations.

A massive landslide struck east Sikkim on Tuesday, damaging parts of a 510-mw hydroelectric project on the Teesta river. The landslide happened at Dipu Dara near Singtam in Gangtok district around 7.30 am, causing significant



damage to the powerhouse of the Teesta Stage V hydroelectric project of the NHPC.

In a statement, Congress General Secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said a series of landslide disasters in Sikkim has substantially damaged the Teesta V, a 510 MW hydel power station on the Teesta. This disaster comes on the

heels of the Glacial Lake Outburst Floods (GLOF) and riverine floods in the Teesta River basin in October 2023, which caused massive devastation in Sikkim and Kalimpong, West Bengal, he noted. The Union Budget, unveiled in July 2024, had a section dedicated to 'Irrigation and Flood Mitigation,' where Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman

made the vague promise of "assistance" without any details of funds for Sikkim, he said. "In a classic case of the Government's confrontational federalism, the Budget was indifferent to the areas in West Bengal which were equally affected," Ramesh said.

"The obvious vendetta politics aside, the Budget announcements were insufficient - what the entire region needs is for a development framework that centres ecological dimensions, the case for which has become apparent from the cascading series of disasters in the last year," the former Environment Minister argued. National Highway 10, the lifeline of Sikkim and Kalimpong, runs along the Teesta and has been in a precarious State with frequent landslides and closures, he pointed out.

# Will resign willingly if need arises: Union Minister Kumaraswamy

PTI n BENGALURU

Union Minister H D Kumaraswamy on Wednesday said he will willingly resign if the need arises unlike Chief Minister Siddaramaiah who found fault with Governor Thaaarchand Gehlot's permission to investigate and prosecute him in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority land allotment scam.

Reacting to the Chief Minister's allegation that the Governor was not giving consent to prosecute him, Kumaraswamy asked what stops Siddaramaiah from approaching the Supreme Court against him in connection with the alleged scam related to Sri Sai Venkateshwara Minerals.

Lokayukta's Special Investigation Team has once again submitted a proposal to the Governor on Monday seeking permission to file a charge-sheet against Kumaraswamy in the alleged illegal mining lease case.

The SIT had first requested Gehlot's nod in November last year to prosecute the Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel, who had allegedly granted mining



lease to the private firm when he was the Chief Minister in 2007 in violation of law. The Chief Minister on Wednesday reiterated that the Governor sanctioned in haste case against him.

Accusing the Governor of discriminating against him, Siddaramaiah said Lokayukta's recommendation to prosecute Kumaraswamy has been pending with Gehlot since November 2023.

Kumaraswamy, the Union Minister for Heavy Industries and Steel, said he has seen the statements of Virajpet MLA and legal advisor to the Chief Minister A S Ponnanna and some other ministers

demanding his resignation. "I will willingly resign if needed, unlike you (Siddaramaiah) who found fault with the Governor's permission to prosecute you and commented about the Governor in a derogatory manner. The Karnataka ministers should be ashamed for using such words against the Governor," he said.

He said: "Don't you think I could have closed the cases against me in 2018 when I was the Chief Minister?" Stating that the ruling Congress is opening another case against him, he said he is not afraid of it.

# Install CCTV cameras in one month, schools told after Badlapur incident

PTI n MUMBAI

Following the incident of sexual abuse at a school in Badlapur, the Maharashtra government on Wednesday issued a directive to all the schools in the state to install CCTV cameras on their premises within a month. The failure to comply with the order may result in severe consequences such as revocation of the permission to operate, said the order issued by School Education Minister Deepak Kesarkar.

Protests have broken out in many parts of the state following the alleged sexual abuse of two kindergarten girls at a school in Badlapur near Mumbai.

A school attendant was arrested in the case.

"All private schools in the state are required to comply with new guidelines from the department, mandating the installation of CCTV cameras at appropriate locations within school premises. Failure to comply may result in actions such as withholding financial grants or revocation of the school's

operating permit," the order said. Installation of a comprehensive CCTV camera network is a proactive measure to enhance the safety and security of students, teachers and staff, it said.

The school education department has also permitted the use of five per cent of the funds allocated for schools in the District Planning and Development Council to establish CCTV camera networks in state-run and aided schools.

Further, the CCTV footage should be examined at least three times a week, and it would be the principal's responsibility to contact police if any concerning incident is captured by the cameras, the order said.

The department also instructed school managements to conduct thorough background checks of all employees with the assistance of the local police station. Schools should provide the local police station the details and photographs of their employees, it added.

# Hema panel report: UDF demands apology from CM

PTI n THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Opposition Congress-led UDF on Wednesday rejected Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's claim that Justice Hema had herself requested that the expert panel's report on the film industry not be made public, calling it a 'blatant lie' and 'hypocrisy'.

Addressing a press conference here, opposition leader V D Satheesan said Justice Hema, who helmed the three-member panel, had never asked the government not to release it.

The CM tried to mislead everyone by telling lies, and his reply that the government had always been with the victims was nothing but "hypocrisy", he alleged.

The Leader of the Opposition also released the purported letter Justice Hema reportedly sent to the government.

Accusing the government of protecting the "hunters" for the last four and a half years after the panel submitted its report, he further charged that Vijayan's expectation was that the letter would never come out.

"In the letter, the Hema committee had not asked the government not to release the report but to follow the



directions of the Supreme Court while releasing it," he said.

The direction of the apex court is not to disclose the names of victims, but it is not an obstacle to taking action on the report.

"This is nothing new. This is not a bar to taking action on the report. There are references to incidents in the report that require prosecution even under POC SO Act," Satheesan said.

It is also a criminal offence if a person, who knows that a crime has been committed, conceals it or fail to report it, he pointed out and accused the Chief Minister and other ministers of committing the offence by sitting on it silently without taking any action.

The LoP further alleged that a series of crimes had taken place, and there is evidence to prove the same.

So, a team of women IPS officers should investigate the case, he demanded.

But the CM is "lying" without being prepared for an investigation, he charged.

The LoP called on Chief Minister Vijayan to apologise for his allegedly misleading claims about the letter penned by Justice Hema.

He warned the government of street protests if it doesn't act upon the report findings.

Satheesan also urged the CM and the Law Minister to explain what the legal hurdles were in registering cases when there are statements of victims.

# PMLA case: Hearing on Senthil's appeal adjourned to Aug 28

PTI n CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday adjourned the hearing on former Tamil Nadu Minister V Senthil Balaji's appeal against a sessions court order refusing to discharge him from a money laundering case.

A division bench comprising Justices S M Subramaniam and V Sivagnanam adjourned to August 28, the hearing on the appeal at the request of advocate Gouthaman, appearing for Senthil Balaji.

When the case came up for hearing, Additional Solicitor General A R L Sundaresan submitted charges had been framed against Senthil Balaji in the money laundering case by Principal Sessions Judge S Alli and the trial also commenced by examining a prosecution witness. The trial was posted to August 22 for cross examination, he added.

Advocate Gouthaman, appearing for Balaji, sought time to argue the case.



Posting the case to August 28, the bench said the trial which has already commenced may go on.

Balaji was arrested on June 14, 2023 by the Enforcement Directorate in connection with a money laundering case linked to a cash-for-jobs scam when he was the Transport Minister during an earlier AIADMK regime.

# Bihar decides to launch 'social register' to create database of beneficiaries

PTI n PATNA

The Bihar government on Wednesday decided to launch a family-based 'social register' to create a database of beneficiaries of welfare schemes of the state.

The decision was taken during a cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar.

The council of ministers approved a proposal by the Information Technology Department to launch the 'social register' which will act as a Unified Service Delivery Platform, Cabinet Secretariat's Additional Chief Secretary S Siddharth told reporters after the meeting.

The department will prepare a unified platform, which will be called 'Bihar-One', for the purpose, he said.

"The aim of launching this register is to develop a database of all beneficiaries who are availing of government welfare schemes in the state," Siddharth said.

In future, those who want to avail benefits of such welfare schemes will have to first register themselves with the portal and each individual



will be allotted a specific registry number, he said.

"With the help of that number, the government can find out details about benefits of the schemes that are being availed by an individual in the state," the official said.

The social registry system will also reduce fraud and duplication of beneficiaries and provide a monitoring mechanism for the living standards, he said.

The department will spend Rs 85.23 crore in developing the 'social register', he said, adding that the process will start very soon.

The cabinet also decided to reduce registration charges on

new vehicles to prevent loss of revenue, said the ACS, adding that the decision has been taken in view of the lower motor vehicle registration charges in the neighbouring states.

It was also decided in the cabinet meeting that the government will soon launch vaccination for girls in the age group of 9 to 14 years for the prevention of cervical cancer.

"The government will provide such vaccines at all government health facilities in the state.

The state government will invest Rs 150 crore in the procurement of such vaccines for the purpose, he said.

# 28 children died of Chandipura virus since July in Gujarat: Minister

PTI n GANDHINAGAR

Chandipura virus has claimed the lives of 28 children under the age of 14 in Gujarat since the first case was reported in July, the state legislative assembly was informed on Wednesday.

Responding to a 'short notice question' by AAP MLA Umesh Makwana, health minister Rushikesh Patel told the House that Gujarat has so far reported 164 cases of viral encephalitis, caused by certain pathogens including the Chandipura virus, with 101 children succumbing to the infection.

Of these 164 cases detected so far, 61 were caused by the Chandipura virus, he said.

Chandipura virus causes fever, with symptoms similar to flu, and acute encephalitis (inflammation of the brain). It is transmitted by vectors like mosquitoes, ticks and sandflies.

He said the sandfly, which carries the Chandipura virus, lives in the cracks of mud houses that are very common in the hinterland.

