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HEZBOLLAH FIRES OVER 200  
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SENSEX, NIFTY HIT NEW  
LIFETIME HIGHS

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SWIMMER  
DHINIDHI GOING  
TO OLYMPICS AT 14  
11 SPORTS

# CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS COME HOME

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosted the T20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team for breakfast here on Thursday during which, he said, there were "memorable" conversations on the side's experiences through the marquee event co-hosted by USA and the West Indies, the team went to Mumbai for victory parade.

The Rohit Sharma-led squad, that won the title after defeating South Africa by seven runs in the final last week, arrived in Delhi early morning after being stranded in Bridgetown, Barbados for five days due to a category 4 hurricane.

The victory parade of the T20 World Cup winning Indian team commenced after a two-hour delay as complete crowd chaos along the stretch of South Mumbai brought the traffic to a halt after Rohit and his men touched down little after 5 pm here on Thursday.

As per the itinerary shared by the officials here, the two-hour open bus parade started from the National Centre for Performing Arts (NCPA) in Nariman Point till the Wankhede Stadium started little after 7:30 pm in the evening as the Maximum City's stretch along the Marine Drive was drowned in an 'Ocean of Humanity'.

The Wankhede Stadium here was thrown open to fans, who filled up the stands within minutes to celebrate the Indian



Players of the T20 World Cup-winning Indian cricket team with the championship trophy acknowledge fans during their open bus victory parade, in Mumbai, on Thursday PTI

cricket team's title triumph last Saturday.

After arriving in the city, Rohit's team and its support staff made their way to the southern tip of the city which houses the

Wankhede Stadium. But not before their aircraft — a Vistara flight — got the famous 'Water Salute' after arriving here at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport's

Terminal 2. The players walked out of the airport with a sea of fans and media waiting for them for last several hours. Meanwhile, here at the iconic

Wankhede Stadium which witnessed India's last ODI World Cup triumph in 2011, the stands got filled to the brim by passionate fans as thousands others waited outside the gates

which were closed around 5:00 pm. As the gates closed amid intermittent rain, extreme humidity and chaos of several thousand people arriving in the vicinity, those fortunate ones who were able to find their places inside Wankhede remained fixated to their seats even if there was scarcity of food and water.

As the fans ran in all directions to take their places in the stands amid a heavy burst of rain, several pairs of footwear got left behind in the rush while debris of all kind was also thrown around along the way.

While the wait extended, rain kept pelting down with breaks but it could not force the fans off their seats inside the stadium. The DJ kept entertaining with songs of all genres and at one instance it felt like Wankhede was hosting a rain-dance party with the stadium's speakers blurring out Vengaboys' party hit 'To Brazil' and country's unofficial sports anthem 'Chak de India'. Soon after, Wankhede came alive with its customary chants of 'Sachin... Sachin' followed by 'Mumbaicha Raja, Rohit Sharma!' and 'India... India'.

Earlier in the day after meeting the world champions, Modi posted on 'X' along with pictures of him with the team.

"An excellent meeting with our Champions! Hosted the World Cup winning team at 7, LKM and had a memorable conversation on their experiences through the tournament," wrote Modi.



## India script cricket history in England

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

While the Indian Men's Cricket team basked in their well-deserved T20 World Cup glory in Barbados, the cricketers of the Indian Deaf Cricket Team were quietly achieving a remarkable success of their own in England. Last week, they defeated host England by six wickets in a thrilling seventh and final T20 to claim the series 5-2 in Leicester.

Their triumph not only highlights inclusivity in sports but also serves as an inspiration, showcasing that with determination and perseverance, no barrier is insurmountable, said experts and differently-abled individuals as they expressed immense happiness and pride over this achievement.

Sumit Jain, president of the Indian Deaf Cricket Association (IDCA), said, "The victory in this bilateral series against England is not just a win on the field but a testament to the perseverance and skill of our hearing-impaired players."

## All govt work to be executed in Odia language

'Odia Asmita Bhawan' to be set up: CM Majhi  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

After his entry to the Loka Seva Bhawan here on Thursday, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi took a slew of decisions and also made some major announcements for the promotion and preservation of the rich Odia culture.

Majhi bowed down before the secretariat building before entering his official chamber. He sat in his chair amidst chanting of mantras by priests.

Majhi informed that all government work would be executed in Odia language and a commission would be formed for the promotion and preservation of the language.

"Apart from material development, emphasis will also be given to cultural development. Importance will also be given towards the promotion and preservation of Odia Asmita. Odia language will be widely used in government work. If needed, the Odisha Official Language Act will be



amended," said the CM.

Majhi further said the Lalit Kala Akademi would be reconstituted while a Translation Academy and an 'Odia Asmita Bhawan' would also be set up.

"The Odissi Research Centre will be activated. Quality research on Odia 'Asmita' will be encouraged. Efforts will be made to increase reading habits among the people and the library movement will be widened. For the promotion of Odia language and literature, a Translation Academy will be set up. Efforts will be made for modern and simple use of technology in the field of language. An Odia Asmita

Bhawan will also be set up. A Language Commission will be set up and the government work will be executed in Odia language. The Odia Bhasha Pratisthan will be reconstituted," said Majhi.

"Samanwita Sanskruti Bhawans will be set up in all districts. Art and culture of the districts will be encouraged. Special consideration will be made to appoint Odia teachers in high schools across the State. The Paika Academy and Memorial work in Barunei will be accelerated. Our government is committed to giving emphasis to various heritage sites in our State," he added.

## Heavy rains in State till July 8

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as a heavy shower lashed Bhubaneswar on Thursday afternoon, the weather office said heavy rains would continue to lash several districts of the State till July 8.

The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here issued a Yellow warning for heavy rainfall in Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Sambalpur, Deogarh, Angul, Keonjhar, Bargarh, Mayurbhanj, Balangir and Kalahandi districts on July 5. Bhubaneswar may experience cloudy sky with one or two spells of rain or thundershower.

Heavy rains may occur in Koraput, Rayagada, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar dis-

tricts on July 6.

There is a warning for heavy to very heavy rainfall in Malkangiri, Koraput, Kandhamal and Ganjam on July 7. Heavy rains are also likely to occur in Gajapati, Rayagada, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Khordha, Nayagarh, Cuttack, Puri, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar districts, the IMD said.

On July 8, heavy rains may continue to lash the districts Malkangiri, Koraput, Rayagada, Ganjam, Gajapati, Kalahandi, Nabarangpur, Sundargarh, Mayurbhanj and Keonjhar.

Light to moderate rain or thundershower may continue at many places across the State till July 10, the IMD said.

## Natural disaster meeting ODRAF units to be increased to 30

Rs 200 cr earmarked for tackling urban flooding  
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In the Natural Disaster Management Committee meeting held under the chairmanship of Chief Minister Mohan Majhi here on Thursday, stress was laid on ensuring zero casualties.

The government has decided to increase the number of Odisha Disaster Rapid Action Force (ODRAF) from 20 to 30 units. The government is also planning to set up as

many as five regional Fire Service hubs to manage sudden accidents like the Bahanaga train tragedy.

The Fire Service capacity is being upgraded with Rs 394 crore and an additional Rs 200 crore would be allocated for the purpose.

Elaborate discussions were held with the Special Relief Commissioner Satyabrata Sahu regarding the preparedness to deal with the possible flood situation.

Moreover, emphasis was given to control artificial flooding during torrential rainfall in urban areas. A proposal was given to earmark Rs

200 crore for the purpose. The IIT Delhi would provide the required technological help to manage artificial flooding in the twin cities Cuttack and Bhubaneswar.

Besides, the 24x7 control rooms, set up in the State, district and sub-division levels to inform people regarding flood-related news, would be updated into smart control rooms. The Health Department was directed to stock ample anti-snake venoms in hospitals to deal with snake-bite incidents. Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari coordinated the meeting.

## Odisha to execute Centre's Mission Shakti

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Thursday directed for implementation of the Central Government's coordinated women's empowerment programme 'Mission Shakti' in Odisha.

The programme aims to

provide security and empowerment to women. One Stop Centre, women's helpline, Beti Bachao Beti Bhabhao, construction of hubs for women empowerment, Sakhi Nivas, Shakti Sadan, Sishu Gruha and Pradhanmantri Matru Bhandana are parts of the

programme.

By this decision, there would be better coordination between the Central and State Governments.

Notably, the State Government has decided to take advantage of all the welfare schemes of the Central Government.

## Hathras stampede site reeks of death, destruction

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ HATHRAS

A teddy bear, a few lunch boxes, slippers and handbags lying on the ground at the spot where the Hathras stampede tragedy unfolded on Tuesday continue to tell of the horrors of the day when devotion to a self-styled godman Narayan Saakar Hari alias 'Bhole Baba' turned into a ghastly affair as more than 120 devotees lost their lives. However, locals, who were witness to the mayhem, said the number of the dead is not less than 400.

In the sobbing town of Hathras many are seen grieving for their loved ones who lost their lives in one of the worst stampedes in the country, cursing the captured-godman who claims to heal and even bring the



Family members sitting at a house after the Hathras stampede. Over 120 people were killed and several injured in the stampede, according to officials Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

dead back to life.

"Itne hi bade bhagwan the to wapis kyo nahi aaye apne bhakto ke liye? (If he is such a big God why didn't he come back for his devotee?)," said a man identified Ramesh Kashyap who lost his mother

in the tragic incident.

Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh police on Thursday arrested six 'sevadars' including two women in connection with the Hathras stampede. However, the preacher has not been

## Victims rue medical neglect

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ HATHRAS

Relatives of those injured in the tragic stampede incident at a 'satsang sabha' led by self-styled godman Narayan Saakar Hari, also known as 'Bhole Baba', have voiced their grievances at the Sikandrarao district hospital in Hathras.

They complained of inadequate medical treatment for the injured, with many patients being discharged prematurely despite still experiencing significant pain.

mentioned as accused in the FIR lodged at the local Sikandra Rao police station. The only accused named in the FIR is at large. The preacher 'Bhole Baba' will be questioned if required during investigation, a senior officer said.

"A reward of ₹one lakh will be announced soon and non-bailable warrant (NBW) will also be issued against the key accused. Devprakash Madhukar," Inspector General of Police (Aligarh Range) Shalabh Mathur said. In the village of Sokhana, four people lost their lives including three from a single family. Binod, a 40-year-old labourer, was in Bareilly in search of a job when he heard the news of his mother's death in the stampede.

## Jaishankar for isolating countries harbouring terrorists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ASTANA

With tension persisting at the border for the last five years, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar told his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi on Thursday that the Line of Actual Control (LAC) must be "respected." He also asked the international community to "isolate and expose" those countries that harbour terrorists, provide safe havens and condone



terrorism, saying if left unchecked, terrorism can become a major threat to regional and global peace, in a veiled jibe at China and Pakistan.

Delivering Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of State Summit in the Kazakhstan capital Astana, Jaishankar, who was physically present at the meeting, recalled that one of the original goals of the SCO is to combat terrorism.

"Many of us have had our experiences, often originating beyond our borders. Let us be clear that if left unchecked, it can become a major threat to regional and global peace. Terrorism in any form or manifestation cannot be justified or condoned," he told the summit, which was attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Russian President Vladimir Putin among others.

## Hemant Soren back in saddle

PNS ■ RANCHI/NEW DELHI

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) executive president Hemant Soren on Thursday took oath as the 13th Chief Minister of Jharkhand, a day after Champai Soren stepped down from the post months ahead of the Assembly election.

He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by



Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader Hemant Soren takes the oath of office and secrecy as the 13th Chief Minister of Jharkhand during the swearing-in Ceremony at the Raj Bhavan, in Ranchi PTI

Governor C P Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhavan here. Hemant's father and JMM supremo Shibu Soren, his mother Rupri Soren, wife Kalpana Soren and senior leaders of the JMM-led alliance were present at the swearing-in ceremony. Chamapi Soren, who resigned as the Chief Minister on Wednesday, was also present on the occasion.

# Opening of Ratna Bhandar on July 8 unlikely Milestone in scientific research, collaboration UGC-DAE CSR BBSR Node unveiled

**Says Justice Arijit Pasayat**

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The Ratna Bhandar of the Jagannath Temple in Puri is unlikely to be opened on July 8 due to Rath Yatra, former Supreme Court Judge Justice Arijit Pasayat said here on Thursday.

Justice Pasayat is heading the 12-member committee formed by the previous government on the direction of Orissa High Court to supervise the inventory of the Ratna Bhandar.

"There is a crucial meeting tomorrow. Modalities will be framed for inventory of jewellery and other valuables

at the treasury of the Lords. The process will start whenever the government decides to open the Ratna Bhandar. There is a less possibility of opening of Ratna Bhandar on July 8 due to Rath Yatra," he told reporters.

On Wednesday, Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan had informed that a decision would be taken shortly and the government would make an official announcement about it. "The process of opening the treasury, modalities and duration of the inventory will be informed by the government through an official notification. Till then, do not believe rumours doing rounds on social media," he said.

The speculation for inven-



Justice Pasayat's visit here on July 4. His tour programme includes a meeting of the Ratna Bhandar Inventorisation Committee on July 5 in Puri, where he will

also participate in Rath Yatra celebrations on July 7 and inventory work between July 8 and July 27 before returning to Cuttack.

Meanwhile, Gajapati Maharaja of Puri Dibyasingha Deb has welcomed the steps being taken by the government to open the Ratna Bhandar for its both conservation and inventory.

"The inner chamber of the treasury has remained closed for 45 years. Opening it has been a long-pending demand and was raised in many managing committee meetings. Its conservation and inventory are the need of the hour," he said while expressing concern over its poor shape as per the ASI reports.

**At Institute of Physics**

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The UGC-DAE Consortium for Scientific Research (CSR) Bhubaneswar Node was inaugurated on June 27 at the Institute of Physics (IOP), Bhubaneswar. The event was graced by Chairman, Atomic Energy Commission and Secretary, Department of Atomic Energy, Mumbai, Prof Ajit Kumar Mohanty.

Prof Mohanty, in his inaugural address, emphasised the significance of collaborative research and the effective utilisation of resources and manpower for advancement



of the scientific development in the eastern part of India. He highlighted the importance of the UGC-DAE CSR Bhubaneswar Node in fostering such collaboration and expressed his optimism for its future growth in the region.

The ceremony was attended by several distinguished guests, including Director of IOP Prof Karuna Kar Nanda, Director of UGC-DAE CSR Prof Amlan J Pal, notable representatives from Department of Atomic Energy and Univer-

sity Grants Commission, as well as faculty members, research scholars, and staff of the institute.

In his speech, Prof Pal underscored the necessity of establishing the UGC-DAE CSR Bhubaneswar Node at IOP. Prof Nanda also emphasized the importance of collaboration and expressed his hope that with the support of all stakeholders, the Node would eventually evolve into a full-fledged UGC-DAE CSR Center. The inauguration marks a significant milestone as it is the first of its kind in the eastern part of India, paving the way for enhanced scientific research and collaboration in the region.