"So far, 101 children under



the age of 14 have died due to acute encephalitis. Of these, 28 have died due to Chandipura virus infection, while 73 succumbed to encephalitis caused by other viral infections," said Patel.

The minister said 63 children were discharged after treatment, while four were still under medical care.

The situation is under control, he said and stressed that no new case has been reported in the past week and no death has been reported for the last 12 days.

According to the minister, the government has launched a drive across the state for vector control and

containment of the Chandipura virus.

Under this drive, health teams surveyed over 53,000 houses in areas from where viral encephalitis and Chandipura cases had emerged.

Malathion powder, a pesticide, has been sprinkled in over 7 lakh mud houses in villages for disease control, he said, adding that liquid pesticide was also sprayed in nearly 1.58 lakh houses.

Since children are more vulnerable to this virus, Malathion powder and liquid pesticide were also sprayed in nearly 40,000 schools and over 36,000 Anganwadis in affected districts.

# Lay proper motorable roads in Kalvarayan Hills: HC to TN Govt

PTI n CHENNAI

The Madras High Court on Wednesday directed the Tamil Nadu government to ensure proper motorable roads were laid in Kalvarayan Hills in Kallakurichi district.

A division bench comprising Justices S M Subramaniam and V Sivagnanam gave the directive while passing further interim orders on proceedings initiated by it, pursuant to the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy that left over 60 persons dead.

The bench said the State government should also ensure adequate doctors and nurses were available in Primary Health Centres in

Kalvarayan Hills, besides teachers in schools.

When the case came up for hearing, Additional Advocate General J Ravindran submitted a status report and said the state government was taking steps to provide all infrastructure facilities to the people living in Kalvarayan hills.

After it was pointed out that people living there were not provided with ration cards, the bench directed the state government to conduct a special camp within four weeks and provide ration cards, Aadhar Card and Voter ID cards to them.

The bench posted for September 19, further hearing of the case.

# Assam to table Bill for compulsory registration of marriage, divorce of Muslims: Himanta

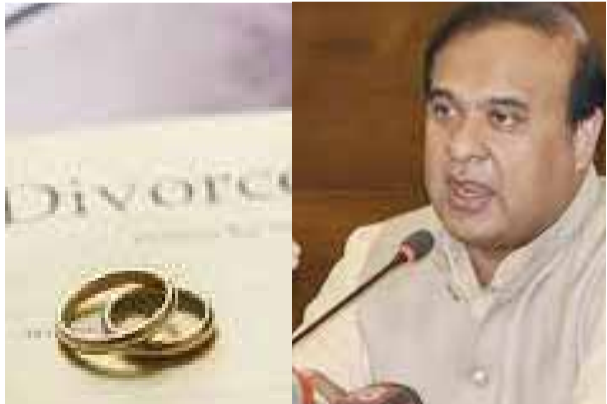
PTI n BHOPAL

The Assam government will introduce a bill in the upcoming Autumn Session of Assembly for compulsory government registration of marriage and divorce of Muslim people, Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma said.

Addressing a press conference after a cabinet meeting, Sarma said the government will table the Assam Compulsory Registration of Muslim Marriage and Divorce Bill, 2024 during the upcoming session, which will begin on Thursday.

"Earlier, Muslim marriages were registered by the Kazis. However, this new bill will ensure that all marriages of the community will be registered with the government," he added.

Sarma also claimed that mar-



riages of minors were also registered by the Kazis earlier, but the proposed bill will prohibit any such move.

"Now, minor marriage registration will not happen at all. We want to end the menace of child marriage. So, the marriages will be registered at the

Sub-Registrar's Office," he added, citing cabinet decisions. Sarma said that there will not be any restriction on the rituals followed by Muslims during the marriage ceremonies, but only the registration by the Kazis has been restricted.

# MP Govt transfers nine IAS officers

PTI n BHOPAL

In yet another bureaucratic reshuffle this month, the Madhya Pradesh government has transferred nine Indian Administrative Services (IAS) officers with Sukhveer Singh being appointed as the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of the state.

The government issued the transfer order on Tuesday night. Sukhveer Singh, a 1997-batch IAS officer posted as the Principal Secretary of Horticulture and Food Processing till now, will replace Anupam Rajan. Rajan, a 1993 batch officer, has been transferred as the Principal Secretary of Higher Education Department. Amit Rathore, a 1996 batch officer, has been appointed as the Principal Secretary of the Finance Department.



He was holding the charge of the Commercial Tax Department. Shriman Shukla, a 2007 batch officer, has been transferred as the Divisional Commissioner of Shahdol division.

On August 10, the state government had carried out a major bureaucratic reshuffle, transferring 26 IAS officers, including eight district collectors and 21 Indian Police Services (IPS) officers.

# Monsoon to remain active in east Rajasthan for another week

PTI n JAIPUR

Monsoon will remain active in eastern parts of Rajasthan for one more week, the meteorological department here said on Wednesday.

Heavy rains pounded many districts, including the capital Jaipur, in the last 24 hours, it said.

Radheshyam Sharma, in-charge of Jaipur Meteorological Centre, said a low pressure area was formed on Wednesday, raising a strong possibility of monsoon being active in many parts of eastern Rajasthan over the next one week.

During this period, moderate to heavy rains are likely in some parts of Bharatpur, Jaipur, Ajmer, Kota, and Udaipur divisions.

There is also a possibility of heavy rains at some places in Kota and Udaipur districts and Jaipur division for the next 5-6 days.

Sharma said light to moderate rains are likely in some parts of Jodhpur and Bikaner divisions of western Rajasthan for the next two-three days.

According to weather data in the past 24 hours till 8:30 am on Wednesday, Jaipur teshil was the wettest in the state recording a maximum rainfall of 85 mm, followed by 78 mm rains in Rajakheda of Dholpur, 65 mm in Gandghar of Jhalawar, 42 mm in Kushalgarh of Banswara.

# Mizoram yet to collect biometric data of refugees taking shelter in State: Minister

PTI n AIZWAL

The Mizoram government is yet to collect biometric data of refugees from neighbouring countries taking shelter in the state, Home Minister K Sapdanga told the assembly on Wednesday. In a written reply to a query of opposition Mizo National Front (MNF) MLA Robert Romawia Rofe, the Home minister said that the matter is being discussed with

the Centre. "The state government is currently in talks with the Ministry of Home Affairs over the collection of biometric data of the refugees," the Home minister said.

Sapdanga said that 33,724 Myanmar nationals and 2,014 Zo ethnic people from Bangladesh took shelter in the state as per the record of state home department, as of August 13.



Besides, 7,999 internally displaced people from Manipur also took refuge in

the state, he said. The Myanmar people mostly from the Chin state,

who share ethnic ties with the Mizo, have been taking shelter in Mizoram since the military takeover in February 2021, while the Bawm people, one of the Mizo tribes, from Bangladesh's Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) migrated to the northeastern state in November 2022, officials said.

The Kuki-Zo people from Manipur, who also share ethnic ties with Mizos, have been taking shelter in Mizoram since May 2023 due

to ethnic violence in neighbouring Manipur, they said.

Earlier, Chief Minister Lalduhoma had said that biometric enrollment portal has been in place for collection of the data and it will be utilised in near future.

He had said that the biometric enrollment portal was prepared in accordance with the advice of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home minister Amit Shah.

In April last year, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs had directed the governments of both Mizoram and Manipur, which share borders with Myanmar, to capture the biometric and biographic details of "illegal immigrants" in their states.

In June, it directed the states that the campaign be completed by the end of September and directed both to prepare a plan and initiate the process.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## The Govt steps back

The Government withdraws lateral entry into bureaucracy amid opposition from its allies

The government has decided to withdraw its initiative on lateral entry into the civil services. This decision comes in the wake of mounting opposition from its political allies, who raised concerns over the potential implications of such a policy shift. However, this withdrawal would put the clock back on the Government's desire to infuse the bureaucracy with fresh talent from the private sector and other domains, aiming to bring specialised skills and perspectives into the administration. Lateral entry, as a concept, was introduced to bridge the gap between the skills required for contemporary governance and the traditional expertise within the civil services. By allowing professionals from various fields—such as finance, technology, and social sciences—to enter the bureaucracy at senior levels, the government aimed to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of public administration. This initiative was seen as a way to inject new ideas and innovation into a system often criticised for being slow, rigid, and out of touch with modern realities. But it was not well taken by the Opposition and the BJP allies alike.



Critics argued that lateral entry could undermine the foundational principles of the Indian civil services, which have historically emphasised neutrality, continuity, and a deep understanding of the country's socio-political landscape. This policy, they claimed, might lead to a dilution of these values, creating a disconnect between the administration and the people it serves. This is indeed a valid point as the professionals in the private sector do not have the training and mindset to serve the people, they are more focused on achieving targets and making profits. This does not go well

with the public office which has to be more sympathetic to people's aspirations even if the cost is high. Another major concern, and that is more pronounced in the Indian context, was that lateral entry could become a tool for political patronage. It was feared that the process could be manipulated to favour individuals with political connections, thus compromising the meritocratic nature of the civil services. Surely, it could lead to the politicisation of the bureaucracy, further eroding public trust in the system. Besides, bypassing the traditional recruitment process could create resentment among career bureaucrats. The decision to withdraw the lateral entry initiative reflects a pragmatic recognition of the political realities at play. While the government may have been convinced of the merits of the policy, the need to maintain a cohesive and supportive alliance outweighed the potential benefits of pushing forward with a contested reform. For now, the Government's retreat on lateral entry is a reminder of the delicate interplay between policy and politics. While the idea of bringing in fresh talent from outside the civil services is laudable, the concerns raised by political allies cannot be ignored. Moving forward, any attempt to reform the bureaucracy will need to address these concerns head-on, ensuring that innovation does not come at the cost of values.

### PICTALK



People perform Shravani Purnima rituals while taking bath in the Ganga river, in Varanasi

PTI

## Raj Kapoor's deep bond with Delhi: A legacy of cinema

Raj Kapoor's relationship with the capital remains an enduring part of his legacy, etched in the memories of cinema halls and the city's cultural fabric

As fans gear up to celebrate the birth centenary of Bollywood's legendary showman Raj Kapoor on December 14th, it is essential to remember his deep-rooted connection with Delhi—a city that was almost like a second home to him. Kapoor's association with Delhi was profound, and this bond will be celebrated in a grand event in the capital on his birth anniversary. Raj Kapoor's final days were also tied to Delhi, where he passed away on June 2, 1988. Just a month before his death, on May 2nd, 1988, he was honored with the prestigious Dadasaheb Phalke Award by then President R. Venkataraman at the Siri Fort auditorium. Unfortunately, his health deteriorated shortly after the ceremony, leading to severe breathing difficulties. He was admitted to AIIMS, where doctors, led by Dr. J.N. Pandey, tried their best to save him, but his condition did not improve, and he passed away due to complications from asthma. Delhi, the city that played such a significant role in his life, also became the place of his final farewell.



Kapoor had a special affinity for Delhi's iconic cinema halls, particularly Regal and Moti, where he preferred his films to be premiered. Regal, one of New Delhi's first cinema halls, held a special place in his heart. It was here that some of his most celebrated films, including "Sangam," "Mera Naam Joker," "Satyam Shivam Sundaram," "Boot Polish," and "Jis Desh Mein Ganga Behti Hai," were released. The RK Banner films consistently performed well in the capital, further cementing Kapoor's connection with the city. As Pandit J.P. Sharma "Trikhya," a close family friend, recalls, even Kapoor's father, Prithviraj Kapoor, had acted in plays at Regal, which showcased both English and Hindi productions in its early days. Sadly, Regal closed its doors

in 2017, with Moti following suit shortly after. Shashi Kapoor, Raj Kapoor's younger brother, fondly remembered his visits to Regal with his elder brother. For Shashi, Regal was more than just a cinema hall; it was a place filled with memories of Raj Kapoor. Raj Kapoor's connection with Delhi was not limited to cinema alone. His tryst with the city began in 1957 when he produced the film "Ab Dilli Door Nahin." The film also marked one of the early appearances of a young Amjad Khan, who would later become famous as Gabbar Singh. "Ab Dilli Door Nahin" captured various iconic locations in Delhi, including the old iron bridge over the Yamuna, Daryaganj, and Connaught Place. Kapoor's relationship with Delhi deepened further in 1970 when his eldest daughter, Ritu, married Rajan Nanda, son of H.P. Nanda, the founder chairman of the Escorts Group. Raj Kapoor would often visit his daughter's home in Jor Bagh whenever he was in town, strengthening his bond with Delhi. The Kapoor family's connection

with Delhi extended beyond Raj Kapoor. His younger brother, Shammi Kapoor, had a different association with the city's cinema culture. In the mid-1960s, Shammi Kapoor became a partner in Plaza Cinema in Connaught Place, along with film producer F.C. Mehra. While he later sold his stake, Shammi Kapoor remains the only member of the Kapoor clan to have held a stake in a cinema hall. Raj Kapoor's fondness for his younger brother Shashi was evident, with the former often treating the latter as a son. Shashi Kapoor's early film "Householder," directed by James Ivory and produced by Ismail Merchant, was primarily shot in a large house near Times House in Daryaganj. "Householder," written by Ruth Praver Jhabvala, featured two of Delhi's iconic landmarks, Jantar Mantar and Jama Masjid. The Kapoor family's connection with Delhi is deeply rooted, with their memories continuing to be cherished in the city. (The writer is a journalist and a columnist; views are personal)



VIVEK SHUKLA

## J&K gears up for historic elections

For the first time since the revocation of Article 370 and the bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir in 2019, the region is set to hold its Assembly elections

Jammu and Kashmir will have Assembly elections from September 18 to October 1 to elect 90 legislators, the first after the revocation of Article 370 and the state's bifurcation in August 2019. The delay in holding new elections has been a contention for years. However, a recent Supreme Court directive was crucial in setting the timeline. Now that the elections are announced, political parties of all shades welcomed it. Kashmir has been a significant source of conflict for long between India and Pakistan. Both countries claim Kashmir, although they only govern a part of it. Pakistan has even internationalised the issue, which has been brought to the United Nations. In 2019, mixed reactions followed Modi's decision to divide the state.

This decision led to Kashmir losing its flag, criminal code, and constitutional protections. Government job opportunities for Kashmiris decreased and are now open to non-residents. Despite challenges, the state has seen both positive and negative changes. The Prime Minister's initiatives have spurred development, and the growing interest of Gulf countries in investing in Jammu and Kashmir signals a promising future, bringing hope to the residents. The Ministry of Home Affairs reports decreased security force casualties from 80 in 2019 to 33 in 2023 and a drop in civilian deaths from 44 in 2019 to 12 in 2023. The last state elections were in 2014. The high voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls has led to Assembly polls. In Kashmir, there was a historic 58.46% voter turnout in the recent parliamentary elections, a 30-point increase from the 2019 general election. The government completed a delimitation exercise after the 2019 revocation of Article 370 and the bifurcation. The assembly seats in Jammu and Kashmir increased from 87 to 114 after the 2022 delimitation, including 24 seats for Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). This increase in seats could potentially shift the balance of power and influence the strategies of political parties in the upcoming elec-



tions. The BJP claimed that the scrapping of Article 370 and their subsequent policies in Kashmir had developed the region for the better. The recently concluded Lok Sabha elections in Jammu and Kashmir were a significant victory for Indian democracy. In the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, the NC and PDP saw a resurgence. The election allowed them to revitalise their membership and bring long-standing issues to the forefront. Although the Congress did not secure any seats, the NC won two out of three, presenting a strong challenge for the third seat. Despite the region's history of terrorism and allegations of rigged elections, the polls were widely celebrated for the conduct of free and fair polls. The upcoming election will test the central government's efforts to integrate Jammu and Kashmir more fully into the Indian Union after revoking the region's special status under Article 370. It is also a test for the Election Commission to conduct polls without any violent incidents. The political parties have started preparing for the upcoming assembly elections, including campaign strategy, alliances, and candidate selection. The People's Conference, Congress,



THE UPCOMING ELECTION WILL TEST THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT'S EFFORTS TO INTEGRATE JAMMU AND KASHMIR MORE FULLY INTO THE INDIAN UNION AFTER REVOKING THE REGION'S SPECIAL STATUS UNDER ARTICLE 370

Peoples Democratic Party, and National Conference met to plan for the elections. The political parties have started preparing for the upcoming assembly elections, including campaign strategy, alliances, and candidate selection. The People's Conference, Congress, Peoples Democratic Party, and National Conference have all met at their party level to plan for the elections. If the assembly elections are held as scheduled, the Valley will see a contest between the NC and the PDP. Moreover, the polarisation and separatist narrative that gained traction during the Lok Sabha elections will only intensify and peak during the assembly elections. The PDP leader and daughter of Mehbooba Mufti echoed the others. Other political parties, including the Congress, the BJP, the CPI(M) and the Democratic Progressive Azad Party (DPAP), welcomed the EC's announcement. In the 2014 Jammu and Kashmir elections, no party won a majority. Governor's Rule was imposed for 49 days until PDP's Mehbooba Mufti was appointed chief minister with BJP's support. 2018, the BJP withdrew from the ruling alliance, leading to the Governor's Rule again. The

assembly was dissolved in November 2018, and President's Rule was imposed in December 2018. Since then, the governor's Rule has been in the state. The government needs to decide whether to intervene in the Kashmir Valley to address soft separatism or consider a reorganisation plan before the elections. During the parliamentary elections, Congress and the NC allied. The NC contested three seats in Kashmir, while Congress contested in Jammu and Udhampur. PDP, part of the INDIA Alliance, was not accommodated and fielded candidates on three seats in Kashmir against the National Conference. For the upcoming Assembly polls, the scene is not explicit. Congress and NC might go together. Omar mentioned that allying with the PDP would be difficult because they ran against each other in the parliament elections. If the regional parties want to improve, they must unite, and the INDIA Bloc must collaborate. The Kashmir elections are crucial, and the entire country will observe a popular government's rise after a decade. (The writer is a popular columnist; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### CAPITAL PUNISHMENT FOR RAPE

Madam — All eyes may be on Supreme Court hearings with respect to the Kolkata case but time shouldn't die down and the government can't be numb further on this issue. The pains undergoing by the parents of the victim as well as the fear in the minds of the medicos when they enter into a hospital for their work need to be realised by the law making authorities. It's time to burn the culprits and not the candles. The time has come for the government to pass a bill for capital punishment for rapists. When currency can be changed overnight, when special session can be called to increase the salary of politicians, when parliament can remain open all night for trust votes, wondering what is delaying to pass a stringent law against rape. The State of West Bengal must be taught a lesson by enforcing the President's role till the case gets cracked and culprits taken to task. Only drastic change like this will also become a lesson for other states to adhere caution and to protect the women from this society. The female MPs in the parliament must take this up as a cause of their own and today it may be somebody's and tomorrow this can happen at their own house can't be ruled out. A.P. Thiruvadi | Chennai

#### REAL HERO

Madam — Amid the dance of death and destruction in Wayanad, humanity dawned. Darkness gets a relief when the sun softly touches it at dawn. Our pessimism and doubt in goodness in human beings similarly got a relief. It was when we read the report that some people on their own rushed to the danger zone in Wayanad and saved others at the cost of their lives. Sharath saw that the roof of his home had been blown away after landslides hit Chooramala on July 30. Immediately, he took his parents to a safer place. But he did not stop there. He rescued 18

#### Saga of champai Soren!



Sixty eight year-old Champai Soren, who was the Chief Minister of Jharkhand for a few weeks, is in the headlines of newspapers these days. Some are saying that he will join BJP, some are predicting that he will form a new party, some are assessing that he will join JDU. But three days have passed since this news break but it has not come to fruition yet. He is still silent, yes, his intention has definitely become clear that after four decades, the people of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, with whose help he became famous,

insulted him. He should remember very well what was the fate of Geeta Koda, Congress MP from Singhbhum parliamentary constituency, when she jumped to BJP at the last moment in the last Lok Sabha elections? She was neither here nor there. The mystery of Champai Soren's future is going on for a long time because he played the game of rebellion thinking that all the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MLAs of Kolhan will come with him. But nothing like that happened. Nor is it going to happen in the future.