## Odia CEO Ankit raises Rs 6.3 cr in pre-seed funding

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Cautio, a Start up in the visual telematics space, announced a pre-seed raise of Rs 6.3 crore led by Antler, 8i and AU Bank. The funding, a mix of equity and debt, was led by Antler, 8i Ventures, and AU Small Finance Bank; with additional participation from Cautio's early believing customers and prominent angel investors.

Founded by Ankit Acharya, former senior executive - NammaYatri, Bounce and Bounce Infinity and Pranjal Nadhani; Cautio is dedicated to addressing safety concerns within India's mobility and transportation space. Offering cost-effective video telematics products, Cautio delivers tailored solutions aimed at miti-



gating safety issues prevalent in India. Through customizable dash cam devices and an AI-powered operating system, Cautio ensures accountability, improves driver conduct, minimises revenue loss, and adopts an API-first strategy.

Acharya - Co-founder and CEO, Cautio said: "Telematics in India has evolved rapidly, moving from GPS, Bluetooth and portable navigation to embedded connectivity. So far the focus has been on passive

road safety measures, but the same will shift to active real-time responsiveness, especially given India's high accident and incident rates. Video telematics and Dash Cams will play a crucial role here, driven by demand from the commercial vehicle segment. Odisha, in particular, is a key market for us. We recognize the State's potential and are committed to making significant investments here to enhance safety in mobility and support the region's growth."

## Puri servitor invited for Ambani wedding

**PNS ■ PURI**

A servitor of the Puri Shreemandir, Jagannath Kar, has received an invitation card for industrialist Mukesh Ambani's son Anant Ambani's wedding on July 12. Overwhelmed by the gesture, Kar noted Anant's devotion to Lord Jagannath and his contributions to the temple. Anant plans to visit Puri along with his wife Radhika after his marriage to seek the Lord's blessings.

Jagannath Kar was overwhelmed when he received the invitation to one of the most expensive weddings in the country. When he opened the invitation card, 'Vishnu Sahasra Naam' started playing from it.

According to Kar, Anant



Ambani is an ardent devotee of Lord Jagannath and he has come to Puri twice to have the Lord's darshan, which Kar facilitated. Since then, Kar has been in contact with Anant, who has donated silver for the silver cladding of the temple's door.

"During his last visit to the temple, Anant had invited me verbally for his marriage ceremony. I had never thought he would formally invite me by sending an invitation card. I have also got a phone call from his side to join the marriage ceremony," said Kar.

## At DAV, Kalinga Nagar Solo song competition among parents

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

Music is the language of the spirit. It opens the secret of life bringing peace, abolishing strife. Going in line with this, the DAV Public School, Kalinga Nagar organised a solo song competition among parents in its premises on Thursday.

More than 160 parents took part in the competition organised to mark the 28th foundation day of the school which is on the sixth of this month.

Addressing the meeting, Principal Balaram Mahapatra applauded the positive response of parents and said, "This unique initiative will not only give the parents a platform to showcase their hidden talent but also add to the steps taken by the school from time



to time in creating an atmosphere of confidence and fostering cordial relationship with the parents community."

The campus reverberated with beautiful renditions of popular, devotional and classical songs of Odia as well as Hindi language. The panel of jury consisted of the music teachers of DAV Public School, Unit-VIII, DAV Public School, Chandrasekharpur and DAV Public School, Pokhariput. The winners would be felicitated on the school foundation day.

## ARI held taking Rs 51,000 bribe

**PNS ■ CUTTACK**

Assistant Revenue Inspector (ARI), Chandanpur RI office under Puri Tehsil Pabitra Kumar Kandhi was arrested on Thursday in a bribery case.

He was caught red-handed while demanding and accepting Rs 51,000 from the complainant for submission of an inquiry report and for facilitating conversion of agricultural land to homestead (Gharbari) land for issuance of RoR (Land Patta).

Based on a complaint, a

trap was laid by the Vigilance team at Kandhi's office. Later, simultaneous searches were launched on the rented residential house of Kandhi at Bank colony, Talabania, Puri, house at native village Fakirpatna, Kakatpur, Puri and his office room. He was forwarded to the court on the day.

In this connection, Bhubaneswar Vigilance PS Case No.12 dated 03.07.2024 U/s 7 Prevention of Corruption Amendment Act, 2018 has been registered and is under investigation.

## 'Soon after in power, BJP fomenting violence in State'

**Cong leaders condemn melee at party office**

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**

The BJP is spreading unrest in the peaceful State of Odisha and the BJP Yuva Morcha activists' violence and maltreatment of the photo of Rahul Gandhi in front of the Congress Bhawan in Bhubaneswar in connection with his speech in the Parliament is condemnable, said PCC president Sarat Pattanayak at a Press conference here.

Pattanayak said it is a matter of concern how the BJP is creating chaos and unrest just

after one month of coming to power in the State. He accused police of not taking action against the BJP activists that created the melee at the Congress Bhawan.

Hitting out at the BJP for cheating the people of Odisha without fulfilling the promises made to people during the elections, the PCC chief said on coming July 5 the Congress Yuva Morcha activists and student leaders will meet the DCP, Bhubaneswar and will present a memorandum demanding action against the BJP activists.

Lok Sabha MP Saptagiri Ulaka said ruling BJP cannot tolerate the increase of

strength of the Opposition and the rising popularity of Rahul Gandhi. So they have become violent.

"Our leader Rahul Gandhi had said BJP and RSS are committing violent activities across the country in the name of Hindutva. But they have spread a canard that Rahul is describing Hindu Samaj spreading hatred," said Ulaka.

"We have raised the Manipur issue in the Parliament where 60,000 people are refugees. They are still to return to their homes. We demanded justice for them. One Congress MP who won from Outer Manipur was not allowed to speak in the Parlia-

ment on the issue, which is highly regrettable," Ullaka added.

PCC media and communication department chairman Dr Biswaranjan Mohanty said, "We strongly demanded to discuss MSP in the Parliament but were not allowed to raise the issue. He alleged that the BJP government has introduced the Gujarat model in the State after they raised the issue of Odia Ashmita during the elections. "Hinduism believes in nonviolence. But in the name of Hinduism, the way BJP and RSS workers spread violence is not good for a democratic country," Mohanty said.

## SOCIAL CANVAS

# No coal royalty hike: Odisha suffers huge revenue loss

The State of Odisha has been losing huge royalty, one of the principal sources of its non-tax revenue, due to lack of its periodic revision, besides due to large scale illegal mining. In spite of provisions in the MMDR Act-1957, (section-9), for a long time, the issues are not settled by the Union Government. The Government of Odisha has been continuously raising the issues before a number of statutory bodies such as the Parliament, InterState Council, Finance Commissions, inquiry commissions and study groups on royalty.

In case of coal there has been no uniformity of royalty rate as in case of West Bengal a separate practice of collection of both royalty and cess is being followed whereas in case other coal bearing States including Odisha only royalty is being collected. The current coal royalty rate is 14 percent of Advaloram on price of coal as fixed by IBM for all States except West Bengal, which charges about 25



**MANAS JENA**

percent cess and less royalty. Though the Union Government wants WB to minimize cess and increase royalty to make a balance, the WB Government has not obliged. It levies education, health and employment cess of 25 percent on each tonne of coal and earns about thousands of crores.

The price of coal has been in-

creased and the representative prices of different grades of coal based on March 2024 price vary. Presently, for grade-1 it is Rs 8,463 while for grade 17 it is Rs732. The prices were Rs 6,059 and Rs 531 respectively for the same grades in the year 2020.

Coal royalty is a tax to be decided by the Union Government in every three years and it is collected and appropriated by the coal reserve States. The royalty(R) is fixed by following a method called  $R = ax b x p$  where a- is sale price of mineral b is rate of royalty and p stands for total quantity of mineral produced/dispatched.

There has been no revision of coal royalty since 2012 by the Union that has led to a huge loss to the coal bearing backward States such as Odisha which in turn affects the development of the State and in climate spending. For the last 75 years, the Centre, the PSUs and private companies have been exploiting the mineral resources of Odisha and ignoring a rightful share

of State and locals. The current mineral sector governance arrangement is very much centralized under the control of the union and is helpful to the capitalist class and their eco-system. The political leadership of Odisha is being appropriated by national parties to act as agents and the demand for resource federalism is invisible in State politics in spite of presence of a regional party which was in power for last 24 years.

The coal mining is the oldest one which started in 1875 at Goalprasad of Talcher. Odisha is a major coal producing State having almost one fourth coal reserve of the country. With increase in price and demand for coal for thermal power plants as well as for cement, fertilizer, glass, ceramic, paper, chemicals and brick industries, the production is projected to be doubled. After 2020 the Union Government has liberalised the coal sector for domestic, PSU and FDI players to buy and sell in open market. But the whole liberalisation and

privatisation process is not beneficial to the State and local communities because the revenue sharing arrangement such as royalty has not been enhanced rightfully.

One of the major objectives of coal nationalisation in early seventies was to boost the core sector of the economy such as steel industry and to meet the energy need of India as well as control the illegal miners and change the poor working condition of mining labourers in private mining companies. After fifty years of coal nationalisation, the country is moving in reverse direction by denationalisation of coal sector with more privatisation. It has been hugely impacting the employment and corporate social responsibility, human rights and environmental obligations, beneficial for the people of the state in general and the affected people in coal mining areas in particular.

The shift from public sector to private sector needs more monitoring and transparency in ensuring

legal obligations to people. Experience shows PSUs are comparatively better than private mining companies in terms of socially inclusive employment and in adopting environmental and local developmental measures.

Coal royalty as a resource for the State and its sharing with affected districts under DMF is linked to the larger issues and challenges of climate changes which is directly linked to the burning of fossil fuel, large scale deforestation and displacement and many more issues for which the union as well as the State government are not serious as it is reflected in their climate justice actions.

The amount of seriousness they showed in auction of commercial production of coal, the same has not been visible in addressing the issues of climate change for climate justice action. Climate change is linked to the greed of extractive industries globally. Coal sector has made drastic change with 100 percent FDI, mechanization, and in-

crease in the lease period to 50 years. They only become instrumental to boost the commercial production.

Climate change will increase economic and social inequalities among already unequal social groups in our societies for many historical reasons. Many communities are deprived of social justice as well as climate justice. The areas having extractive industries is making it more vulnerable by depriving people of their natural right over resources and a fair share in minerals wealth available in their habitations, at large. The last hundred years of unplanned mining has created huge abundant mines, no back filling, restoration of land, disturbed hydrology and huge fly ash ponds. Thermal power plants have rendered thousands acres of land uncultivable. The State Government has not yet done any evaluation of loss and audit of coal mining in terms of overall gain and loss for the State as a whole.

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## In Gajapati Unable to write in Odia, woman Sarpanch loses post

PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI

Two years after being elected, a woman Sarpanch in Gajapati district has lost her post because of her inability to write in Odia.

Kanakalata Pal (56) was the Sarpanch of Chandiput panchayat in Mohana block of the district. Her election in the 2022 Panchayat elections was challenged by her rival candidate Lalita Badaraita.

According to the Panchayat Act, candidates must be able to read and write in Odia to hold the post of Sarpanch.



Lalita initially filed a complaint with the election officer in Mohana. As no action was taken, she subsequently took the matter to the First Class

Judicial Magistrate in Mohana.

During the hearing, magistrate Subhjit Behera asked Kanakalata to demonstrate her ability to read and write in Odia. While she could read the language, she was unable to write it.

Consequently, the magistrate disqualified her election and directed the District Election Officer and the Mohana Block Development Officer (BDO) to conduct a re-election for the Sarpanch post.

Kanakalata said she would challenge the verdict in a higher court.

## J'suguda MLA meets 3 Union Mins in Delhi

Raises issues like 2nd KV, flight connectivity, railways, NH-49 expansion

RAJ KUMAR SHARMA ■ JHARSUGUDA

Jharsuguda MLA Tankadhar Tripathy met three Union Ministers in New Delhi recently to advocate for the all-round development of Jharsuguda.

During his meeting with Union Education Minister



Dharmendra Pradhan, Tripathy emphasized the need for a second Kendriya Vidyalaya in Jharsuguda. He

also urged the Minister to expedite the construction of additional classrooms and ensure the posting of necessary staff

in the existing Kendriya Vidyalaya.

Tripathy's discussion with Union Civil Aviation Minister K Rammohan Rao Naidu centered on improving flight connectivity. He requested the introduction of a second flight service between Delhi and Jharsuguda, as well as new flight routes connecting Jharsuguda with Hyderabad, Mumbai, and Ayodhya.

In his meeting with Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, Tripathy advocated for the stoppage of the Duronto Express and Ispat

Express at Bagdihi station. He also highlighted the need for the four-lane expansion of NH 49, which passes through Jharsuguda.

Upon his return to Jharsuguda, Tripathy was warmly welcomed by party workers at the local airport. Speaking to the media, he expressed optimism about the positive response from the Central Ministers and the anticipated progress in fulfilling various local demands.

"The Ministers have assured me that they will look into the matters," Tripathy said.

## In Baleswar 3 missing persons' bodies found

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Highly decomposed bodies of three missing persons, including two women, were traced on the hilltop in village Barapada under Gadapokhari GP under the Oupada police station in Baleswar district on Thursday afternoon.

The trio, including a couple, identified as Dampa Singh, his wife Jalia Singh and Somabari Singh, had been mysteriously missing since Monday.

Reports said the family members had lodged an FIR in connection with their missing with police. It was suspected that they were killed on the suspicion of practising sorcery. The local police after seizing the bodies sent them for autopsy.

Stepping up their investigation, the cops detained seven persons for interrogation. Further investigation on the matter was in progress, informed IIC of Oupada police station Sraban Kumar Maharana.

## In Jajpur Couple dies as car rams into truck



PNS ■ JAJPUR

A couple died and three others sustained critical injuries when the car by which they were travelling ramed into a truck on National Highway-16 near Panikoili Chhak in Jajpur district late on Wednesday.

The deceased were identified as Vinod Jena and his wife Sumitra of Soro in Baleswar district. According to reports, the accident took place near

the Sharma petrol pump when they were on their way to Baleswar from Cuttack. It was suspected that the driver lost control over the vehicle, leading to the crash.

All five injured were rescued by locals and Fire Service personnel and admitted to the Districts Headquarters Hospital, where doctors declared the couple dead. The other three injured were later referred to the SCB Medical College Hospital in Cuttack.

## In Rourkela Missing man's body found under bridge

PNS ■ ROURKELA

An elderly man, who had been missing for over 24 hours, was found dead under a bridge on National Highway-143 in Rourkela on Thursday.

According to sources, the body of the man, identified as Bhagwan Agarwal (75) of De-luxe Gali in the steel city, was recovered by police in the morning. The body was floating in the water under the Tarkera bridge on the National Highway.

Agarwal had been missing from his house from Wednesday morning and his family members had lodged a complaint with the police in this connection.

The body was spotted in the morning by some locals who informed the police about it.

Getting the information, police and Fire Service personnel rushed to the site after getting information and recovered the body, which was sent to hospital for postmortem. Further investigation was underway.