It is quite possible that he may lose the election from his constituency Sarakela as well. Because in the last assembly elections in the entire Kolhan, BJP was wiped out. Therefore, even though the people here call Champai the 'Tiger of Jharkhand', they will never tolerate rebellion against JMM. Therefore, for the time being, it seems that Champai Soren's political life has come to an end. Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

#### SAFETY AT SCHOOLS

Madam — Schools are noble and learn-orable places where students learn humility, humanity, compassion, benevolence, respect for others, and how to abandon violence and corruption. They foster unity, peace, and a spirit of togetherness. Unfortunately, today, schools have become places of fear and distress. Instances of student suicides due to teachers' cruelty, conflicts among students, vandalism on campus, and incidents like the recent Udaipur stabbing have left parents frightened and apprehensive about sending their children to school. Why is this happening? Why aren't government schools especially peaceful anymore? We heard a lot about shooting in the US schools and wondered why that happens but now it is happening in our own country. A close look is needed. Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

They have reiterated the scientific discovery that says all living human beings are relatives and have originated from one woman. Research has shown that fragments of the mitochondrial genome carried by all humans alive today can be traced to a single woman ancestor living an estimated 150,000 to 200,000 years ago. This woman, known as "Mitochondrial Eve", lived in Africa. You and I, irrespective of our religion, race, class, caste, country, colour, or gender carry the same genome of that mother. The whole humanity is one! Sujit De | Kolkata

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



## FIRST COLUMN

## THE DIVINE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Aligning with this divine justice system is essential for realising true justice and harmony in life



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Along with the Creation, God has set in place a perfect justice system. This is overseen by the Divine Authority under the superintendence of God. (The Bhagavad-Geeta 9.10) The Divine Authority is required to record all our acts by the mind, words and the body 24x7. Obviously, they have access to them. They are required by God to decide awards and punishments according to the guidelines given by Him. God does not interfere in this, and we keep on getting rewards and punishments as deserved life after life according to the 'Karmaphala Principle', which is: "what we sow we reap." Going into details, there are three parts of this.

There is 'prarabdha' (acts done earlier), 'kriyamana' (acts currently being done) and 'svabhava' (nature). What was done earlier including past lives, which has not been acted upon is carried forward till rewarded or punished. This process goes on eternally. The timing of rewards and punishments are decided by the Divine Authority. God knows what is being done, but does not interfere in it.

God gets into the act only if someone, mostly a devotee having God's consciousness, approaches Him for relief/pardon. If the request is found appropriate, God helps those approaching Him in order to deal with their punishments, i.e. makes them tolerable. (18.58) In this connection, it is necessary to point out that nature of all souls are also results of past karmas (deeds), as determined by the Divine Authority. It is very difficult to change one's nature by self-help. For example, if someone is lusty,



he or she will continue to be so during his entire life, unless God intervenes and helps in improving it. Again, we have to pray for it. These are the basics. Now let us see how it turns out practically. Take up a soul as an example. He has past karmas, which are due for rewards and punishments in this life. They manifest at their appointed times.

A man gets into an argument with his brother for his share in the paternal property. He decides to seek legal help. This is stage one of the justice system. Now it is 'Panchayat' at the village level or a court of justice. Such courts deliver justice based on man-made laws. These authorities deliver justice expeditiously, i.e. not taking too much time. But they must do justice, in which 'dharma' (highest religious principles) is the basis, wherever they have some latitude. Failing which, they create their faulty destiny; they just act as mediums. Whatever happens to a person has been decided long ago. That is how astrologers can predict what will happen to us.

At every stage of the legal process, rewards and punishments, as destined only, keep coming. If the person concerned is fated to get relief, it will happen in a higher court. Vice versa is also true. God has no pre-conceived or prejudiced notion towards anyone, except if someone takes His shelter, as mentioned earlier. Like all of us, nations have also destiny. This is a cumulative total of fate of all its residents. Let me take up India for example.

The 21st century is likely to be dominated by India. If it is true and India will become a developed nation by 2047, then, its judicial system has to be functioning smoothly. It must have been streamlined. There will be no delay in the delivery of judgements, i.e. there will be time-bound at every stage. Justice delayed is justice denied will be a thing of the past. There will be adequate judicial infrastructure with sufficient resources. But for this miracle to happen, some people in authority have to become mediums. For this, they will be rewarded personally according to the karmaphala principle. The divine justice system is foolproof. Are people in authority listening? It will be a shame if an opportunity like this is squandered; whatever is destined will surely happen. The question is: who would become mediums and get credit? This has been left to individuals.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

## Streamlining Punjab's administrative web



A S MITTAL

To unlock the State's true potential, there is an urgent need for structural reforms that prioritise smooth operations, accountability and stakeholder engagement

It's time for the complex web of multiple organisations of the Punjab government to take cues from the Indian Army's well-structured organisational hierarchy, which prioritises efficient command, control, and operational efficiency to maintain readiness. From a Havaldar leading a section, the smallest unit comprising ten soldiers, to the Chief of the Army Staff, the Army meticulously ensures cohesive functioning, distinct roles, and responsibilities, enabling the 14.55 lakh personnel to effectively fulfil defence and security roles. In contrast, the Punjab government's organisational structure (4.15 lakh personnel, including contractual and outsourced) requires an overhaul. In total, 50 parent departments and 163 affiliated organisations, each with its administrative head, aim for seamless result-oriented operations, which are below expectations. In the current government, the Chief Minister, who also oversees the industry sector, plays a pivotal role. However, the current structure, with around 20 administrative secretaries heading 17 departments, corporations, boards, and regulatory authorities, is not conducive to growth. By fostering a culture of collaboration, we can overcome these hurdles and drive efficiency and accountability towards a single goal of industrial growth, which has the potential to exceed the current stagnation of around 3% over the past 20 years in Punjab. Unfortunately, the complexity of multiple departments cannot achieve the single target of developing a fresh entrepreneurial class in the state. Rather, numerous channels breed corruption at various levels, and coercion can easily be gauged as the Punjab government scrapped 1498 mandatory compliances for industries three years ago. Therefore, it is high time to further ease the parent department as a single unique point, focusing on the singular target of developing a fresh entrepreneurial class in the state. It's impractical for any chief secretary to closely monitor 50 parent departments and their 163 affiliated organisations, which around 75 administrative secretaries head.

Assigning an Apex officer, preferably at an additional chief secretary (ACS) level, is crucial to overseeing and synchronising each key sector. This officer will provide guidance, ensure alignment of goals and strategies, and streamline human resources operations effectively. Industries and other key sectors, such as Education, Health, urban development, Rural Development, and Agriculture, also need help navigating the complex web of 15 parent departments and their 69 affiliated organisations, which hampers good governance in Punjab. However, these challenges also present an opportunity for policymakers to reassess and reform, driving efficient and accountable human resources and paving the way for a vibrant Punjab. Industries: In Punjab industries are overseen by over 20 administrative secretaries who manage 17 departments and affiliated organizations. This large organizational structure, instead of collectively achieving the goal of growth, is currently engaged in assessing around 2000 compliances, posing a significant challenge for entrepreneurs. The need for an efficient and accountable administrative setup is urgent to create a conducive and thriving business environment. Initially, the Department of Punjab Industries and Commerce and its



IT'S IMPRACTICAL FOR ANY CHIEF SECRETARY TO CLOSELY MONITOR 50 PARENT DEPARTMENTS AND THEIR 163 AFFILIATED ORGANISATIONS, WHICH AROUND 75 ADMINISTRATIVE SECRETARIES HEAD

seven affiliated organisations oversaw the industrial sector.

However, three additional departments were later established - the Department of Investment Promotion, the Department of Employment Generation and Training, and the Department of Technical Education and Industrial Training - along with their ten organisations to fulfil the same objective. To fetch new investment, "Invest Punjab" was established under the Punjab Bureau of Investment Promotion (PBIP) as a single access point to streamline processes. It is claimed that this entity has been empowered to provide over 34 regulatory approvals, clearances, and compliances related to more than 30 organisations. This streamlined approach is crucial for existing industries, as they face challenges in directly dealing with 17 departments - the Punjab Industries & Commerce Department, Pollution Control Board, Chief Electrical Inspector, Labour Commissioner, Department of Factories, Department of Industries, Employment Generation and Training, Skill Development Mission, Punjab Bureau of Investment Promotion and Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation etc.

This complex web of multiple departments is directionless and unfocused; enormous human resources can be utilised in a single merged service provider entity. In 2012, the idea of merging The Punjab State Industrial Development Corporation (PSIDC) and Punjab Financial Corporation (PFC) into the Punjab Small Industries and Export Corporation (PSIEC) was also

proposed but has yet to materialise. Punjab, with 99.7 per cent of MSMEs, is a promising hub for growth. However, the most significant roadblock for these enterprises is dealing with multiple departments and keeping track of their compliance. Despite the implementation of ten policies since the first industrial policy was formulated in 1978, the need for actionable governance reforms is still pressing. It is necessary to explore various measures to significantly improve services and make Punjab an attractive destination. Policymakers must urgently re-imagine the state. Agriculture: In Punjab, agriculture is overseen by five distinct departments: the Department of Agriculture, Animal Husbandry, Dairy Development and Fisheries, Department of Horticulture, and Department of Soil & Water Conservation.

Eighteen additional organisations support these departments. Despite the involvement of multiple organisations, the state's agricultural growth has consistently declined, resting at around three per cent from 1990 to 2000 and further declining to less than two per cent from 2010 onwards. Education: The government greatly emphasises education and considers it a top priority.

There is a critical need to revamp the administrative structure, as there are currently two separate departments, with six organisations and a school education board. The Department of Higher Education and Languages manages organisations in education and languages, while the Department of School Education oversees the six organisations. Despite these efforts,

it is essential to address that Punjab's secondary school dropout rate was 17.2% in 2022, exceeding the national average of 12.6%. The Way Forward: The reforms have the potential to significantly improve the functioning of key sectors in Punjab, creating a more accessible, transparent, efficient, responsive and accountable system to achieve a single goal collectively. Therefore two steps may be taken: First, Empowering Apex Officials: To achieve seamless collaboration among departments, empower at least five to six apex officers who will oversee the overall administration of their respective departments and have to report to the chief secretary. Each apex officer should have the support of five to six officers as direct reports.

This approach aims to improve responsiveness, ensure transparency in decision-making processes, and hold apex officials accountable for their actions. Second, Stakeholder Engagement: The active participation of stakeholders is not just important, it's integral to the success of the proposed reforms. Encouraging stakeholder participation through feedback mechanisms and regular interactions to understand their needs and concerns is a key part of inclusive growth.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal)

## A bold leap towards 'Viksit Bharat' with historic push for education and skilling

This budget allocation of Rs 1.48 lakh crore for education and skilling along with digital learning will help build a robust, future-ready workforce

Union Minister for Education Dharmendra Pradhan hailed the 2024-25 budget as a pivotal milestone on India's path to becoming a developed nation by 2047. Prioritising education, skilling, employment generation, research and innovation like never before, #Budget for Viksit Bharat paves the way for strengthening Bharat's credentials. "Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan posted on X. He noted that these are comprehensive and concrete measures taken up by Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman that will be a win-win for all stakeholders—students, academia, and industry. The budget allocation for Education, employment, and skilling has been increased by



REETU SRIVASTAVA

30% to Rs 1.48 lakh crore. India has the largest educational system with 265 million students in schools, 43 million in higher education and more than 10 million learners enrolled in skilling institutions. The Budget Allocation for 2024-25 of Rs 73,498 crores is the highest ever for the Department of School Education & Literacy. Autonomous bodies such as the Kendriya Vidyalaya

Sangathan and Navodaya Vidyalaya Samiti have also received their highest-ever allocations. The Flagship Schemes like Samagra Shiksha, POSHAN and PM-SHRI have got Rs 3,250 crores. The budget includes strengthening the skilling and apprenticeship ecosystem, skill development and internship opportunities for one crore youth by India's top companies, and providing employment-linked incentives to first-time employees across the sector. The government has introduced a revamped 'Model Skill Loans Scheme' from 1.5 lakhs to 7.5 lakhs to 25000 students annually and education loans up to 10 lakhs for pursuing education in higher domestic educational institutions to one lakh students every year with an annu-

al interest subvention of 3%. The step will certainly promote enrolment in domestic institutions as well as reduce the financial burden on the students. In addition to this, the finance minister also outlined several initiatives for the Skill Development sector. These include the upgrading of 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) in line with the skill requirements of the industry. The internship opportunities for one crore youth in 5 years by the government is a welcoming step, this will provide youths with an engagement and enhance employability and practical skills. In the scheme 'National Apprenticeship Training Scheme (NATS)', an allocation of Rs 600 crore has been made. There has been an over-



all increase of Rs. 3525.15 crore (7.99%) in the budget allocation of the Department of Higher Education in this budget. Deemed Universities, IITs, NITs, IISERs, and IISc have got hefty allocations, considerably high in comparison to the previous budget. In higher education, areas like Digital e-learning, Research and Innovation, teacher training, the Centre of

Excellence in Artificial Intelligence and some specific institutions have received higher allocations. Under Digital e-learning, the government is looking forward to tapping the potential of virtual learning and aligning it with the Academic Bank of Credits with the view of increasing portability and flexible study options. In the scheme 'National Mission in Education through ICT', an allocation of ₹480 crore has been made in 2024-25 and this is ₹80 crore more than the allocation in 2023-24. The increased budget for Research and Innovation is to focus on academic and research collaborations in science, engineering and technical education. To improve the quality of education being

imparted at the school level it requires a revamped pedagogical structure, so, the Teacher Training segment has got its due share. The scheme 'Establishment of 3 Centres of Excellence (CoEs) in Artificial Intelligence (AI) has got an allocation of ₹255 crore in the budget. The Major Schemes For Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) erstwhile known as Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), the budget has been kept at Rs1814.94 crore. An allocation of Rs 1800 crore has been allocated for Institutions of Eminence. In the scheme 'Multi disciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education EAP (MERITE)', an allocation of Rs 200 crore has been made and this is a 100% increase over the

last year's budget. The NEP 2020 says that the aim of the policy must be for India to have an education system by 2040 with equitable access to the highest-quality education for all learners regardless of social or economic background. Recognising the crucial role of education the government has designed an ambitious package for education for it to be growth-oriented, inclusive and progressive. However, the most important aspect is its implementation. The features of the budget meant for education will play a crucial role in guiding India towards becoming a 'Viksit Bharat' by 2047 as stated by the Education Minister. (The writer is an educationist and a freelance writer; views expressed are personal)

# 'Commercial ship drifts, ablaze after attacks in Red Sea'

AP n DUBAI

A commercial ship traveling through the Red Sea came under repeated attack Wednesday, leaving the vessel "not under command" and drifting ablaze after an assault suspected to have been carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels, the British military said. Few details were immediately available about the attack, though it comes during the Houthis' monthslong campaign targeting ships over the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. The attack saw men on small boats first open fire with small arms some 140 kilometers (90 miles) west of the rebel-held Yemeni port city of Hodeida, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) center said.

Four projectiles also hit the ship, it added. It wasn't immediately clear if that meant drones or missiles. "The vessel reports being not under command," the UKMTO said, likely meaning it lost all power. "No casualties reported." Later, the UKMTO warned the ship was drifting while on fire in the Red Sea. The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack, though it can take them hours or even days before their acknowledgment one of their assaults. The Houthis have targeted more than 80 vessels with missiles and drones since the war in Gaza started in October. They seized one vessel and sunk two in the campaign that also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have been either intercepted by a US-led coalition in the Red

Sea or failed to reach their targets. The rebels maintain that they have targeted ships linked to Israel, the United States or the UK to force an end to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran. The Houthis have also launched drones and missiles toward Israel, including an attack on July 19 that killed one person and wounded 10 others in Tel Aviv. Israel responded the next day with airstrikes on the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida that hit fuel depots and electrical stations, killing and wounding a number of people, the rebels say. After the strikes, the Houthis paused their attacks until August 3, when they hit a Liberian-flagged container ship traveling through the Gulf

of Aden. A Liberian-flagged oil tanker came under a particularly intense series of attacks, beginning August 8, likely carried out by the rebels. A similar attack happened Aug. 13 as well. As Iran threatens to retaliate against Israel over the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, the US military told the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group to sail more quickly to the area. America also has ordered the USS Georgia guided missile submarine into the Mideast, while the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier strike group was in the Gulf of Oman. Additional F-22 fighter jets have flown into the region and the USS Wasp, a large amphibious assault ship carrying F-35 fighter jets, is in the Mediterranean Sea.

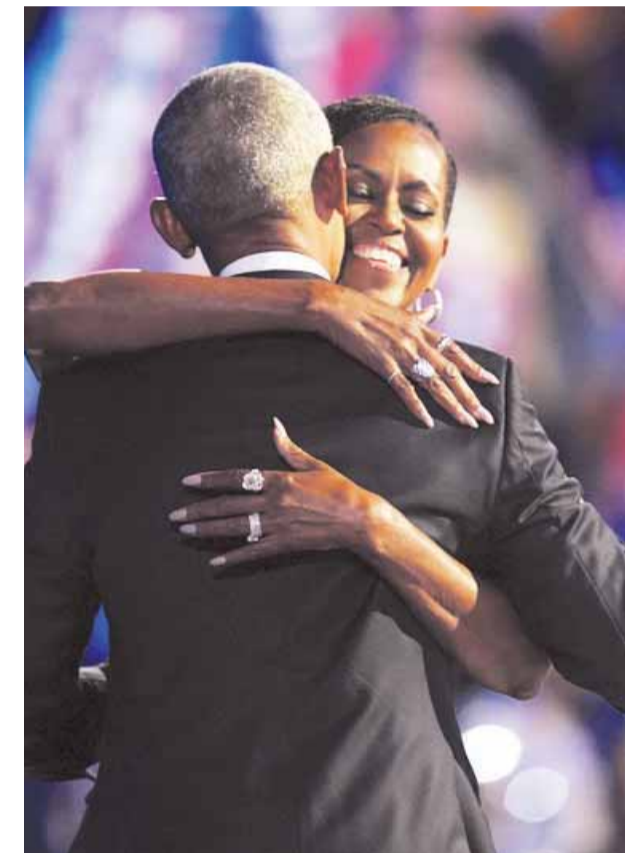


Israeli police officers scuffle with ultra-Orthodox Jewish men during a protest against a potential new draft law which could end their exemptions from military service in Jerusalem, Wednesday. AP/PTI

# Iran's parliament approves all members of president's Cabinet

Tehran (AP) — Iran's hard-line parliament on Wednesday approved all members of reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian's Cabinet, the first time in over two decades a leader has been able to get all of his officials through the body. The approval marks an early win for Pezeshkian, a longtime lawmaker who found himself catapulted into the presidency after a helicopter crash in May killed his hard-line predecessor. Getting his officials approved shows Pezeshkian picked a Cabinet of consensus with names palatable to all of the power centres within Iran's theocracy, as opposed to going for controversial choices as well.