## In Koraput 2 Maoist IEDs recovered by BSF

PNS ■ KORAPUT

Two powerful Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) planted by Maoists were recovered by Border Security Force (BSF) personnel in the Machhkund area of Koraput district on Thursday.

Sources said an operation was launched following credible information received from the BSF intelligence.

The operation was initiated from COB Ankadeli, 65 Battalion, targeting the general area of village Kadamguda under Machhkund police station in Koraput.

A contingent comprising BSF troops and a bomb disposal team was dispatched to the designated area to conduct a thorough search operation in the forest terrain.

During search, two powerful IEDs were discovered, concealed within the forest area. The IEDs were diffused.

This operation marked a substantial victory for the BSF and a devastating blow to Maoists. The timely intervention not only safeguarded the community but also prevented a potentially calamitous incident, the BSF said.

## B'pur forum urges Health Min to upgrade MKCG to AIIMS level

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

A delegation of the Odisha Development Forum (ODF) met Health and Family Welfare Minister Dr Mukesh Mahaling, during his visit to the city here on Monday and submitted a memorandum in the presence of Brahmapur MLA Anil Kumar requesting to upgrade the MKCG Medical College and Hospital to AIIMS or AIIMS+ like institute.

The delegation said that, MKCG MCH is the only referral hospital for Ganjam and other backward districts of entire south Odisha and is considered as the lifeline of one of the country's most backward regions. However, the quality of healthcare services has not seen much improvement over the last few decades, the forum alleged.

While the previous government often claimed that the development of the premier medical college is an overriding priority, but the quality of services and poor infrastruc-



ture are forcing the patients of the region to go to private hospitals outside the State even for minimum treatment at optimal cost, the memorandum pointed out.

Drawing the attention of the Minister to some of the media reports, the delegation said that, out of 426 sanctioned posts of doctors, 113 posts are still lying vacant and a majority of the vacant posts are Professors including Specialists and Super Specialists. Similarly, out of 81 posts of Associate Professors, 30 posts are vacant; followed by 23 out of 40 Tutors and 41 out of 84 posts of Senior Residents.

Similarly, a majority of supporting healthcare professionals such as Lab Technicians, Pharmacists, and Nurses are vacant putting the healthcare service in a shambles, the memorandum added.

The memorandum attributed the pathetic condition of the premier hospital to severe negligence by the earlier BJD government for the last 24 years befooling the public and for mindless acts of frequent transfer of doctors of the medical college to other places without giving substitutes.

The forum said that maximum ICU beds of the hospital are non-functional; most of

the machineries and equipment are unutilised; some test equipment and tools and the lifts often remain defunct causing serious inconvenience to patients and their attendants. The forum appealed to the Minister to recommend the Government to upgrade the MCH to AIIMS+ status; fill up all the vacant posts of doctors and supporting staff; open the Burn Unit and other critical super specialist departments; establish the Department of BDS; Physiotherapy; Occupational Therapy and appoint a senior IAS officer as Chief Administrator of the MCH.

## Controversy over Kusuma bungalow in Jajpur

Collector orders probe

PNS ■ JAJPUR

While mystery still shrouds the Balle Balle Dhaba in Dharmasala, a new controversy has erupted over the luxurious Kusuma bungalow within the premises of a children's park in Jajpur district.

The luxurious buildings have come up alongside the Kusuma pond and children's park. But the question is who had given permission for its construction. How much money was spent on the project and by which department? Why such luxurious bungalow-type buildings were constructed at a place meant for public?

Surprisingly, the administration also doesn't have any concrete answers to the questions.

Meanwhile, the district Collector has ordered a probe into



the matter. "Now immediately we had called the Municipality Executive Officer and asked to find out how much money was spent, land details, pattas and who executed the work and whether transparency was maintained or not," said Collector, Nikhil Pawan Kalyan.

Notably, Kusuma had turned into a centre of attraction when the renovated pond was inaugurated by the then Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on March 15, 2018, in the constituency of BJD's organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das. It is said

that several Bollywood singers and actresses had come for the inauguration ceremony and the total expenses incurred on the event was quite more than what was incurred for the construction of the pond and its beautification.

There are nine cottages in the two-storied building. Rs 22 crore was sanctioned for the revival of the Kusuma pond and its all-round beautification and development in 20 acres of land in 2011. Lighting, children's park, and installation of the statue of Kusuma queen around the pond were done with the sanctioned

funds.

Later in 2019, Rs 6 crore was spent on installing a floating musical fountain. The local residents have alleged that the cottages were being used by powerful and influential people while others were not allowed.

"VK Pandian had come and we have heard the then CM and other influential people had come and the gates used to remain closed. Nothing was made public. An investigation is needed," said former Jajpur MP Anchal Das.

It remains to be seen what turn the entire controversy takes from here as already Pranab Prakash Das was in the news for constructing and later demolishing underground and tree cottages in his official residential quarters in Bhubaneswar. No comments could be obtained from the former MLA, whose name is being dragged into the Kusuma row by locals.

## Rs 9.56-cr cheque cloning fraud Odisha EOW arrests 1 more accused from Chhattisgarh

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested one more person in connection with the Rs 9.56-crore Bank of India cheque cloning case.

The arrested was identified as Ghanashyam Ahuja of Chhattisgarh. "He was nabbed on June 1, produced before the Bilaspur CJM Court and brought to Bhubaneswar on the strength of transit remand. He was produced in the Designated Court under the OPID Act, Baleswar on Thursday," the EOW said.

A case was registered on basis of a complaint filed by Chief Manager of Bank of India, Baripada, Sujata Kanungo

about illegal transactions of Rs 9,56,76,600 from the account of District Mineral Foundation Trust of Zilla Parishad, Mayurbhanj, through four cheques on April 10 and April 18. The EOW took over the case from the Bhanjapur police on April 19.

The investigation revealed that the fraudster used clone cheques and managed to transfer the amount to the accounts of PT Constructions and Supplier (Rs 2,68,42,300) with Bank of Maharashtra and S K Enterprises (Rs 1,84,27,400) with Punjab & Sindh Bank. He further diverted or transferred the money from the accounts of PT Constructions and Supplier and S K Enterprises to several other



accounts. "Out of the illegally transferred amount, Rs 5,04,06,900 was blocked and Rs 13,56,948 lying in 33 accounts

have been frozen," it said.

The EOW further stated that Ahuja is the proprietor of Ahuja and Associates and also the

signatory authority of the firm's account. "It was found that Rs 63,69,601 was transferred from the account of PT Construction to the account of Ahuja and Associates, and Rs 11.60 lakh was withdrawn from the account by the accused who then transferred the rest amount to different accounts. He posed as an CA having office at Raipur and in connivance with other accused allowed his account maintained with IDBI Bank for diversion of the fraud amount.

Following the arrest of one accused, Pomeshe Tembhare, from a village in Madhya Pradesh on April 26, Ahuja fled to his native place Raipur and hid in a rented house at Bilaspur. He also managed to

get another Aadhaar card in the name of Rakesh Kingrani.

"He is a member of a larger gang having complex network in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Odisha. After this arrest, the agency has got important clues about the entire gang. They have been perpetrating such frauds orscams for last four years in an organised manner by using the clone cheques, multi-layering of money transfers, sometimes using mule accounts and by manipulating the information network. Many incriminating materials like laptop, two mobiles, three pen drives suspected containing vital clues and ATM cards were seized from him," the EOW further said.

## P'lahara MLA takes up drainage issues with officials



PNS ■ PALLAHARA

Pallahara MLA Ashok Mohanty visited the drain system of Pallahara town and held discussion with the authorities recently.

Pallahara town is under the Nijigarh GP. But some roads are covered under the PWD department. The drain system is totally damaged and not in a proper system. The drain water in the rainy season cannot be disposed of properly.

During heavy rains, water-logging is a common problem in the town. It creates more

problems on the hospital campus. The NH roads along with some hamlets remain submerged for two to three days.

While four-laning of NH-49 has been made, the drainage system has been choked, in which the underpass gets submerged for a week. MLA Mohanty advised the Nijigarh Sarpanch and PWD officials to look into the matter and take immediate steps to clear the clogged drains before heavy rains. He also took up the matter with the Sub-Collector, Pallahara and BDO.

## In Jajpur 3 cracker makers injured in explosion



PNS ■ JAJPUR

Three cracker makers of Khosalpur village under the Kuakhia police station in Jajpur district sustained serious injuries on Wednesday night in an explosion at what seemed to be an illegal cracker manufacturing unit.

The injured persons were identified as Dhaneswar Pagada (50), Sidheswar Pagada (25) and Omprakash Jena (17). They were first admitted

to the Primary Health Centre, Kuakhia and later shifted to the SCB Medical College Hospital as their conditions deteriorated, said Investigation Officer of the case Dushman Das.

The impact of the explosion was so severe that the roof of the pucca house was damaged. The family members of the injured persons had no licence to manufacture firecrackers and the cracker making unit was illegal, added the police officer.

# 2024 winners' average vote share down by two per cent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The winners of Lok Sabha elections 2024 won an average of 50.58 per cent votes, down by 2 per cent as compared to the last general elections, according to an analysis by the poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). Among the elected MPs with declared criminal cases, 42 per cent won with a vote share of 50 per cent and above, the ADR report said. The ADR and National Election Watch (NEW) have released a comprehensive analysis of the vote share in the Lok Sabha Elections 2024, examining 542 out of 543 constituencies. The Surat constituency in Gujarat was excluded from the analysis as its candidate was elected unopposed. Winners in the 2024 elections secured an average of 50.58 per cent of the total votes polled, a decrease from 52.65 per cent in 2019. Notably, 279 winners (51 per cent) achieved more than half of the total votes in their constituencies, while 263 winners (49 per cent) failed to reach the half-way mark. Among the major parties, the



BJP had 75 out of 239 winners (31 per cent) securing less than 50 per cent of the vote share. For the Congress, 57 out of 99 winners (58 per cent) won with less than 50 per cent votes. Among regional parties, 32 out of 37 winners (86 per cent) from Samajwadi Party, 21 out of 29 winners (72 per cent) from All India Trinamool Congress, and 14 out of 22 winners (64 per cent) from Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam won with less than 50 per cent of the vote share. Out of the 251 winners with declared criminal cases, 106 (42 per cent) won with a vote share of 50 per cent and above,

while 173 out of 291 winners (59 per cent) with clean backgrounds secured more than 50 per cent of the vote share. Among the 503 crorepati winners, 262 (52 per cent) won with a vote share of 50 per cent and above, while 17 out of 39 non-crorepati winners (44 per cent) achieved the same. The winners of the Lok Sabha elections in 2024 represent, on average, 33.44 per cent of the total electorate, down from the 35.46 per cent in 2019. This indicates a decrease in the representativeness of elected candidates when compared to the number of eligible voters. Five winners had a margin of victory of less than 2,000 votes, and another five won with

more than a 50 per cent margin of victory. Notable victories include Shivraj Singh Chouhan (BJP) from Vidisha, with a 56.43 per cent margin, and Shankar Lalwani (BJP) from Indore, with a 64.54 per cent margin. Among the 542 winners, 74 were women. Kriti Devi Debbarman (BJP) from Tripura East secured the highest vote share among women winners, with 68.54 per cent of votes and a 42.92 per cent margin of victory. Out of 214 re-elected winners, 101 (47 per cent) won with more than 50 per cent of the vote share. However, 92 re-elected winners had a margin of victory of less than 10 per cent, with three exceeding a 50 per cent margin. The None of the Above (NOTA) option saw 0.99 per cent of the total votes in 2024, down from 1.06 per cent in 2019 and 1.12 per cent in 2014. This trend indicates a gradual decline in the use of the NOTA option by voters. The voter turnout for the Lok Sabha elections 2024 was recorded at 66.12 per cent, a slight decrease from the 67.35 per cent turnout in the 2019 elections.

# Modi to visit Russia, Austria next week: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will pay an official visit to Russia and Austria on July 8-10 July, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Thursday. This will be the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Austria in 41 years, it said. Giving details about his schedule, MEA said Prime Minister will be in Moscow on 8-9 July 2024 at the invitation of the President Vladimir Putin to hold the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit. The leaders will review the entire range of multifaceted relations between the two countries and exchange views on contemporary regional and global issues of mutual interest. Prime Minister Modi, will thereafter travel to Austria during 9-10 July. This will be the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to Austria in 41 years. He will call on President of Austria Alexander Van der Bellen and hold talks with Chancellor of Austria Karl Nehammer. Prime Minister Modi and Chancellor Nehammer will also address business leaders from India and Austria. Modi will interact with members of the Indian community in



Moscow as well as in Vienna. Modi last visited Russia in 2019 when he attended an economic conclave in the Far East city of Vladivostok. The annual summit between the Prime Minister of India and the President of Russia is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two countries. So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternatively in India and Russia. The last summit was held on December 6, 2021, in New Delhi. President Putin had visited India to attend the summit.

The summit saw both sides sealing 28 MoUs and agreements, besides coming out with a joint statement titled "India-Russia Partnership for Peace, Progress and Prosperity". Prime Minister Modi and President Putin last held bilateral talks on the margins of a summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) at Samarkand in Uzbekistan on September 16, 2022. In the meeting, Modi had famously pressed Putin to end the conflict in Ukraine saying "today's era is not of war". "I know today's era is not of

war. We discussed this issue on phone several times that democracy, diplomacy and dialogue touch the entire world," Modi had said. Since the Russian military action in Ukraine in February 2022, Modi has held several telephonic conversations with Putin and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. In reflection of its strong friendship with Russia, India has refrained from condemning Moscow's military action in Ukraine and it has been maintaining that the crisis must be resolved through diplomacy and dialogue. India's import of Russian crude oil has also gone up significantly notwithstanding the G7 price cap and increasing disquiet over the procurement in many Western countries. In December 2022, the G7 grouping and its allies announced a cap on the price of Russian oil as part of a series of punitive measures against Moscow in view of its invasion of Ukraine. The price cap restricts countries to pay more than USD 60 a barrel. Russia has been a long-standing and time-tested partner for India. Development of India-Russia relations has been a key pillar of India's foreign policy.

# PM pays tribute to Vivekananda on his death anniversary



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi paid homage to Swami Vivekananda on his death anniversary on Thursday and said that "we reiterate our commitment to fulfill his dream of a prosperous and progressive society". In a social media post, Modi said, "I pay homage to Swami Vivekananda on his Punya Tithi. His teachings give strength to millions. His profound wisdom and relentless pursuit of knowledge are also very motivating." "We reiterate our commitment to fulfill his dream of a prosperous and progressive society," he said.