Former Foreign Minister Mohamad Javad Zarif, who campaigned for Pezeshkian in his election, later resigned as a vice president for the new leader over the Cabinet selections. Underlining that point, Pezeshkian immediately posted an image online with him standing next to Iran's judiciary chief, a Shiite cleric, and the country's parliament speaker, a hard-liner he once faced in the election. "Consensus for Iran," he wrote in the caption. Among those in Pezeshkian's new Cabinet is Abbas Araghchi, 61, a career diplomat who will be Iran's new foreign minister. Araghchi was a member of the Iranian negotiating team that reached a nuclear deal with world powers in 2015 that capped Tehran's nuclear programme in return for the lifting of sanctions. In 2018, then-President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the deal and imposed more sanctions on Iran. Pezeshkian said during his presidential campaign that he would try to revive the nuclear deal. The candidate who received the most support from lawmakers was the country's new defence minister, Aziz Nasirzadeh, who received 281 votes out of 288 present lawmakers.



Former President Barack Obama hugs former first lady Michelle Obama as he is introduced during the Democratic National Convention Tuesday, in Chicago. AP/PTI

# Michelle Obama attacks Trump on 'Black jobs'

PTI n CHICAGO

In perhaps her boldest words ever against Donald Trump, Michelle Obama, the former first lady took a swipe at the former president for attacking her family because of their race, saying that the top job he is seeking once again "might just be one of those Black jobs." Delivering a forceful endorsement of Kamala Harris during the second night of the Democratic National Convention, Michelle said former president Trump, the Republican candidate in the race for the White House, will try and attack the US Vice President, the Democratic Party's nominee — something she said she and her husband have personal experience with. "For years Donald Trump did everything in his power to try to make people fear us. His limited narrow view of the world made him feel threatened by the existence of two hard-working, highly educated, successful people who happen to be Black," she said in her

nearly 20-minute address on Tuesday in Chicago, her hometown. Voicing her hope that Harris will win the November 5 election - and Trump's repeated use of the term - "Black jobs" - she chided him for promoting birtherism and other racist comments. "Who is going to tell him that the job he currently is seeking might just be one of those Black jobs?" the 60-year-old former first lady said, referring to Barack Obama, America's first Black president. The Obamas were targets of unfounded claims by Trump and other Republicans that Barack Obama's birth certificate was a forgery. Her powerful statement was a jab at Trump's comments at the June presidential debate and while speaking last month to the National Association of Black Journalists, where he said that immigrants are taking "Black jobs." If Harris is elected, she will become America's first woman — and first woman of colour

and first Indian-origin politician — to win the presidency. Michelle, the wife of the country's first Black president, predicted that Trump would launch attacks on Harris' race and gender. She warned that the race to the White House was still close, and asked the Democratic Party to continue working in the days ahead to ensure the victory of Harris. Michelle, in her address, described Vice President Harris, 59, as one of the most qualified presidential candidates who worked her way up from a middle-class background, drawing on lessons from the two women's late mothers. "Even though our mothers grew up an ocean apart, they shared the same belief in the promise of this country. That's why her mother moved here from India at 19," she said of Shyamala Gopalan, the mother of Harris. "She'd often tell her daughter: 'Don't sit around and complain, do something,'" Michelle said. She also recounted how

Harris was a student at Howard University — a historically black university — and then attended law school. "And then she went on to work for the people," Michelle said, "from a middle-class household, Kamala worked her way up to become vice president of the United States of America. My girl Kamala Harris is more than ready for this moment. She is one of the most qualified people ever to seek the office of the presidency." Michelle was earlier greeted by a long standing ovation from the crowd as he arrived to address them during which she delivered a series of not-so-subtle digs at Trump — evoking his name to critique what she described as his "ugly, misogynistic, racist lies." "No one has a monopoly on what it means to be an American," she said in an apparent reference to Trump's recent remarks on Harris' background as a child of immigrants. "If we see a mountain in front of us, we don't expect there to be an escalator waiting

to take us to the top," she said. Lest anyone think she was being ambitious, Michelle called Trump out by name. Michelle Obama's speech, "delivered with a clear voice as she looked straight into the camera to address Americans watching at home, was not saccharine. She began her time onstage by framing her remarks in the context of reaching for hope through despair," the New York Times commented. Kamala Harris rallied thousands of voters in one packed arena as former President Barack Obama and Michelle Obama energized millions more on Harris' behalf inside another on a Tuesday night designed to demonstrate the energy and breadth of the Democratic nominee's evolving coalition. "I am feeling hope," Obama told the Democratic National Convention in Chicago just minutes after his wife, the former first lady Michelle Obama, told the same crowd that, "Something wonderfully magical is in the air, isn't it?"

# Congo reports more than 1k new Mpox cases in a week

Cape Town (AP) — Congo reported more than 1,000 new mpox cases in the last week up to Tuesday as African health authorities asked for desperately needed vaccines to help fight its "growing" threat on the continent. The World Health Organisation has declared the outbreaks in Africa a global emergency. Mpox belongs to the same family of viruses as smallpox but causes milder symptoms like fever, chills and body aches, and mostly spreads through close skin-to-skin contact, including sexual intercourse. People with more serious cases can develop lesions on the face, hands, chest and genitals. While mpox has been reported in 12 of Africa's 54 countries during these outbreaks, the vast central African nation of Congo has recorded by far the most cases this year. Out of a total of 18,910 cases in 2024, 94% — or 17,794 — were in Congo, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said, with 535 of the 541 deaths reported. The figures are likely an underestimate, as only about one in five suspected cases in Congo are being tested for mpox. Africa CDC director-general Dr. Jean Kaseya said many affected African countries had limited testing and surveillance capabilities. Over the last seven days, Congo recorded 1,030 of the 1,405 new cases in Africa according to statistics provided late Tuesday by the Africa CDC. Only 16% of the cases have been confirmed by virus tests, but the infections meet the agency's definition of the disease. The rising mpox case count in Africa and a new form of the virus identified in Congo that might be more easily transmitted led the WHO to declare it a global health emergency last week. Some hope this will encourage donors to share vaccines and other help to curtail the outbreaks in Africa before cases spread internationally as Sweden recorded a case of the new mpox variant first seen in eastern Congo.

# UK steps up action against Mpox in Democratic Republic of Congo

PTI n LONDON

The UK on Wednesday announced new GBP 3.1 million funding to work with the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to bolster the regional African response to outbreaks of Mpox and cholera in the country. The funding announcement follows a declaration from the World Health Organisation (WHO) that the upsurge of Mpox in the DRC and a growing number of countries in Africa constitutes a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC). During a visit to the Institute Nationale de Recherche Biomedicale (National Institute of Biomedical Research) in the DRC, minister Lord Ray Collins announced the funding for a new partnership with UNICEF aimed at benefiting over 4.4 million people in affected communities and preventing the further spread of Mpox to neighbouring countries. "Working together, with our partners and

using the expertise and dedication of Congolese scientists, including those at the world-leading research centre I have visited in DRC, our support will play an important role in ensuring global health security for all," said Collins, UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) minister in charge of Africa. "By protecting the health and wellbeing of communities across DRC, and by helping contain these outbreaks, we reduce the risk of diseases spreading further afield. This will ultimately benefit us all," he said. There have been more than 17,000 Mpox cases and 571 deaths in Africa this year, following the emergence of a new clade 1b variant of the disease first spotted in the DRC. Mpox, previously referred to as monkey pox, causes blisters on the face and elsewhere, and mainly spreads when fluids from these lesions are passed on during sexual contact. But it can also be spread through other types of skin-to-skin contact, as well as an

infected person coughing or sneezing nearby, and can even be spread by touching clothing, bedding, or towels used by someone with Mpox. The small-pox vaccine is used to protect against its spread. The UK said it remains in regular contact with the WHO and the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention on developments of the outbreak and the UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) is closely monitoring the situation. India is also on high alert over the disease, which has reportedly been detected outside Africa in Sweden and Pakistan. "The UK's support to the DRC, in partnership with UNICEF, on the Mpox response, will contribute to saving the lives of affected populations by aligning with the DRC's national Mpox preparedness and response plan," said Professor Christian Ngandu, Public Health Emergency Operations Centre Coordinator at DRC's National Public Health Institute.

# Bus carrying Shiite pilgrims from Pak to Iraq crashes in Iran, killing 28

AP n TEHRAN

A bus carrying Shiite pilgrims from Pakistan to Iraq crashed in central Iran, killing at least 28 people, an official said Wednesday. The crash happened Tuesday night in the central Iranian province of Yazd, said Mohammad Ali Malekzadeh, a local emergency official, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. Another 23 people suffered injuries in the crash, 14 of them serious, he added. He said all the bus passengers hailed from Pakistan. There were 51 people on board at the time of the crash outside of the city of Taft, some 500 kilometers southeast of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Iranian state television later broadcast images of the bus, turned upside down on the highway with its roof smashed in and all its doors open. Rescuers stepped gingerly through the broken glass and debris littering the road. In the state TV report, Malekzadeh



This image taken from a video released by Iranian state television shows the aftermath of a bus crash near Taft, Iran, early Wednesday. A bus carrying Shiite pilgrims from Pakistan to Iraq crashed in central Iran, killing multiple people, an official said Wednesday. AP/PTI

blamed the crash on the bus brakes failing and a lack of attention by its driver. In Pakistan, authorities described those on the bus as coming from the city of Larkana in Pakistan's southern Sindh province. Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he was "deeply saddened" by the crash and that diplomats were providing assistance to those affected. "My thoughts are with the bereaved families," Sharif said

the pilgrims had been on their way to Iraq to commemorate Arbaeen. Arbaeen — Arabic for the number 40 — marks the death of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein, at the hands of the Muslim Umayyad forces in the Battle of Karbala, during the tumultuous first century of Islam's history. Hussein was seen by his followers as the rightful heir of the prophet's legacy. When he refused to pledge allegiance to the Umayyad caliphate, he was killed in the battle, cementing the schism between Sunni and Shiite Islam. Pilgrims gather in Karbala, Iraq, in what's regarded as the largest annual public gathering in the world. The event draws tens of millions of people each year.

# From blind date to 'Momala': Kamala Harris' husband shares their love story

PTI n CHICAGO

Kamala Harris' husband Douglas Emhoff shared his love story and recalled how he met his wife on a blind date in 2013 and left an awkward voice message for her which she plays for him every year on their wedding anniversary. Second Gentleman Doug Emhoff took to the stage at the Democratic National Convention here on Tuesday night with this deeply personal story to drum up support for Harris, who is of Indian and African heritage. He said he loved working as a lawyer, became a dad to son Cole and daughter Ella, got a divorce and then "something unexpected happened" — he was set up on a blind date with Harris.

plays for him every year on their anniversary. "For generations, people have debated when to call the person you're being set up with, and never in history has anyone suggested 8:30 am. And yet, that's when I dialled," he said. "I got Kamala's voicemail, and I just started rambling." "I remember trying to grab the words out of the air and put them back in my mouth. After what seemed like far too many minutes, I hung up. By the way, Kamala saved that voicemail, and she makes me listen to it every anniversary. That message wasn't the only unusual thing about that day," he said, drawing laughs and cheers from the Democratic Party supporters. "Kamala, who normally would have been working hard at the

office, just happened to be waiting at her apartment for a contractor to do some work on her kitchen. I was eating at my desk, which was not a regular occurrence for a busy lawyer like me who appreciates a good business lunch," Emhoff said. "That's when she called me back. We talked for an hour. We laughed. You know that laugh. I love that laugh. Maybe that counted as our first date. Or, maybe it was that Saturday, when I picked her up and told her 'Buckle up-I'm a really bad driver,'" he said. He called his wife a "joyful warrior" and a loving co-parent to his kids. Emhoff, a Los Angeles attorney who took leave from his firm when Harris became vice president, has two now-grown children from his first marriage.

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# UK to deploy specialist officers, speed up returns in illegal migration crackdown

PTI n LONDON

The UK government on Wednesday announced a new set of illegal migration crackdown measures that include the immediate recruitment of up to 100 new specialist intelligence officers and the reopening of detention centres to speed up returns to countries of origin. Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said the new officers will be deployed at the National Crime Agency (NCA) to target, dismantle and disrupt organised immigration crime networks. She also announced a "surge" in immigration enforcement, with plans for the next six months to achieve the highest rate of removals of those with no right to remain in the UK, including failed asylum seek-

ers. In addition, a new "intelligence-driven" illegal working programme will be rolled out to target, investigate and take down "unscrupulous employers" who illegally employ those with no right to work in the country. "We are taking strong and clear steps to boost our border security and ensure the rules are respected and enforced," said Cooper. "Our new Border Security Command is already gearing up, with new staff being urgently recruited and additional staff already stationed across Europe working with European enforcement agencies to find every route into smashing the criminal smuggling gangs organising dangerous boat crossings, which

undermine our border security putting lives at risk. And by increasing enforcement capabilities and returns we will establish a system that is better controlled and managed, in place of the chaos that has blighted the system for far too long," she said. As part of the measures unveiled this week, the Home Office expects a "large surge" in enforcement and returns flights, with the aim of putting removals at their highest level since 2018. There will also be increased detention capacity, including 290 added beds at Campsfield and Haslar Immigration Removal Centres, and redeployment of staff to drive the process of returning migrants entering the UK illegally from a country deemed as safe.







# INDIAN PARA-ATHLETES EYE 12 MEDALS AT PARALYMPICS



PTI n NEW DELHI  
Eyeing an unprecedented five gold and a dozen medals in total, the first batch of the Indian contingent, including star javelin thrower Sumit Antil, left for the Paris Paralympics in advance to get acclimatised to the conditions. The 16 para athletes will stay at hotels in Paris for a few days before entering the Games Village on August 25, three

days before the Opening Ceremony. The likes of Antil, who is bidding to become the first Indian to defend his Paralympics gold, will train at facilities near the French capital to acclimatise with the weather conditions there. Para athletics events will be held from August 30 to September 8, the closing day of the Paralympics, at Stade de France, the same venue where the able-bodied athletes

competed during the Paris Olympics. "Sumit Antil and some other para athletes will train at Nelson Mandela Sports Complex for a few days before entering the Games Village," para-athletics head coach Satyanarayana told PTI. Nelson Mandela Sports Complex is around 5km from Stade de France. It has state-of-the-art training facilities for athletics, rugby, tennis, wheelchair tennis and

swimming. "Some will stay at hotels near the Games Village and they can use the training facilities there during day time," he added. Asked about Indian para-athletics team's medal prospects at the Paris Games, he said, "We are aiming for at least five gold and 12 medals in total. This will be our best performance in the Paralympics." Satyanarayana's hopes stem

from the unprecedented success at the 2024 World Para Athletics Championships in Kobe, Japan, in May where India had finished sixth in the medal tally with six gold, five silver and six bronze. Antil (men's javelin F64), Deepthi Jeevanji (women's 400m T20), Sachin Khilari (men's shot put F46), Ekta Bhyan (women's club throw F51), Simran Sharma (women's 200m T12) and Mariyappan Thangavelu (men's high jump T42) won gold. In the Tokyo Paralympics in 2021, India had won a record 19 medals (5 gold, 8 silver and 6 bronze). India is sending its biggest ever team of 84 athletes across 12 sports to the Paralympics, with 38 from the para-athletics team. Paralympic Committee of India President Devendra Jhajharia has predicted at least 25 medals from the Paris Games. Antil and Bhagyashree Jadhav, who won a silver in Hangzhou Asian Para Games in women's shot put F34, will be the joint flag bearers for India during the Opening Ceremony, which will be held outside a stadium for the first time. The ceremony will be held from Champs-Elysees to Place de la Concorde in the heart of Paris. The Opening Ceremony of the Paris Olympics was also held outside a stadium, on the banks of the Seine river, a first in the games' history.

# No Jhinghan among India probables for Intercontinental Cup



PTI n NEW DELHI  
Influential centre-back Sandesh Jhinghan's name was missing as Chennaiyin FC forward Kiyan Nassiri, son of East Bengal's Iranian legend Jamshid, on Wednesday inched closer to his maiden India selection after being named among new head coach Manolo Marquez's 26 probables for the Intercontinental Cup preparatory camp. Mohun Bagan SG right-back Ashish Rai and East Bengal goalkeeper Prabhshukhan Singh Gill, who are yet to play for the senior India team, also received call-ups for the camp in preparation for the three-team annual tournament that will be held from September 3-9 in Hyderabad. It is understood that key defender Jhinghan, who sustained a right knee injury during India's Asian Cup group match against Syria in January, is yet to recover from the injury. Jhinghan, the 31-year-old central defender, also missed out on selection for the team's camp ahead of the FIFA World

Cup 2026 preliminary joint qualification round 2 matches against Kuwait and Qatar, in May. Syria, placed 93rd in the latest FIFA rankings and Mauritius, who stand at 179, are the other two teams in the competition. India are currently ranked 124th. The preparatory camp will start in Hyderabad from August 31. The fourth edition of the Intercontinental Cup will be the first full tournament after the retirement of the legendary Sunil Chhetri and the first assignment for Marquez who was named India head coach last month. India have won the tournament twice in the past. The 23-year-old Kiyan, who grew up in Kolkata and whose mother was born and brought up in Shillong, has been excelling upfront while playing for Indian Super League side Chennaiyin FC. His father has been an East Bengal legend and currently lives in Kolkata, having represented the Iranian U-20 team in the 1977 FIFA World Youth Championship. Announcing the probables,

Marquez said: "We are very excited about our first preparatory camp and I know it will be the same for the players. "We face two different teams and the rankings are not very important. We need to work all together in the same direction to find the correct group of players and their predisposition will be very good, something I am completely sure about. "I know all of us are in pre-season with nice challenges in front of us. Is a big honour to wear the jersey of the national team and we need to show it for our fans." **THE LIST OF PROBABLES:** **Goalkeepers:** Gurpreet Singh, Amrinder Singh, Prabhshukhan Singh Gill. **Defenders:** Nikhil Pojary, Rahul Bheke, Chinglensana Singh Konsham, Roshan Singh Naorem, Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta, Ashish Rai, Subhasish Bose, Mehtab Singh. **Midfielders:** Suresh Singh Wangjam, Jeakson Singh, Nandhakumar Sekar, Naorem Mahesh Singh, Yasir Mohammad, Lalengmawia Ralte, Anirudh Thapa, Sahal Abdul Samad, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Lalthathanga Khawhring. **Forwards:** Kiyan Nassiri Giri, Edmund Lalrindika, Manvir Singh, Liston Colaco. **Intercontinental Cup fixtures (all matches will kick-off at 7:30 pm):** **September 3:** India vs Mauritius **September 6:** Syria vs Mauritius