# CBI ready to help States, stakeholders implement new laws: Director Sood

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) Director Praveen Sood on Thursday said the Central agency is geared to help States and other stakeholders implement the three new criminal laws which came into force earlier this week. He also said the CBI is working with the Law Ministry to successfully implement the three new laws. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) replaced the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Indian Evidence Act respectively from July 1. Addressing an event at the CBI academy, Ghaziabad where Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal presented the President's Police Medal (PPM) for Distinguished Service and Indian Police Medal (IPM) for Meritorious Service to 39 CBI personnel, Sood said the agency and the Law Ministry are working in synergy to prioritise more efficient prosecution along with investigation. According to a ministry statement, he noted that CBI's role has been evolving with the passage of time, from handling primarily anti-corruption cases in the beginning to special and economic crimes, cyber crimes and bank frauds. Addressing the gathering, Meghwal said



the new criminal laws will usher in "ease of living" with citizenry contributing to the progress and development of the nation. Appreciating CBI, he observed that its importance is being recognised in the society due to its investigative skills which is reflected in the high conviction rate. Referring to the new criminal laws, Meghwal asserted that they will bring in ease of living in a big way for the citizenry and will expedite delivery of justice and save crucial time of all the stakeholders spent in litigation. The minister stressed that this will prove highly productive for the nation as the energies would be channelised towards the process of development of the society and eventually lead to higher progress. Meanwhile, former senior police officers, including a former Central Bureau of

Investigation (CBI) chief, have said new criminal laws, which came into force on Monday will ensure speedy justice to the victims. Former Maharashtra DGP Sanjeev Dayal said the three new criminal laws are a "welcome change" from the colonial mindset of previous laws. "They bring necessary emphasis on crime against women reflecting concerns on rape, molestation and child trafficking. The use of scientific aids to investigation should help in securing better conviction rates and a cap on adjournments by the courts should get faster justice to victims," he said. Dayal was part of a committee, which also included senior police officers, including Satish Sahney, MR Reddy and S S Puri besides three young officers nominated by the then Maharashtra DGP in 2020.

The committee had made recommendation to bring victimology to the centre of criminal justice system. "It is very satisfying to see many of the recommendations codified. Now it is over to implementing agencies and courts," he said. Echoing Dayal, another former Maharashtra police DGP AN Roy also said that new laws take victim-centric approach compared to the British Era Penal Code. "The provisions in the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita aim to provide timely justice to women and children with increased punishment under these cases. It introduces digital electronic evidence reviews along with more focus on national security," Roy said. Former CBI chief and Mumbai Police ex-Commissioner Subodh Kumar Jaiswal said the new laws represent a tectonic shift towards a people centric approach to justice. "This will ensure justice is served rightly, timely and swiftly. Indian criminal justice system is now more victim friendly and justice oriented, a transformation achieved through extensive deliberation," he said. Jaiswal said the new laws will address the challenges arising due to cyber enabled crimes. Former SPG Director MR Reddy said the new laws will bring "paradigm shift" in enforcing scientific investigation and speeding up disposal of cases.

# Armed forces should be technology ready, says CDS General Chauhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan on Thursday said the form of war is transforming rapidly due to technological advancements and the country's Armed forces will have to be ready to accept this change. He made the remarks while addressing a gathering of Army officers, junior commissioned officers (JCOs) and soldiers drawn from 18 Grenadiers to mark 25 years of the battles of Tololing and Tiger Hill fought during the Kargil war in 1999. Tiger Hill top was captured by the Indian Army on July 4, 1999. The 18 Grenadiers battalion played a pivotal role in the Kargil conflict. "Vijay Diwas" is celebrated on July 26 every year to mark India's victory over Pakistan in the 1999 Kargil war. "People of the country have faith in our capabilities and due to that, we have this immense prestige. The legacy that has been bequeathed to you has been earned by our ancestors. We may not have made a direct contribution but we are reaping its fruits," Gen Chauhan told the gathering. This also "entrusts on us responsibilities", both individually and as a community, he said. One cannot make a mistake as a soldier and as a community, the trust can never be lowered, the CDS added.



In his address, General Chauhan said, "We are going through an age of transformation. In today's era, the form of a war is rapidly changing. Therefore, we will always have to be ready to accept this change." "We want to become a professional armed force and a superpower... India. It is our desire. This can happen only if we work with new energy, new zeal and new thoughts". Quoting scientists and philosophers, the CDS underlined that change is the only constant and the Indian armed forces "cannot stay away from this change". "Due to rapid technological developments, the form of the war is changing rapidly. In the past, it was found that valour was an essential element in winning a battle. But in future wars, valour alone is not enough... We will have to be flexible and

imaginative and keep an open mind," he added. As many weapons get upgraded with better technology, tactics and strategies also change and it is very rapid now, the CDS told the gathering. "Today we are talking of a multi-domain warfare. Instead of just conventional domains like land, sea, maritime and air, the cyber, electromagnetic spectrum and space domains are also added to augment our military strength," he said. The CDS said people love and trust the armed forces and if "we have to maintain it, we will have to bring change. "We cannot fail in a war," he asserted, adding that unlike sports, there are no runners-up in war as winner takes it all. "To maintain that trust, you will have to understand and adapt to these new things. This is the main reason why the government has made the post of a CDS and it is part of reforms that we are endeavouring to implement," General Chauhan said. He said as CDS, his mandate is to bring jointness and integration among the three Services, that all must work in consonance. "A unit works like a human body where any ailment impacts overall health," he said. General Chauhan extended his greetings to members of the 18 Grenadiers battalion and also the Veer Nari, whose sons or husbands made the supreme sacrifice for the nation.

# India, UK to deepen cooperation between cyber agencies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Sixth Cyber Dialogue between India and the United Kingdom (UK) was held here on Wednesday, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Thursday. Discussions during the Dialogue included cyber threat assessment, internet governance, data protection, protection of critical infrastructure, capacity building and cooperation in multilateral fora, including the latest developments in the cyber realm at the United Nations. Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation between their respective cyber agencies in order to build a safe and robust cyberspace. The dialogue was co-chaired by Amit A. Shukla, Joint Secretary, Cyber Diplomacy Division, Ministry of External Affairs of India (MEA) and Kat Jones, Head of Strategy and Engagement, Cyber Policy Department, The Foreign, Commonwealth and



Development Office (FCDO) of the UK. The Indian delegation consisted of officials from the MEA, Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Indian Cybercrime Coordination Center (I4C), Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY), Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO), CERT-In and National Critical Information Infrastructure Protection Centre (NCIIPC). The delegation from the UK comprised of officials from National Cyber Security Centre, the Cyber Policy Department of the FCDO, and representatives of the Cyber Policy Team of the British High Commission.

# NEET candidates move SC to restrain NTA from cancelling exam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 50 successful Gujarat-based NEET-UG candidates, including several who have been ranked first, have moved the Supreme Court seeking a direction to restrain the Centre and the National Testing Agency from cancelling the controversy-ridden exam. They have sought a direction from the top court to the Union Education Ministry to probe, identify and take strict action against students and others who indulged in unfair practices like paper leak and impersonation in the NEET-UG exam conducted on May 5 this year. The fresh plea by 56 students has been filed days before a top court bench headed by Chief Justice DY Chandrachud is scheduled to hear as many as 26 petitions seeking reliefs like re-test and probe into the conduct of the examination plagued by allegations of malpractices. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) is conducted by



the National Testing Agency (NTA) for admission to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country. NEET-UG, 2024 was held across 4,750 centres on May 5 and around 24 lakh candidates appeared in the exam. Allegations of irregularities, including paper leaks, have led to protests in several cities and sparring between rival political parties. The pleas seeking cancellation of the exam, re-test and high-level probe are listed for hearing on July 8 in the SC. The fresh plea of Sidharth Komal Singla and 55 other students was filed through lawyer

Devendra Singh. It said "The Hon'ble court may further direct the respondents (Centre and the NTA) not to re-conduct NEET-UG ... As that would not only be unreasonable and harsh for the honest and hardworking students but also would lead to the infringement of the Right to Education and therefore violative of Article 14 (right to equality) of the Constitution." The plea sought a direction to the Centre and the NTA to identify and punish the examinees who adopted unfair means, identify the centres and take appropriate action where any "compromise to the established guidelines for NEET-UG 2024 examinations has been done." The Petitioners are young students around 17-18 years of age, and to achieve their dream of becoming a doctor, they have given their 100 per cent and have cleared the exam after consistent hard work of more than 3-4 years, it said. However, the continuous coverage of news regarding the cancellation of the exam and

possibility of a re-test for all is creating mental pressure and causing unnecessary stress, it said. If the re-test happens as a result of "hype created due to the misleading coverage by media", the honest successful students will have to face hardship, it added. Singla, the lead petitioner, ranked 778 in the merit list of NEET-UG 2024, the plea said, adding, "He has always been an outstanding student who in class 12th has topped in his school with 96.60%. It is further stated that amongst the other co-petitioners, there are students who have scored even the 1st Rank...". On June 11, while hearing a plea seeking holding of the exam afresh on grounds of alleged question paper leak and other malpractices, the top court had observed that the sanctity of the NEET-UG has been affected and sought responses from the Centre and the NTA on the petition. It, however, refused to stay the counselling of the successful candidates.

# India, Australia to review bilateral defence ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Thursday reviewed the entire spectrum of their bilateral defence and strategic ties during telephonic talks between Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and his counterpart Richard Marles. He is also Deputy Prime Minister of Australia. In a social media post, Rajnath stated that a range of issues pertaining to bilateral defence cooperation were reviewed, with focus on closer collaboration between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific. "We place great value on India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," he said. Both Ministers noted the transformative progress in defence cooperation under the comprehensive strategic partnership, and appreciated the momentum achieved in the ties since the last India-Australia 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, which the two Ministers attended in November 2023.



Australia considers India as a top-tier security partner in their National Defence Strategy document which was released in 2024. Marles congratulated Rajnath for taking charge as the defence minister for a second consecutive term, and appreciated the functioning of the Indian democratic system wherein people voted in large numbers. He also congratulated Rajnath on Team India becoming the T20 world champions. India, US, Japan and Australia are part of Quad to safeguard interests in the strategically important Indo-Pacific region. China has all along criticized this grouping claiming it will lead to militarization of the region.

# Karnataka CM rejects BJP demand for CBI probe into MUDA scam

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday rejected the BJP's demand for a CBI probe into alleged irregularities in the Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) even as the opposition party intensified its protests against "fraudulent" allotment of sites to land losers.

The BJP has alleged that alternative sites were also allotted to the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been acquired by the MUDA, and sought his resignation. The BJP has alleged that alternative sites were also allotted to the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been acquired by the MUDA, and sought his resignation. The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of over three acres of her land, which the authority had acquired for developing a residential layout. The controversial scheme envisages allotting 50 per cent



of developed land to the land loser in lieu of undeveloped land acquired for forming layouts. The BJP has alleged that irregularities to the tune of Rs 4,000 crore had taken place in distribution of sites to land losers by MUDA. "Apparently 4,500-5,000 sites were allotted by flouting norms," a BJP leader claimed. The Chief Minister on Wednesday said housing sites allotted by MUDA under the scheme to land losers have been put on hold pending an investigation into the alleged irregularities.

The BJP staged a protest in Mysuru -- the Chief Minister's home district -- on Thursday and tried to lay siege to the MUDA office there, but the police detained them and whisked them away in a bus. "Have they (BJP) given any case (to CBI) during their tenure? I have given seven cases (including his earlier tenure as CM). This is not a case that is to be given to CBI... We too had demanded, did they give (any case to CBI for probe)," Siddaramaiah said on Thursday in response to a

question on BJP demanding for a CBI probe.

Urban Development Minister B S Suresha (Byrathi Suresha) has ordered a probe by a four-member committee.

Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said he wouldn't resign. "What role do I have in the case?" he had asked.

Home Minister G Parameshwara said the alleged irregularities in the allotment of residential sites by MUDA are being probed, and noted that the Chief Minister has already given clarification.

On BJP demanding CBI probe, he said, "if everything is given to CBI, then there is nothing to do here. They (BJP) are asking for a CBI probe for everything...."

To a question on the BJP planning to raise the MUDA irregularities issue in the coming Legislature session, Parameshwara said: "whatever issues they raise the government will respond to them effectively, without any hesitation."

# Yogi reviews progress of various developmental projects in UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewed the progress of various projects at a meeting with the Urban Development Department on Thursday. Emphasising the rehabilitation of slums, he directed officials to identify one slum in each municipal corporation and prepare a plan for the development of a multi-storey residential complex with basic facilities like schools, markets, parks, etc nearby.

The market developed in these complexes should be allotted to the families living in the slums, the chief minister said.

According to an official statement, he added that the responsibility for managing the parks in these areas should also be given to them. This will lead to the rehabilitation of slums in a phased manner across the state, significantly improving the living standards of the



people there," Adityanath said.

On increasing parking issues in the city, he said, "The government, administration and the public need to work together to find a solution. It must be ensured that vehicles are parked only in designated parking spots and not on the roadside. If necessary, enforcement actions should be taken." "Multi-level parking lots are proving very useful. Ensure to include commercial spaces in multi-level parking. Create plans for new parking spaces only after studying local requirements.

Develop parking space rules for better facilities in the future," he said.

Adityanath directed officials to take immediate action against illegal taxi stands and asked them to encourage the use of electric buses in urban transport.

He also directed officials to ensure the removal of encroachment on drains, which is the primary cause of waterlogging.

On improperly placed advertising hoardings in urban areas, he said they not only spoil the city's beauty but also become a cause of

accidents every day.

It should be ensured that no hoardings are placed on top of any building in any urban area. LED displays should be installed in place of the currently prevalent hoardings. This technology-based system will be convenient for advertising agencies, advertisers, local administration and the public. No type of advertising hoarding should be allowed anywhere except in designated areas," he said.

He also emphasised that there is a need for cadre restructuring in urban bodies. For the smooth running of the system in all Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and Nagar Panchayats, the availability of adequate manpower is essential, he said. Efforts are underway to upgrade 17 cities in the state to Smart Cities. Each project must be completed on time and meet quality standards, ensuring physical verification of project quality as well, Adityanath added.

# Heavy rain lashes several parts of HP, 115 roads closed



PTI ■ SHIMLA/MANDI

Heavy rains lashed several parts of Himachal Pradesh, leading to the closure of 115 roads for vehicular traffic. The Shimla meteorological office Thursday issued an orange alert, warning of heavy to very heavy rains accompanied by thunderstorm and lightning at isolated places till Friday. As many as 115 roads including 107 in Mandi, four in Chamba, three in Solan and one in Kangra district are closed for vehicular traffic following rains and 212 transformers are disrupted in the state as per the state emergency operation centre. Meanwhile, cracks have developed at a stretch between Mandi to Pandoh of the Chandigarh-Manali four-lane road and it has started sinking, forcing officials to allow only one-way traffic since Wednesday, officials said.

Locals say a retaining wall was constructed by spending lakhs of rupees but it has started sinking and has gone down by about two feet and questions are being raised on the quality of construction. The tarring work is going at the spot at war

footing, said Project manager Raj Shekar.

The MeT which also issued yellow warning of heavy rains on Saturday and Sunday (July 6 and 7) cautioned of damage to plantation, horticulture and standing crops, partial damage to vulnerable structures, minor damage to kutcha houses and huts due to strong winds and rain, disruption in traffic and waterlogging in low-lying areas.

Several trees were uprooted in state capital Shimla which has received 84 mm rain since Wednesday evening and debris from drains was littered on the roads.

Widespread rain occurred in the state. Sundernagar was the wettest with 111 mm of rain followed by Palampur 109.4 mm, Shimla 84 mm, Gohar 80 mm, Solan 79.8 mm, Mashobra 78.5 mm, Jogindernagar 75 mm, Bajnath 70 mm, Mandi 55.2 mm, Narkanda 48 mm and Kangra 44.2 mm.

Narkanda in Shimla district was coldest at night recording a minimum temperature of 13.4 degree Celsius while Bhuntar in Kullu was hottest during the day on Wednesday with a maximum temperature at 35.6 degree Celsius.

# Assam flood situation deteriorates, 16.50 lakh people affected in 29 districts

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam further deteriorated with over 16.50 lakh population affected in 29 districts with the major rivers flowing above the danger level across the state on Thursday, an official bulletin said.

An alert has been sounded in Kamrup (Metro) district with the Brahmaputra, Digaru and Kollong rivers flowing above the red mark with vast tracts of land inundated.

Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is scheduled to visit flood-affected areas in Maligaon, Pandu Port and Temple Ghat areas in Guwahati Metropolitan area on Thursday to take stock of the situation.

Sarma chaired a meeting on the flood situation with all District Commissioners late on Wednesday night and directed them to be liberal in granting relief as per norms,



complete all rehabilitation claims as per norms before August 15 and provide accurate information to the headquarters so that adequate relief can be ensured. Cabinet ministers will also be camping in the flood-affected districts for the next three days from Thursday. The death toll in this year's flood, landslide and storm has increased to 56 and three others are reported missing. The severely affected flood

over 2.23 lakh people suffering, followed by Darrang with nearly 1.84 lakh people and Lakhimpur with more than 1.66 lakh people reeling under flood waters. Brahmaputra is flowing above the danger marks at Nimatighat, Tezpur, Guwahati, Goalpara and Dhubri.

Its tributaries Subansiri at Badatighat, Burhi Dihing at Chenimari, Dikhou at Sivasagar, Disang at Nanglamuraghat, Dhansiri at Numaligarh, and Kopili at Kamrup and Dharamtul are flowing above the danger levels.

The Barak river is flowing above the danger mark at AP Ghat, BP Ghat, Chota Bakra and Fuletrak, while its tributaries Dhaleswari at Ghamura, Katakhal at Matizuri and Kushiya at Karimganj town and are also flowing above the danger marks.

districts are Barpeta, Biswanath, Cachar, Charaideo, Chirang, Darrang, Dhemaji, Dhubri, Dibrugarh, Goalpara, Golaghat, Hailakandi, Hojai, Jorhat, Kamrup, Kamrup Metropolitan, East Karbi Anglong, West Karbi Anglong, Karimganj, Lakhimpur, Majuli, Morigaon, Nagaon, Nalbari, Sivasagar, Sonitpur and Tinsukia districts.

Dhubri is the worst hit with

# MP Government eyeing tough law to curb illegal colonies

PTI ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday told the legislative assembly that it was considering bringing a tough law to keep a check on illegal colonies in the state.

"Illegal colonies are a big problem. A nexus is working in the state. MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has already given instructions to frame a tough law to deal with the problem of illegal colonies," state Urban Development and Housing Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya told the House during the Question Hour.

The government would come up with a bill to this effect, he said.

The minister added that the existing illegal colonies won't be regularised, but basic amenities would be made available in such dwellings. Vijayvargiya, who is also the MP Legislative Affairs Minister, was replying to the questions raised separately by two BJP MLAs Hardeep Singh Dang and Rajendra Pandey over the mushrooming illegal colonies and the plight of the residents.

The opposition Congress also targeted the state government over the nursing scam. After the question hour got over, Leader of the Opposition Umang Singhar sought a debate on the breach of privilege motion against state minister Vishvas Sarang in the nursing scam.

He was joined by other Congress members. Speaker Narendra Tomar said he will take a call on the Congress' demand after examining their proposal. The Congress legislators have been alleging that MP



Sports, Youth Welfare and Co-operative Minister Sarang, who was medical education minister in the past, has provided incorrect information to the House over the nursing scam, which amounts to breach of privilege.

Since Monday, when the monsoon session of the state assembly began, the Congress has trained its gun on Sarang and is targeting the government over the nursing scam.

On May 30, the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed reinspection of 169 nursing colleges, which were given a clean chit by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the scam case, in light of two officers of the probe agency being caught allegedly taking bribes from institutions for favourable reports.

The CBI is probing the scam pertaining to gross irregularities in the functioning of several nursing colleges that lacked infrastructure while some existed only on paper. The probe agency furnished its report to the court in January, stating that it found 169 colleges suited to function, while 73 colleges lacked infrastructure and 66 were unsuited, he said.

# Landslides snap communication in seven Arunachal districts

PTI ■ ITANAGA

Landslides triggered by rain have snapped surface communication in at least seven districts of Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday, officials said. The districts affected by landslides are Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, Shi Yomi, Leparada and Upper Subansiri.

A portion of the NH-13 along the Pasighat-Pangin-Aalo road has blocked following a landslide on Thursday morning. A huge boulder has completely blocked the road in between Lokpeng and Pangin tri-junction in Siang district, PWD Highways assistant engineer Gemar Padu said.

The road is being cleared by engaging men and machinery for light motor



vehicles to pass through, he said.

The Nigmoi-Aalo bypass road has also been blocked due to landslides in several locations.

Upper Siang District Information and Public Relations Officer Y Jerang said

that landslides have cut off the strategic Tuting sub-division with the rest of the district.

On June 29, landslides completely cut off the sub-division following heavy landslides in several places at Moying and Migging villages, she said, adding that Tuting-bound commuters are stranded in Yingkiang, district headquarters of Upper Siang.

Quoting PWD Highways department official, the DIPRO said it will take at least a week to completely restore the road if weather permits.

Incessant rain has disrupted water supply to Aalo in West Siang district.

The water supply to Likabali township in Lower Siang district has also suffered extensive damages due to floods and landslides, officials said.

# Rajasthan: Kirodi Meena keeps his word, submits resignation as Minister over BJP's poor performance

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan minister Kirodi Lal Meena, who had said he will quit the state Cabinet if the BJP loses any Lok Sabha seat under his responsibility, has submitted his resignation but it is yet to be accepted.

Meena -- who holds multiple portfolios including agriculture, rural development, disaster management and relief minister -- said the party high command has called him to Delhi on Friday and he would explain to them why he put in his papers. The 72-year-old said he has no expectations, or resentment with the organisation or Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma.

Meena said he has submitted his papers due to his public vow that he will resign if the party loses LS any seat under his responsibility. During the recently held elections, he had said Prime Minister Narendra Modi



assigned him seven seats in eastern Rajasthan on which he worked hard during the polls.

In the Lok Sabha poll results announced on June 4, the BJP lost four seats, including his native Dausa, in eastern Rajasthan. Overall the BJP won 14 of the state's 25 seats, its tally coming down from 24 in the 2019 polls.

"The party high command has called me to Delhi tomorrow, I will go and satisfy them (on my decision). I could not make the party win. I had said if the party does not win, I will

resign," he told reporters here.

"It is my moral responsibility to resign. I met the chief minister but he rejected my resignation... My credibility among the people should remain intact, I have resigned," he said.

When asked whether he was unhappy with the party for not making him a deputy CM, Meena said no "If I was dissatisfied, I would have resigned immediately after taking oath. I have no complaint against the organisation or the chief minister, neither do I have

any complaints nor am I greedy for power. I did not resign because of the post. I resigned because I stand by what I said about my failure to get the party win seats," he said.

Earlier, Meena posted on X, "Raghukul reeti sada chali aai, pran jaai par vachan na jaai to underline his unwavering intent to keep his promise at any cost.

Meena campaigned on eastern Rajasthan seats including Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Alwar, Tonk-Sawaimadhopur and Kota-Bundi.

In the results declared last month, the BJP lost Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur and Tonk-Sawai Madhopur. He was also in the race for chief minister's post after the results of the assembly elections were announced in December last year, but the party high command picked first-time MLA Bhajanlal Sharma to lead the state.

# Ahom era Moidams recommended for inclusion in UNESCO World Heritage list

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Ahom era 'Moidams', a resting place of royal families, in Assam's Charaideo district have been recommended for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List by its international advisory body ICOMOS.

The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has prepared a report 'Evaluations of Nominations of Cultural and Mixed Properties' for the 46th ordinary session of the World Heritage Committee, to be held in New Delhi on July 21-31. The report, which PTI has accessed, evaluated a total of 36 nominations, including 19 new ones, received from across the globe and the Ahom Moidam was the only applicant from India.

"I C O M O S recommends that Moidams -- the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty, India, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (iii) and (iv)," it said.



With this recommendation, the first-time applicant Moidams are just one step short of formally entering the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These were first included in the Tentative List in April 2014.

France-based ICOMOS, also an advisory body to UNESCO for cultural heritage, is an international non-governmental organisation that is comprised of

professionals, experts, representatives from local authorities, companies and heritage organisations, and is dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the architectural and landscape heritage throughout the world.

Inclusion of Moidams in the World Heritage List was sought by the Indian government on the basis of Cultural Criteria (iii), (iv) and (v). The nominated property has an area of 95.02 hectares and a buffer zone of 754.51

hectares. Criterion (iii) bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared and criterion (iv) is for an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history.

The criterion (v), which ICOMOS rejected, is for an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change. The report stated that 90 Moidams are found within the Charaideo necropolis, situated on elevated land. These were created by building an earth mound over a hollow vault constructed of brick, stone or earth, and topped by a shrine at the centre of an octagonal wall.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Litmus test

With the UK deeply divided on key issues, the outcome of this election could alter its direction and shape its future

The UK voted yesterday to elect 650 representatives to the House of Commons who in turn would elect its next prime minister. The UK is at a crucial juncture. It is battling myriad issues ranging from economic downslides, healthcare and post Brexit hardships. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made a fervent appeal to voters, urging them to put an end to what he describes as Labour's dominance in British politics. Interestingly, for the last 14 years, the Conservative Party has been in power but has not delivered on its promises in full measure. The centre-right Conservatives took power amid the global financial crisis. However, their tenure has been plagued by economic stagnation, declining public services, and multiple scandals, leaving them vulnerable to criticism from both the left and right. The general election marks a pivotal moment in UK politics, with the Conservative Party, led by Rishi Sunak, pitted against the Labour Party under the leadership of Keir Starmer. The two parties have diametrically opposite views on tackling the country's problems. The UK is still coming to terms with Brexit which did not go well for it and led to many hardships for the Government and the people. Besides, once a world power, the UK is reduced to just another ally of the US in the world arena seriously jeopardizing its international standing. So the battle is not just for seats in Parliament but for the very direction of the nation.

Rishi Sunak's campaign has centred on themes of stability and continuity. He has emphasised the need for a steady hand to navigate the complex challenges facing the UK, including economic recovery post-COVID-19, ongoing trade negotiations, and maintaining national security. Sunak's message to voters is: build a stronger, more prosperous Britain together. Sunak has vehemently criticised Labour's policies, which left the country vulnerable and economically fragile. He has positioned himself as the leader capable of delivering a balanced approach that protects jobs, supports businesses, and ensures a sustainable path to growth. The Conservative manifesto promises tax cuts, increased investment in infrastructure, and a commitment to maintaining a firm stance on immigration and national security. This of course is a litmus test for Rishi Sunak himself. He became the first Prime Minister of colour itself speaks volumes about his calibre as a politician. But right now the biggest challenge for him is to manage the economy and relieve people of tax burden. On the other side, Keir Starmer's Labour Party is campaigned for change and renewal. Starmer has highlighted the need for comprehensive reform of the welfare system and has promised to tackle the cost-of-living crisis through targeted support for low-income families and significant public sector pay rises. For Rishi Sunak, the election is a chance to solidify his leadership and set a course for a post-Brexit Britain that he believes can thrive globally. The results of this election will not only determine the next government but will also shape the trajectory of the UK for years to come.

### PICTALK



Villagers catch fish in flood water, in Morigaon district

# The rise of radical rebels in Pakistan



BHOPINDER SINGH

This alarming rise in extremism has prompted Pakistan to initiate Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, an ambitious effort aimed at eradicating terrorism

Clergy has always played a pivotal role in the Pakistani narrative. The indelible impact of the 'Mullahs' has historically cut across institutions of power like the Military establishment, political parties, civilian society, academia et al. Each has, in their own way succumbed to puritanical displays and appropriations to posture alignment befitting the 'land of the pure' or Pakistan. However, it must be said that many of these institutions have also privately harboured the exact opposite instincts and preferences, from what has been prescribed by the clerical order. These institutions have pandered to religiosity only to tick in the box their own false, and publicly fronted sense of piety to legitimise their relevance, whilst indulging in vices, degeneracies, and excesses. A cursory look at the long list of the Pakistani infamous in the Pandora Papers or Panama List is a veritable who's-who of the Pakistani elites, who posture simplicity, austerity, and god-fearing honesty in the public sphere. This has led to the elites leading notoriously duplicitous lives with ill-gotten properties and excesses across the world, whilst injecting toxic-religiosity and religious extremism back home.