## U17 WORLD WRESTLING C'SHIP



# India's Ronak wins bronze in 110kg

PTI n AMMAN (JORDAN)  
India's Ronak Dahiya bagged the bronze medal in the 110kg Greco-Roman category at the U17 World Wrestling Championship here. In the bronze medal play-off, Ronak, currently ranked two in the world in his age-group weight category, comfortably disposed the challenge of Turkey's Emrullah Capkan 6-1 to claim India's first medal from the championship on Tuesday. Earlier, Ronak had lost to eventual silver medalist

Zoltan Czako of Hungary in the semi-final. The gold in this category was won by Ukraine's Ivan Yankovskiy, who beat Czako 13-4 by virtue of technical superiority. India have a chance of a second medal in the 51 kg repechage if Sainath Pardhi wins two bouts. He is first pitted against Dominic Michael Munaretto of the United States and if he wins the bout then he will fight the bronze medal play off with either Kazakhstan's Mussan Yerassy or Iran's Abolfazl Mehrdad Karamiegeai.

# Ronaldo aiming to help Al-Nassr end Al-Hilal's dominance in Saudi soccer league

AP n RIYADH  
Cristiano Ronaldo is lining up for another Saudi Pro League season with the main aim of helping Al-Nassr end the dominance of Riyadh rival Al-Hilal. Ronaldo signed for Al-Nassr in December 2022 and has yet to win a domestic trophy with the club. In a social media post this week, he wrote: New season, same goal. Al-Hilal won the title last season with 31 wins and three draws, finishing 14 points clear of second-place Al-Nassr. Hilal beat Ronaldo's team 4-1 in the final of the Saudi Super Cup last weekend. The 18-team league kicks off its season on Thursday. "I'm feeling a lot of apprehension because this season is going to be very

difficult," Al-Hilal defender Kalidou Koulibaly, who signed from Chelsea last year, told The Associated Press. "Last year, it was a tough championship, but we managed to come out on top. This year, all the teams will be gunning to beat Al Hilal." Last summer, a string of big-name stars arrived from Europe's top leagues to join Ronaldo in Saudi Arabia. According to Deloitte's Sports Business Group, a total of \$957 million was spent. This summer has been comparatively quiet, although the transfer window remains open until Sept. 2. For Al-Hilal, the return of Neymar will be like a new signing. The Brazilian superstar made only five appearances for the Riyadh club before sustaining a serious left knee injury while



playing in a World Cup qualifier in October. "Neymar's return is highly anticipated by our players," Koulibaly said. "We know that there is still a little bit of waiting due to his injury but people will see a great Neymar. He still has this motivation when we see him in training."

Neymar returned to training last month and, according to local media, could start playing again in September. In Neymar's absence, Serbian striker Aleksandar Mitrovic scored 28 league goals last season, second only to Ronaldo's record 35. Al-Hilal also has Portuguese

international Ruben Neves and Morocco's Yassine Bounou in goal. Al-Nassr's major new signing so far has been Brazilian goalkeeper Bento, who replaces Colombian international David Ospina. As well as Ronaldo, the Yellows have Senegalese star Sadio Mane, Croatian midfielder Marcelo Brozovic and defender Aymeric Laporte, who helped Spain to the European championship in July. Other challenges are expected to come from Jeddah clubs Al-Ahli, led by Riyad Mahrez, and Karim Benzema's Al-Ittihad, which has made the biggest signing this summer so far, paying over \$60 million to Aston Villa for French winger Moussa Diaby. All four clubs, which were taken over in 2023 by Saudi

Arabia's Public Investment Fund, are by far the country's best-supported teams. League officials will likely be hoping a more competitive title race will help improve the average attendance, which was just over 8,000 per game last season. Al-Hilal has international as well as domestic ambitions. The club will represent Asia in the expanded FIFA Club World Cup which kicks off June 15 in the United States. Al-Hilal reached the final of the 2022 tournament before losing to Real Madrid. "What will be expected going into that competition is that it's going to be Neymar's team," the 33-year-old Koulibaly said. "So we're going to do everything in training so that he's out there and in his best conditions to help us win trophies."

# It's final week to qualify for Presidents Cup and Solheim Cup

AP n WASHINGTON  
The BMW Championship is the last stop before the leading six players get automatic spots in the Presidents Cup next month at Royal Montreal. Turns out the first FedEx Cup playoff event had a strong effect, too. Jordan Spieth might have been a long shot to make the U.S. Team, but last week sealed it. He finished 26 shots out of the lead, failed to advance and said he would be having surgery on his left wrist. His season is over. It also was a big blow to Mackenzie Hughes of Canada, who dropped out of the top 50. International captain Mike Weir wants a strong Canadian presence, but none is in the top six and four other Canadians are ahead of Hughes. Weir gets six captain's picks after the Tour Championship. Hughes won't be at East Lake,

either. This comes two years after Hughes, renowned for his putting, was curiously left off the International side for the matches at Quail Hollow, where he is a member. For the Americans, there figures to be significant turnover from their last team competition at the Ryder Cup. Three players already are effectively eliminated - Spieth, Rickie Fowler (didn't qualify for the post-season) and Brooks Koepka (ineligible because he plays for LIV Golf). The leading five - Scottie Scheffler, Xander Schauffele, Collin Morikawa, Wyndham Clark and Patrick Cantlay - were at Marco Simone. Sahith Theegala is holding down the sixth spot over Tony Finau. Max Homa, who went 4-0 in his Presidents Cup debut at Quail Hollow, finished last in the 70-man field last week. He has not contended since his Sunday chance at the Masters (his lone top 10 was at Wells

Fargo, where he finished 13 shots behind). Homa is at No. 9 in the standings. Right behind is Brian Harman, who has one top 10 in his last 13 starts. The wild card, again, is Justin Thomas. He is at No. 16 in the standings and he could use a mile-high effort this week. Thomas faced plenty of scrutiny from being picked for the Ryder Cup team without having qualified for the post-season. U.S. Captain Jim Furyk could have some interesting choices, such as 20-year-old Nick Dunlap or 22-year-old Akshay Bhatia, depending on what kind of performances he sees at Castle Pines and then East Lake. The International team, which has lost nine in a row, is the side that would appear to have some stability. The leading five players were at Quail Hollow and Byeong Hun An played in the 2019 matches. Four others



from the '22 team have done well enough to merit consideration. **SOLHEIM CUP PUSH:** The Women's British Open at St. Andrews is the final qualifying event for the Solheim Cup, with seven players vying for the final two automatic spots for the U.S. Team. Lauren Coughlin, who won the Women's Scottish Open, and Allisen Corpuz, who tied for 15th in Scotland, clinched their spots. Meghan Khang and Andrea Lee are holding

down the final two spots among seven automatic qualifiers. Rose Zhang is at No. 8, though she also is leading in the two spots awarded to players from the women's world ranking not already eligible. Stacy Lewis gets three captain's picks, one of them likely going to Lexi Thompson, who has shown renewed form since announcing her retirement from a full schedule. Europe takes two players from its European Solheim Cup

standings, the leading six players from the women's world ranking and Suzann Pettersen will get four captain's picks. The matches are Sept. 13-15 at Robert Trent Jones Golf Club in Gainesville, Virginia. Keegan hangs on. Keegan Bradley figured to be safe when he started the post-season at No. 39, but that was a little misleading. There were 93 points between Bradley and No. 38, and only 105 points down to Jake Knapp at No. 50. Bradley left the TPC Southwind projected outside the top 50 and he narrowly hung on, moving inside when Tom Kim finished bogey-double bogey-double bogey. He has said his goal was to get to the Tour Championship. But the Ryder Cup captain did well to make it to the BMW Championship. The top 50 get into all eight signature events next year, allowing Bradley to

be around players likely to make his team for Bethpage Black. Plus, he doesn't have to put tournament directors in a spot by asking for exemptions. **WINNERS OUT:** Winning a PGA Tour event that offers full FedEx Cup points is worth a trip to the Masters and PGA Championship, a start at Kapalua for The Sentry and a two-year exemption. But it doesn't guarantee the top 50 in the FedEx Cup and the guarantee of playing the eight \$20 million signature events the following year. Nick Taylor (Phoenix Open), Jake Knapp (Mexico Open), Peter Malnati (Valspar Championship), Davis Riley (Colonial) and Jonathan Vegas (3M Open) did not reach the BMW Championship. Don't expect Vegas to lose sleep over it. He was No. 139 in the FedEx Cup and in danger of losing his card when he won

in Minnesota. Saunders retires. Trying to play golf at the highest level is difficult enough. Sam Saunders did this while being known his entire career as the grandson of Arnold Palmer. Saunders strived for his own identity while embracing his heritage with remarkable poise. But the 37-year-old is ready to move on. Saunders missed the cut on the Korn Ferry Tour last week and posted to Instagram that it was his last professional round. He did not qualify for the Korn Ferry Tour post-season after making only four cuts this year. "I started this career over 15 years ago, and today was my last professional round," Saunders wrote. "I didn't want to post anything or make a big to-do of it, but I have too many people I want to thank, and acknowledge what a treat it has been."