The bunny of religion is essentially for public consumption to be invoked whenever everything else fails e.g., beseeching Arab Sheikhs or Turkey for life-sustaining aid in the name of a "brotherly muslim nation". The personal lives of the ruling Sharif family and the feudal Bhuttos are hardly the modicum of religious idyls, and the same discomfort applies to the Westernised Generals who are increasingly facing the wrath of the angry, long-bearded, armed, and madrasa-educated tribals. Today, it seems the ability of Pakistan's ruling elite to successfully play the patented double game has run its course. Not only have the radicalized masses (generously fanned by the elites in 'Olive Green' or Servants) refused to take orders, but far worse, they have turned on their begetters! Creations like the 'Taliban' which was a joint



project between the wily politicians, amoral Generals, and unhinged clergy, simply refuse to take orders from their progenitor. The product i.e., Taliban, which was made for the export market, is getting unwelcomed imported back to its original source. The elite finally realise that it cannot differentiate between "Good Taliban" and "Bad Taliban", for at the end of the day it is "Taliban", an unhinged outcome of affording extra generous space to religion in governance. Terrorism has gripped Pakistan with elements 'within', going rogue. Elites now sense that not only must they take on the terror elements directly (as they have done multiple times, still terrorism worsened), but it must also snuff out the oxygen that breeds and nurtures the terror industry i.e., religious insurances and outreach, in every sphere of Pakistani reality. Pakistani dispensation has come up with Operation Azm-i-Istehkam which seeks to eradicate terrorists, and religious extremism, and deradicalize society, in a holistic and comprehensive manner. It is easier said than done, given the deep-rooted grip of religiosity. This refreshing acceptance (though time will tell if it is sincere or posturing) of religious overload needs to be unloaded. For starters, it will diminish the



THE ELITE FINALLY REALISE THAT IT CANNOT DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN 'GOOD TALIBAN' AND 'BAD TALIBAN', FOR AT THE END OF THE DAY IT IS 'TALIBAN', AN UNHINGED OUTCOME OF AFFORDING EXTRA GENEROUS SPACE TO RELIGION IN GOVERNANCE

role of Islamist political parties like Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F), or even the various militias and formations of sectarian denominations who have contributed to the morass. Such parties have not only imported strains of alien Wahhabism or Salafism but have been instrumental in ensuring that the Pakistani 'establishment' goes slow on anti-terror operations in restive areas. Caught between offering perfunctory platitudes towards the integrity of Pakistan and the safety of its citizens - they are also simultaneously offering mealy-mouthed suggestions to not partake in militaristic operations. They are truly caught between the devil and the blue sea, for their wishy-washy stand will neither endear them to the frustrated Pakistani Government (which they are no longer a part of the ruling coalition), nor to organisations like Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) who would want them to be bolder and indulge in plain-speak in favour of religious and radical bodies. Nonetheless, these religious parties are mulling putting together an ostensible 'resistance movement' against Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, and they are unlikely to find too many partners to go along with them. Forces that are key to bailing out Pakistan eco-

nominally from sure 'failed-state' status e.g., China, international multilateral agencies (IMF, World Bank etc), Western Powers or even Arab Sheikdoms are pitted against the agendas and outcomes of religious parties. The so-called 'iron brother' Chinese have invested over \$62 billion in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridors (CPEC) and they cannot allow the religio-extremist Baluch insurgents to attack Chinese interests as part of their 'sacred' duties. Middle Eastern countries too have had their own trust with the likes of the Muslim Brotherhood and their offshoots from Egypt, Jordan, and Kuwait to Saudi Arabia, and have clamped down on the same. Now with the Taliban Government in Kabul thawing relations with outsiders and no longer surviving on Pakistani doles, Afghans also cock a snook at historical equations and madrasa-fed ranks from Pakistan. All this diminishes the relevance of religious parties in Pakistan and if the Pakistanis grasp the opportunity, they may just be able to overcome their history and instincts. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Bowing to elders is a sign of respect



Recently, political strategist Prashant Kishore criticized Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar for touching the feet of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, describing it as a 'sale of dignity of the people of Bihar'. While Kishore's comments reflect a certain perspective, it's important to recognize that showing respect to elders, even political rivals, is a personal choice deeply rooted in Indian culture. Touching the feet of elders is a gesture of humility and respect, irrespective

of the individual's public standing or knowledge. It's a tradition that underscores the significance of age and wisdom. Such practices are part of a cultural ethos that teaches younger generations to respect their elders. In a recent incident, opposition leader Rahul Gandhi criticized Om Birla, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, for bowing before Prime Minister Modi, claiming it compromised the dignity of the Speaker's office. Gandhi cited Mahatma Gandhi's views on the impartiality and dignity of the Speaker. However, the gesture by Birla was a personal one, reflecting respect for an elder, not a political statement. It's crucial to separate personal respect from political actions. In Hindu culture, it's customary for the younger to show respect to the older, irrespective of their positions. Rahul Gandhi's criticism may stem from a place of political rivalry, but it overlooks the cultural context of such gestures.

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

### PM'S REMARKS ON MANIPUR

Madam — The Congress has strongly criticized Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his remarks in the Rajya Sabha, where he claimed that the situation in Manipur was returning to normal. The Congress argues that this statement is far from the reality on the ground, pointing out that the Prime Minister has yet to visit Manipur since violence erupted between the Meitei and Kuki communities in May of the previous year. Congress MP Jairam Ramesh accused the Prime Minister of making light of the situation and not acknowledging the continuing violence and tension in Manipur. Despite more than 200 deaths and thousands of people displaced due to ongoing ethnic violence, the Prime Minister's comments suggested a lack of serious engagement with the issue. The Congress also criticized the Prime Minister for not listening to voices from Manipur and for focusing more on political jobs than addressing the concerns of those affected by the violence. The party emphasized that the Prime Minister's response is insufficient given the severity of the crisis in Manipur and accused him of turning a blind eye to the plight of the state's residents.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

### HATHRAS TRAGEDY

Madam — The recent stampede in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh, resulting in numerous deaths, is a tragic reminder of the consequences of poor crowd management. A stampede, or crowd crush, occurs when an area becomes dangerously overcrowded and mismanaged, leading to fatal accidents. If crowd densities exceed four to six people per square meter, the risk of such incidents significantly increases. Authorities must not downplay their role in these tragedies by labeling them as mere accidents. Effective crowd management requires meticulous planning, including venue

selection, emergency response preparation, and public awareness initiatives. The lack of a culture of safety among authorities is evident in such incidents. Learning from this tragedy, it's imperative to adopt a proactive approach to safety and crowd management to prevent future incidents. This includes mandatory safety provisions and increased public awareness to ensure the well-being of participants at public events. Authorities must prioritize the safety of citizens to avoid repeating such devastating outcomes.

K V Chandramouli | Mysuru

### UNSUNG HEROES IN INDIAN CRICKET

Madam — Last Saturday, Indian cricket fans witnessed the celebration of Team India's T20 World Cup victory in Bridgetown, Barbados. Among the jubilant players, a lesser-known figure, Raghu Raghavendra, stood out. Known affectionately as Raghu, he has been a pivotal part of the Indian cricket sup-

port staff since 2011, specializing in throwdowns to help batsmen practice against fast bowling. Raghu's ability to deliver balls at speeds exceeding 150 km/h using a sidearm device has been instrumental in preparing Indian batsmen for international challenges. While his name may not be widely recognized, his contributions to the team's success are immense. Raghu represents the behind-the-scenes dedication and skill that supports every win by Team India. His work exemplifies the importance of support roles in sports, highlighting how essential unsung heroes are to the success of prominent athletes and teams. As India celebrates its cricketing triumphs, it's important to acknowledge and appreciate the efforts of individuals like Raghu, who play a crucial role in these victories.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

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## Balancing motivation and misuse in India's research landscape

Many students opt for PhD programme for reasons unrelated to research. This hinders the nation's intellectual progress



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

A higher academic degree like a PhD is often considered a symbol of quality. PhD training emphasizes innovation and the ability to tackle complex problems. Graduates are expected to think independently, identify gaps in existing knowledge, and propose novel solutions, making them valuable assets in both academic and industry settings. The more PhD holders a country produces, the more productive a country will be. Countries with more PhD holders tend to produce more scientific publications and patents. This intellectual output can lead to technological advancements and improvements in various industries, driving innovation and economic growth. Despite having the advantages of higher enrolments for the nation, the current system of registering for PhD as an escapism will not reap any benefits for the student or the country. Many students register for PhD as a stop-gap arrangement before their marriage, a permanent government job, or as a fashion to be called 'Dr.'. They never assess their moti-



vation for pursuing a PhD degree. Are they passionate about the research topic? Or have they reflected on their career goals? If the alignment is strong, it might justify pursuing a research degree that is highly demanding and time-consuming. The most successful PhD candidates are often driven by intrinsic motivations such as intellectual curiosity, passion for their field of study, and a desire to contribute new knowledge. These motivations sustain them through the challenges of research work. Recently, it has been observed that many scholars registering for PhD through national-level competitive fellowships like CSIR, UGC etc, try to prolong their study for the sake of fellowship amount.

In many colleges in Tamil Nadu, college teachers work for a salary as low as Rs. 4000- 8000 per month. Qualifying for a national test will at least provide a scholar with a decent salary for 3 to 5 years. The sole motive of the scholar is financial support. For some, the academic environment may provide a refuge from societal expectations of marriage, family responsibilities, and other traditional roles. Unfortunately, even today, female students are not provided the freedom to make decisions. Our society gives a girl's marriage more importance than acquiring knowledge. Earning a doctorate requires extensive study, self-sufficiency, and intellectual development, which are priceless assets to the community. Even in a highly literate society like Kerala, many women, even after getting a PhD degree, are forced to stick to societal norms and move away from active research. Many students with PhD degrees ultimately land in job sectors where their research has no role, like clerical jobs in

government sectors, banks, or even as a school teacher, to cite a few. To change people's minds, we must keep fighting for equal rights for women, spreading the word that education should be accessible to everyone and dispelling myths about women's abilities and goals. It's essential for prospective PhD candidates to carefully consider their motivations and the potential impact of their research. Pursuing a PhD solely for recognition or prestige, without a genuine commitment to contribute meaningful research or knowledge, offers little benefit to society or the nation. People who do research for name sake are involved in many unethical practices, like outsourcing the work and outsourcing their thesis writing and paper writing to other agencies. Unfortunately, these people reach higher positions through their influence, overtaking genuine researchers who have toiled their lives for research. (The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies; views are personal)



**FIRST COLUMN**  
**STRATEGIC DYNAMICS**  
**AT THE SCO SUMMIT**

As China asserts its influence within the SCO, the interplay of geopolitics becomes increasingly visible



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation or SCO held its 24th meeting for heads of State this week. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, otherwise known for promoting Bharat to crucial allies at bilateral and multilateral forums, skipped this regional dialogue citing parliamentary responsibilities back home. However, many also point out that, the frosty relationship with Pakistan and China both of whose top leadership were present for the SCO summit, was one of the reasons PM Modi avoided travelling to Astana in Kazakhstan. India was represented by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for the summit, where he held separate bilateral meetings with several SCO Central Asian member countries.

The SCO as a Eurasian intergovernmental group was announced in China in June 2001. India and Pakistan joined the SCO as full members in 2017. Currently, SCO has 9 member states, 3 observer states and 14 dialogue partners, which represent an entire swathe of emerging economic geographies, that occupy the theatre of current geopolitical developments. Russia and China along with four neighbouring Central Asian states form the founding members. However with Iran later joining in as a member state along with Kuwait, Qatar, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Bahrain, Myanmar, and Maldives as dialogue partners, one can see why, SCO is an important platform for shaping the current geo-political landscape. Russia is engaged in a long war with Ukraine, while much of Middle Eastern and West Asia nations are intimately engaged in the Israel-Hamas war. China has been trying to dominate the dialogue since its inception and could be seen by many, as one of the diplomatic extensions of its sovereignty-threatening foreign policy. In the past few years, it has managed to bring a weakened Russia under its wings and is portraying SCO as an alternate multilateral dialogue platform challenging the US control of world affairs. In the run-up to the Astana SCO summit, the Chinese state mouthpiece Global Times carried a few reports extolling the virtues of the summit. "It sends a message to the Western world that there are many different voices from the emerging economies that need to be heard and represented, and the mainstream trend of global cooperation won't



be reversed by their obstruction," wrote Zhou Rong, a senior researcher at the Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies at Renmin University of China. "Chinese President Xi Jinping also clubbed the SCO summit with two state visits to Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, thereby, expanding its footprints in the Central Asian states. State media reminded global audiences that Kazakhstan, was where China's Belt and Road initiative was proposed in 2013, which in the past decade managed to get China to secure strategic infrastructure footprints in landlocked Central Asia. Quoting a few analysts Global Times reported "Central Asia, as one of the key areas in the implementation of the BRI, offers a vivid example of how the China-proposed global public good has been transforming the landlocked region into a land-linked region, transforming it into a bridge connecting the Eurasian continent." Central and West Asia has been PM Modi's focus in the past decade. Even though PM Modi avoided the Astana summit, he is expected to travel to Russia for a 'post-Ukraine' bilateral meeting with President Putin, followed by a stopover in Austria, a first in nearly four decades.

The meeting with President Putin and PM Modi, both of whom have returned to power after elections would be closely followed, since, it would be one of the first face-to-face meetings post Russia's isolation by Western countries following the Ukraine war. It will also be the first, where regional issues including the ongoing Israel offensive on Gaza and, the evolving geo-political situation in a conflict-ridden, post-COVID world are likely to be taken up. From a regional platform perspective, India China and Russia, also interact closely at BRICS. The unfolding engagement in the next few weeks will be closely followed.

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

# Railway accidents expose neglect, systemic failures



SHIVAJI SARKAR

The latest report from the CAG highlights a troubling decline in funding for crucial track renewal projects amidst an alarming rise in train accidents



Railway accidents not only cause significant loss of lives and severe financial setbacks but also undermine public confidence in the system. A recent incident near New Jalpaiguri, where a train collided with another, resulting in eleven fatalities and 40 injuries, has once again highlighted the issue of signal failures. The railways have received less scrutiny since the decision to discontinue the presentation of a separate Railway Budget. This change has allowed many faults within the railways, including outdated equipment and complex signal failures, to go unnoticed. While accidents draw attention, derailments are equally frequent and damaging.

The full extent of the losses is challenging to estimate, as they not only impact the railways but also disrupt the movement of goods and people, with far-reaching consequences. The CAG audit found that while the Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 15,000 crore had been contributed, the Railways' internal resources fell short of the target for funding the remaining Rs 5,000 crore per year to Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK), set up in 2017. The report highlighted a decline in the allotment of funds for track renewal works, from Rs 9,607 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 7,417 crore in 2019-20. The railways' Rs 2.55 trillion budget is self-generated. Ignoring critical signal and track safety issues it has allocated Rs 24470 crore to be spent for 508 of the 1300 stations planned to be demolished and rebuilt in 16 states.

The buildings may need some repairs and refurbishing but demolition is outrageous under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Many stations are already on the block though these hardly need demolition. The railways should have prioritised its operational safety issues and utilised the station rebuilding funds for safety. According to the CAG report 2022, an Analysis of 1129 'Inquiry Reports' of derailment accidents in 16 Zonal Railways (ZRs) revealed 24 factors



THE KAVACH SYSTEM OF BRINGING THE TRAINS TO A HALT HAS A COST OF RS 50LAKH PER KM AND RS 70 LAKH PER LOCOMOTIVE. IT MAY TAKE LONGER THAN THE RAILWAY HAS PLANNED

responsible for derailments in the selected cases/accidents. The total damages/loss of assets in these cases was reported as Rs 32.96 crore. The report adds that nearly 75 per cent of the consequential train accidents between 2017-18 and 2020-21 were caused by derailments. Out of 217 consequential train accidents, 163 (around 75 per cent) were due to derailments. The goods train ramming into the Kunchenjunga Express between Rangapani and Chattar Hat, off New Jalpaiguri, has almost the same pattern as the triple train accident near Balasore that killed 296 persons and injured 1100 people a year back. Like the Balasore, this one is also blamed on manual failure at the initial stages.

It was routine for Rail Board chairman Jaya Varma Sinha and two zonal chief public relations officers to blame it on the deceased train driver for "disregarding" signals and speed limits. The signal failure in both cases is responsible for the accidents as scrutiny of the system reveals. The Rangapani goods train was issued a manual authorisation paper chit signal, called a paper-line clear ticket (PLCT). It allowed goods train drivers to pass all inoperative automatic signals.

As per procedure the driver should have stopped for a minute at each signal and restricted speed at 10 to 15 km. Now it is being told that restriction should have been imposed on each of the trains in the section. The document of the railways says that all trains had the PLCT issued suggesting major signal failure. The rail officials said that the track circuits had failed due to the lightning and thunderstorms,

rendering the automatic signals defunct since 5.50 am.

In such a situation absolute block comes under restriction. When signals are not operational it is covered with paper or a piece of cloth. Railway Minister Ashwani Vaishnav had told Rajya Sabha on July 21, 2023, that the rear collision at Balasore was due to lapses in the signalling-circuit alteration carried out in the past and during the execution of the signalling work related to the replacement of the electric lifting barrier for a level-crossing gate. Two months before this, the Railway Board had flagged the issue of signalling staff resorting to short-cut methods. Referring to five alarming incidents where trains entered the wrong path due to short-cut methods adopted by the signalling staff, the Railway Board in a letter to General Managers of Zonal Railways expressed "serious concern" that despite repeated instructions the ground situation was not improving and "signalling staff continue with short-cut methods for clearing signals".

In another incident of collision between two passenger trains, the Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS) has found the Indian Railways administration at fault for not implementing, and harmonising safety norms and protocols, the lack of which led to the collision of two passenger trains in Andhra Pradesh on October 29, 2023. The collision claimed 17 lives including three crew members. The CRS noted that senior officers continuously overlooked such violations in the recent past. The CRS found five flaws in the safety system:

1. Officials Overlooked Multiple Violations Earlier,

2. Employees in Crucial Safety Posts are Incompetent, and not aware of basic safety rules, and assistant loco pilots should be trained on simulators even on brake use,  
3. Mismatch of Two Sets of Rules – general rules peg speed at 10km in case of signal failure and subsidiary rules at 15 km,  
4. Every Passenger Train's Last Two Coaches Need Crash-Worthy Features,  
5. Record Walkie-Talkie Conversations Between Station Masters and Loco Pilots. In yet another incident the South Western Railway Zone official wrote: "on 08.02.2023 the loco pilot of Up Train No: 12649 Sampark Kranti Express, had stopped the train before Point No: 65 A, while observing that the point was set to down main line (wrong line), while as per PLCT, the train was supposed to pass through Up main line."

An audit report of the last year flagged serious lapses in rail safety. In a 2022 report focusing on derailments within Indian Railways, the CAG sought to investigate how preventive measures were implemented by the railway ministry against derailments and collisions. The Kavach system of bringing the trains to a halt has a cost of Rs 50lakh per km and Rs 70 lakh per locomotive. It may take longer than the railway has planned. The eastern region alone needs Rs 3000 crore. Even if Kavach implemented the railways to improve on signal and track maintenance, accidents would not be easy to prevent. Even now it is not too late to divert funds from station demolitions to safety aspects.

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

# Women suffer in silence as violence against them keeps increasing

Despite the high prevalence of such crimes, many women are unable to report these incidents due to societal pressures and lack of support

Violence against women remains a critical issue in our society, hindering both their physical development and mental well-being. According to the 2022 annual report by the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), crimes against women increased by four per cent in 2022 compared to 2021. Over 5.8 million cases of crime were registered across the country in 2022, with nearly 450,000 involving crimes against women. This translates to an alarming average of around 51 FIRs registered every hour for violence against women. The report highlights that the highest number of cases of violence against women were recorded in Delhi, the capital city, while Jaipur, the capital of Rajasthan,



KAVITA DHAMEJA

was listed as the fourth most unsafe city for women. Rajasthan is the third state with the highest number of cases of violence against women in 2022.

Notably, Rajasthan had the highest number of recorded rape cases, with over 31,000 incidents reported across the country and 5,399 cases registered in the state. The report also reveals that most incidents of violence or discrimination against women are

perpetrated by their husbands or close relatives. Gender-based violence encompasses physical, mental, sexual, and economic abuse, with intimate partner violence being the most widespread form. Women often experience sexual or physical violence from an intimate partner at some point in their lives.

Despite the prevalence of violence, many women do not report these incidents due to several factors. First, the burden of the family's honour is disproportionately placed on women, instilling fear and preventing them from reporting the abuse, even to close family members. Second, many women lack access to support groups where they can confide and seek help. Third, and perhaps most crucially,

there is a widespread unawareness of the support systems and legal frameworks established by the government to aid women affected by violence. However, some women – who are a little aware and have found support groups – raise their voices against the violence they face and report it to the police.

One example of this courage is found in Baba Ramdev Nagar Kachhi Basti in Jaipur, Rajasthan, where gender discrimination and violence are prevalent. Meena Devi (name changed), a 38-year-old resident, shared her experience: "I collect trash, and my husband works as a laborer. We have six children, including four daughters. Our financial situation is dire, and my husband sometimes does not find work.

To contribute to the household income, my two daughters and I collect trash daily, and I had to stop their schooling." She further revealed, "My husband used to beat me after getting intoxicated, which also affected my daughters.

One day, I gathered the courage to call the police, and since then, he has significantly reduced the violence." This settlement, predominantly inhabited by Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, is located about 10 kilometres from the city in the Gurjar Ki Thadi area.

With a population of over 500 people, many residents engage in occupations such as blacksmithing, scavenging, drumming at weddings, bamboo crafting, and daily wage labour.

Meena mentioned that it is so common for women to be subjected to violence by their husbands that it does not bother anyone in the settlement. Most men indulge in substance abuse and mistreat their wives.

Although several non-government organizations are working in the area to raise awareness among women to stand up against this violence, the problem has not been completely eradicated. Another woman, who preferred to remain anonymous, recounted her story: "My husband works as a scrap dealer, while I stay busy with household chores." She explained that her husband gets intoxicated every day and abuses her. Her hands bore burn marks, evidence of the physical violence she endured. She said that other women in the settlement often protect her from her husband's violence and have advised her to seek help from the police, but she does not wish to do so. Such control by partners leaves women without access to a safe space to share their experiences and seek advice.

Social worker Akhilesh Mishra, who has been working on the health of women and children in this area explains, "The government has enacted several laws to protect women from gender-based violence and women can file complaints against the violence they face. Various NGOs are also working here to raise awareness among women about gender discrimination and violence."

This effort has started showing results, as women in the settlement have now started to stand up against the violence and seek support from the police. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach. Cultural norms that place the burden of family honour on women must be challenged and redefined.

Efforts to increase awareness of support groups and governmental resources must be intensified, ensuring that all women have access to the help they need. Only through collective societal effort can we hope to build a capable, equal, and violence-free society for all women.

*(The author is a social worker; views expressed are personal. Charkha Features)*

# Hezbollah fires over 200 rockets into Israel

AP ■ BEIRUT

The Lebanese Hezbollah group said it launched over 200 rockets on Thursday at several military bases in Israel in retaliation for a strike that killed one of its senior commanders. The attack by the Iran-backed militant group was one of the largest in the months-long conflict along the Lebanon-Israel border, with tensions escalating in recent weeks.

The Israeli military said "numerous projectiles and suspicious aerial targets" had entered its territory from Lebanon, many of which it said were intercepted. There were no immediate reports of casualties. It said about 200 "projectiles" were launched toward the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and over 20 drones into Israeli territory, but that it had intercepted some of them.

Israel after Hezbollah's attack struck various towns in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military said it struck Hezbollah's



"military structures" in the southern border towns of Ramyeh and Houla. Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported an Israeli drone strike of Houla killed at least one person. Israeli jets also broke the sound barrier over

the Lebanese capital and other areas in the country. Israel on Wednesday acknowledged that it had killed Mohammad Naameh Nasser, who headed one of Hezbollah's three regional divisions in southern Lebanon, a day earlier.

Hours after the killing, Hezbollah launched scores of Katyusha rockets and Falq rockets with heavy warheads into northern Israel and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. It launched more rockets on Thursday and said it had also sent exploding drones into several bases.

Nasser was of great importance to Hezbollah, which said he took part in battles in conflicts in Syria and Iraq from 2011 until 2016 and fought in the group's last war with Israel in 2006. Two other senior Hezbollah commanders have also been killed.

The US and France are continuing to scramble to prevent the skirmishes from spiraling into an all-out war, which they fear could spillover across the region. Washington in its shuttle diplomatic efforts initially hoped for calm along the Lebanon-Israel border in a deal that is not linked to the war in Gaza. However, since the US has called for Hamas to agree to a cease-fire proposal

presented by President Joe Biden, it has said that an end to the war in Gaza would lead to calm in Lebanon and northern Israel as well.

The relatively low-level conflict erupted shortly after the outbreak of the war in Gaza. Hezbollah says it is striking Israel in solidarity with Hamas, another Iran-allied group that ignited the war in Gaza with its October 7 attack into southern Israel. The group's leadership says it will stop its attacks once there is a cease-fire in Gaza, and that while it does not want war, it is ready for one.

Israeli officials, meanwhile, say they could decide to go to war in Lebanon if efforts for a diplomatic solution fail.

Hezbollah's retaliation comes a day after a senior adviser to US President Joe Biden, Amos Hochstein, met with French President Emmanuel Macron's Lebanon envoy, Jean-Yves Le Drian, in Paris.

The fighting has displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border. In northern

Israel, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. In Lebanon, more than 450 people — mostly fighters but also dozens of civilians — have been killed. Israel sees Hezbollah as its most direct threat and estimates that it has an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles.

In 2006, Israel and Hezbollah fought a monthlong war that ended in a draw.

Meanwhile, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Thursday that the Palestinian death toll from nearly nine months of war has surged past 38,000. The ministry said that in the last 24 hours, the bodies of 58 people had been brought to hospitals, bringing the overall death toll to 38,011. It said more than 87,000 people have been wounded in the fighting.

The ministry does not distinguish between fighters and noncombatants in its count, but many of the dead are said to be women and children.

# Israel weighs Hamas' latest response to Gaza cease-fire proposal

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel's Cabinet was set to convene Thursday to discuss Hamas' latest response to a US-backed proposal for a phased cease-fire in Gaza, as diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the nine-month war stirred back to life after a weeklong hiatus.

Fighting, meanwhile, intensified between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, with the militant group saying it fired more than 200 rockets and exploding drones into northern Israel to avenge the killing of a senior commander in an Israeli airstrike the day before. The relatively low-level conflict has literally set the border ablaze and raised fears of a potentially even more devastating war in the Middle East.

Hezbollah has said it will halt its attacks if there is a cease-fire between Hamas — a fellow Iran-backed ally — and Israel. The United States has rallied world support behind a plan that would see the release of all of the scores of hostages still held by the militant group in return for a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. But until now, neither side appears to have fully embraced it.

Hamas suggested "amendments" to the proposal last month, some of which the US said were unworkable, without providing specifics. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that the original proposal was an Israeli one, but has raised doubts over whether it would end the war — a key Hamas demand. Hamas confirmed Wednesday that it had sent another response to Egypt and Qatar, which are mediating the talks, without providing details. A US official said the Biden administration was examining the response, calling it constructive but saying more work needed to be done.

The official, who wasn't authorized to comment publicly, spoke on condition of anonymity.

An Israeli official said Netanyahu would convene a Cabinet meeting Thursday to discuss the latest develop-

ments surrounding the negotiations. The official, who wasn't authorized to discuss the meeting with media, spoke on condition of anonymity. Israel would likely hold additional consultations before making a final decision on any amended proposal.

As cease-fire talks appeared to be gaining new steam, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the death toll in the war had climbed past 38,000. Hamas political official Bassem Naim said that the group has neither accepted nor rejected the American proposal, and has "responded with some ideas to bridge the gap" between the two sides, without elaborating. Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' top political leader, has shared suggestions with Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish officials, the group said in a statement late Wednesday.

US officials have said the latest proposal has new language that was proposed to Egypt and Qatar on Saturday and addresses indirect negotiations that are set to commence during the first phase of the three-phase deal that US President Joe Biden laid out in a May 31 speech.

The first phase calls for a "full and complete cease-fire," a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all densely populated areas of Gaza and the release of a number of hostages, including women, older people and the wounded, in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

The proposal called for the parties to negotiate the terms of the second phase during the 42 days of phase one. Under the current proposal, Hamas could release all of the remaining men, both civilians and soldiers, during the second phase.

In return, Israel could free an agreed-upon number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The releases would not occur until "sustainable calm" takes effect and all Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza.

The third phase would see the return of the remains of hostages.

# Suspect in attempted assassination of Slovakia's PM now faces terror charges

Bratislava (Slovakia): The suspect in the attempted assassination in May of Slovakia's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, is now facing terror charges as part of an investigation by authorities, the country's prosecutor general said Thursday.

Maros Zilinka said in a statement that the suspect identified only as JC, who was originally charged with attempted murder, now faces the additional charges. Zilinka said the change is based on evidence the investigators obtained, but didn't immediately give further details.

The government officials originally said they believed it was a politically motivated attack committed by a "lone wolf" but announced later that a "third party" might have been involved in "acting for the benefit of the perpetrator." Fico has currently been recovering at home from mul-

iple wounds he suffered in the assassination attempt on May 15 when he was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters after his government's session in the town of Handlova.

The assailant was immediately arrested and a court ordered him to remain behind bars.

Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. He returned to power for the fourth time last year after his leftist party Smer, or Direction, won the parliamentary election last September, after campaigning on a pro-Russia and anti-American message. His critics worry that Slovakia could abandon its pro-Western course and follow the direction of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.

Thousands have repeatedly rallied in the capital and across Slovakia to protest Fico's policies

# Voting begins in UK polls; Future of Rishi Sunak as PM hangs in balance

PTI ■ LONDON

The future of Rishi Sunak as Britain's Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party hangs in the balance as polling booths opened across the UK on Thursday, with the British Indian leader and the man who wants his job — Keir Starmer — out early to cast their votes along with millions across the country.

Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty walked hand-in-hand to their local polling booth on a sunny day in his constituency of Richmond and Northallerton in Yorkshire, northern England. A little later, Starmer and wife Victoria were at their polling station in Camden, north London, sporting Labour red colours.

As is customary, there is no campaigning or party political canvassing on polling in the UK.

Sunak, 44, is up against voter angst towards the incumbent Tories after 14 years in power



and has had to contend with trailing far behind 61-year-old Keir Starmer-led Labour Party throughout the six-week campaign.

Both leaders wrapped up their poll pitches with contrasting messages — Sunak urging voters not to hand "tax-raising" Labour a "supermajority" and Starmer playing down the prospect of a landslide win for fear of a low turnout impacting the final outcome.

Candidates are being fielded for 650 constituencies across England, Scotland, Wales, and

Northern Ireland, with 326 required for a majority in the first past the post system.

Besides the two main parties, voters will be choosing from a list of candidates representing the Liberal Democrats, Green Party, Scottish National Party (SNP), SDLP, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Sinn Fien, Plaid Cymru, the anti-immigration Reform Party and several contesting as Independent.

Around 40,000 polling booths opened across the country at 7 am local time as an estimated 46 million registered voters began turning out to mark a cross next to their chosen candidate on a paper ballot.

Since this year, carrying an identification document to the polling booth has become compulsory in UK elections, which are open to all registered adult voters resident in the UK including Indians as Commonwealth citizens.

Several voters have already cast their vote in a postal ballot, which can also be handed in to

their local councils if pending. Once the votes are cast and the booths officially close at 10 pm local time, the focus shifts to the definitive exit poll soon after which gives a fair snapshot of what can be expected UK-wide. Counting commences up and down the country right away, with the first results expected just before midnight local time.

"Stop Labour's supermajority" is the central message British Prime Minister Sunak was trying to drive home as he wrapped up his campaign, even as most of the incumbent Conservatives all but conceded defeat in the general election.

"Labour will put up your taxes. Again and again and again," posted Sunak on social media as the catch-all message to wind up the campaign trail. The British Indian leader and his team's strategy in the final hours was to canvass their traditional voters to narrow the gap of a widely expected defeat after clear Tory majorities in the last three general elections.

# Hurricane Beryl roars toward Mexico after leaving destruction in Jamaica

AP ■ PLAYA DEL CARMEN

Hurricane Beryl ripped off roofs in Jamaica, jumbled fishing boats in Barbados and damaged or destroyed 95 per cent of homes on a pair of islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines before rumbling toward the Cayman Islands and taking aim at Mexico's Caribbean coast after leaving at least seven dead in its wake.

What had been the earliest storm to develop into a Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic, weakened slightly but remained a major hurricane. Its eye was forecast to pass just south of the Cayman Islands overnight.

Mexico's popular Caribbean coast prepared shelters, evacuated some small outlying coastal communities and even moved sea turtle eggs off beaches threatened by storm surge, but in nightlife hotspots like Playa del Carmen and



Tulum tourists still took one more night on the town. Mexico's Navy patrolled areas like Tulum telling tourists in Spanish and English to prepare for the storm's arrival.

Early Thursday morning, the storm's centre was about 500 miles (800 kilometres) east-southeast of Tulum, Mexico. It had maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (205 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 21

mph (32 kph). Beryl was forecast to make landfall in a sparsely populated area of lagoons and mangroves south of Tulum in the early hours of Friday, probably as a Category 2 storm. Then it was expected to cross the Yucatan Peninsula and strengthen over the warm Gulf of Mexico to make a second strike on Mexico's north-east coast near the Texas bor-

der. The storm had already shown its destructive potential across a long swath of the southeastern Caribbean.

Beryl's eye wall brushed by Jamaica's southern coast Wednesday afternoon knocking out power and ripping roofs off homes. Prime Minister Andrew Holness said Jamaica had not seen the "worst of what could possibly happen."

"We can do as much as we can do, as humanly possible, and we leave the rest in the hands of God," Holness said.

Several roadways in Jamaica's interior settlements were impacted by fallen trees and utility poles, while some communities in the northern section were without electricity, according to the government's Information Service. The worst perhaps came earlier in Beryl's trajectory when it smacked two small islands of the Lesser Antilles.

# Cost of living could trump pride in Sunak for British Indian voters

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK's historic general election on Thursday marks the first real test at the ballot box for Rishi Sunak when pride in Britain's first Prime Minister of Indian heritage might be trumped by the cost-of-living crisis and sheer fatigue with 14 long years of a Conservative Party-led government. Exactly how the votes stack up will start to unfold only once polling closes but YouGov's final large-scale poll for 'The Times' on the eve of the election suggests the Opposition Labour could be handed a so-called "supermajority" — indicating a 212-seat parliamentary majority and the highest in decades. But whatever the final outcome, this pattern is more a reflection of the political turmoil that ultimately brought Sunak into 10 Downing Street than a vote against his own leadership.

"I think for British Indian voters, in particular, this election is similar to the rest of the electorate; they've been given a chance to choose to keep or remove the government and after 14 years of a Conservative government, the mood is much more for change than for maintaining it," reflected Sunder Katwala, Director

of the British Future think tank.

"There'll be a sense, I think, of regret and disappointment that this didn't go better for Rishi Sunak as there was great pride... but people aren't going to make their voting choice on that basis. And that's why I think, more British Indian voters are going to vote for change than vote for keeping Rishi Sunak, even though they appreciate his historic achievement in being the first British Prime Minister of Indian heritage," he noted. Against this backdrop, the issues that would influence British Indian voters would echo wider concerns such as the cost-of-living crisis, the National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists and getting a grip on illegal migration.

While Sunak did meet his pledge to bring down inflation from the soaring levels he inherited in the aftermath of the chaotic terms of predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, it may not prove enough to get him over the line at the ballot box.

"I don't know why he's not going around to every single member of the Tory party inside of the government saying, 'I told you so...' We've now reduced inflation down from the high of 11 per cent down to 2 per cent. We've seen the underlying

economic outlook for the country improving since Sunak took office in October 2022. "But the problem we have is that people have long memories of a time when we forgot what it was to be a Conservative," Andrew Boff, Tory Chair of the London Assembly, said during an election debate hosted by 'Eastern Eye' earlier this week. "Rishi Sunak, at one level, was a breath of fresh air because he's clearly an extremely bright, decent man attempting to do his best... [but] not much has changed since he became Prime Minister," said Lord Richard Newby, Leader of the Lib Dems in the House of Lords, during the event. For Anneliese Dodds, Labour Party chair and shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, Sunak's term marked a "huge amount of continuity" with his embattled predecessors.

However, if the outcome of the election indicates a definitive shift among British Indian voters towards Labour, it would be seen more as a vote in favour of change rather than a decisive ballot in favour of party leader Keir Starmer — who is simply being viewed as a "choose-able alternative," according to poll analysts.

# Indian-origin schoolgirl chess prodigy to be youngest in England team

PTI ■ LONDON

Bodhana Sivanandan, a nine-year-old Indian-origin schoolgirl is set to make chess history after she became the youngest person selected to represent England internationally in any sport. Bodhana, from Harrow in north-west London, will join the England Women's Team at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, in September. The others in her team are all in their 20s, 30s or 40s. "I found out yesterday after I came back from school when my dad told me. I was happy. I hope I'll do well and I'll get another title," she told the BBC on Wednesday.

Malcolm Pein, manager of the England chess team, described the schoolgirl as one of the most remarkable British chess prodigies he has ever seen. "It's exciting — she's on course to be one of the best British players ever," he said. Her father, Siva Sivanandan,



says he remains mystified about where his daughter got her talent. "I'm an engineering graduate, as is my wife, but I'm not good at chess," he said. Bodhana first picked up chess during the pandemic lockdown when Siva's friend was going back to India and gave her a few bags which also had a chess board. "I was interested in the pieces, so I started playing," she recalls. Last December, Sivanandan won the European Blitz Chess Championship in Zagreb,

Croatia, and was dubbed "super talented" at the time. Soon after, she was among a group of young chess enthusiasts invited by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to 10 Downing Street to mark the government's major new GBP 1 million investment package for the game. The package has since been in place to support children attending schools in disadvantaged areas across England to learn and play chess, improve the visibility and availability of the game, and fund elite playing. As part of the package, the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) said it would invest GBP 500,000 in the English Chess Federation (ECF) over two years to develop the next generation of world-class talent. Funds will support expert coaching, training camps and cutting-edge computer analysis for international events to assist current grandmasters and up-and-coming players.

# Verdict expected for Iranian-born Norwegian man charged in Oslo LGBT+ festival attack

Copenhagen (Denmark) (AP): A verdict is expected on Thursday in the case of an Iranian-born Norwegian man who is charged with terrorism in a 2002 attack at an LGBTQ+ festival in Oslo, Norway, in which two people were killed and nine seriously wounded at three locations. The Oslo District Court is to rule on whether Zaniar Matapour fired 10 rounds with a machine gun and eight with a handgun into the crowd, chiefly outside the London Pub, a popular gay bar, on June 25, 2002.

Prosecutors said Matapour, 45, a Norwegian citizen originally from Iran, has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State group. Extensive video material of the attack was presented in court. The verdict will not be read in court but will be sent out electronically. Matapour will have the verdict read to

him in prison, the court said. Matapour was overpowered by bystanders after the attack and arrested. Following the attack, a Pride parade was cancelled, with police saying they could not guarantee security. The shooting shocked Norway, which has a relatively low crime rate but has experienced a series of "lone wolf" attacks by individuals in recent decades, including one of the worst mass shootings in Europe. In 2011, a right-wing extremist killed 69 people on the island of Utøya after setting off a bomb in Oslo that left eight dead.

Six days before the attack, Norway's external intelligence agency, E-Tjenesten, learned from an undercover agent that a possible action was expected in a Nordic country and the information was passed to the domestic security service.

# Keir Starmer: Human rights lawyer turned Labour Leader

PTI ■ LONDON

Keir Starmer, the human rights barrister turned Labour Party Leader, has made it a manifesto pledge to pursue a "new strategic partnership" with India, including an FTA, if handed a mandate to form a Labour-led government in Thursday's general election.

Sir Keir, who was knighted by the late Queen Elizabeth II for his services to law and criminal justice, spent much of his career in the legal profession before stepping into the world of politics, first elected as Labour's member of Parliament from London in 2015.

The 61-year-old father of two teenage kids, who he and his National Health Service (NHS) employee wife Victoria have chosen to keep out of the political spotlight, has been credited with reversing the



party's fortunes from one of its worst poll performances in the 2019 general election to the edge of government. The other turnaround Starmer worked on was to try and rebuild Labour's connect with the Indian diaspora, alienated under former leader Jeremy Corbyn over a perceived anti-India stance on Kashmir.

"I have a clear message for you all today: this is a changed Labour Party," declared Starmer at the India Global Forum (IGF) last year, setting the tone for the party's India-UK outlook.

"What my Labour government will seek with India is a relationship based on our shared values of democracy and aspiration. That will seek a free trade agreement (FTA), we share that ambition, but also a new strategic partnership for global security, climate security, economic security," he said.

This approach has been entrenched in the party's 2024 election manifesto, which commits to seeking a "new strategic partnership with India, including a free trade agreement, as well as deepening cooperation in areas like security, education, technology and climate change."



# Putin, Xi among others attend SCO summit



From left, front row, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Russian President Vladimir Putin, Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani pose for a photo at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) plus summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, on Thursday

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping on Thursday attended the summit of a security grouping created by Moscow and Beijing to counter Western alliances. Putin and Xi joined the leaders of other countries that are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation at its annual meeting in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana. The grouping was established in 2001 by China, Russia and the four ex-Soviet Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to promote regional security and economic cooperation. It was later joined by India, Pakistan and Iran. Russia's western neighbour and ally, Belarus, joined the SCO on Thursday. Observer states and dialogue partners include Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. Addressing the summit, Putin emphasised the group's focus on ensuring security of its members and said the SCO will form a dedicated centre that will coordinate response to various security challenges. He added that the group's members will also endorse a special program to fight separatism and extremism. Xi called on the SCO members to show solidarity in the face "the real challenges of intervention and polarisation," according to a readout of his speech by the official Xinhua news agency. "In the face of the real threat of the Cold War mentality, we

have to safeguard the security bottom line," he added. Besides Putin and Xi, and summit host Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, attending Thursday's meeting are Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif of Pakistan, President Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan, President Emomali Rakhmon of Tajikistan, President Sadyr Zhaparov of Kyrgyzstan and President Alexander Lukashenko of Belarus. Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India has sent his foreign minister S Jaishankar. Iran is still choosing a successor to President Ebrahim Raisi, killed in a helicopter crash in May, with a runoff election Friday, so acting President Mohammad Mokhbar is attending. Other guests of the SCO include President Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Türkiye and President İlham Aliyev of Azerbaijan. Also present is UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who is visiting Central Asia. For Putin, the summit offered another venue to demonstrate the failure of Western efforts to isolate Russia over its 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Speaking Thursday at the summit, Putin mentioned his statement in June that the hostilities could end if Ukraine withdraws its troops from the four regions that Moscow annexed in 2022 and abandons its bid to join NATO. Kyiv and its allies have rejected the idea. Putin also thanked SCO members for their proposals for a peace settlement, adding that Moscow will take them into

account. Moscow has hailed a peace plan for Ukraine offered by China last year that was rejected by both Ukraine and the West for failing to call for Russia to leave occupied parts of Ukraine. At a meeting with Xi on Wednesday, Putin hailed the SCO as "one of the key pillars of a fair, multipolar world order," and said ties between Moscow and Beijing are "experiencing the best period in their history." It marked their second meeting in as many months following Putin's visit to China, which underscored Beijing's political support for Moscow amid Western sanctions and China's role as a top market for Russian oil and gas. Russia also has relied on Beijing as a main source of high-tech imports to keep its military machine running. The SCO helps China project its influence, especially across Central Asia and the Global South. Xi called for "bridges of communication" between countries last week and wants to further promote China as an alternative to the US and its allies. For host Kazakhstan and the other Central Asian nations, the meeting is a way to further their cooperation with bigger, more powerful neighbours. Kazakhstan, for instance, frequently engages with both neighbouring Russia and China, while also pursuing links with the West. Speaking in opening remarks at the summit, Tokayev hailed the SCO as "one of the most authoritative and influential international structures."

# Shehbaz raises terror concern

PTI ■ ASTANA

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Thursday raised the issue of terrorism as a major concern for member states at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and called for "meaningful" engagement with the Afghan Taliban government. Shahbaz, who arrived in Kazakhstan's capital of Astana on Wednesday for a two-day official visit, represented Pakistan at the SCO meeting where leaders and diplomats from countries including China, India, Türkiye, Iran, Azerbaijan, and Kyrgyzstan have gathered to discuss economic and security cooperation. The prime minister, during his address, emphasised the importance of maintaining peace in the region as a precondition for economic development, Dawn News reported. "Achieving lasting peace in Afghanistan is a linchpin to this common objective," he said, adding that the interna-

tional community "meaningfully engage with the Afghan government to meet their genuine economic and development needs". Sharif also said the Afghan Taliban must also "take concrete measures" to ensure its soil is not used for terrorism against any other state. "Terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, including state terrorism, must be condemned in clear and unambiguous terms," he said, adding that there was "no justification for killing innocent people or using the bogey of terrorism" for political point-scoring. He also touched on the topic of globalisation and highlighted that leaders had the responsibility to rise above partisan geopolitics and join hands to secure a prosperous future for our people. Regarding Pakistan's role in regional trade connectivity, the premier said the country's location made it an "ideal trade conduit" for the region and added that the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

supplemented "SCO's vision of regional connectivity and economic interaction". Shehbaz also advocated for the promotion "of national currencies for mutual settlements within the region" to avoid "global financial shocks". He said alternative funding mechanisms would "give impetus to different development projects in the SCO region". The prime minister said Pakistan would do "its utmost to provide impetus to collective efforts to raise living standards in the SCO region" while talking about the rise in political and military conflicts across the globe and consequent hike in food and fuel prices, which have "seriously affected members' ability to address poverty". Pakistan and India became a member of SCO in June 2017 at a summit in Kazakhstan. Recalling how Pakistan and Russia used to have a bilateral trade and a barter system in the 1950s and 1960s, Shehbaz, on Wednesday, during his

interaction with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the sidelines of the summit, called for overcoming financial and banking issues between the two countries by renewing and expanding trade under a barter system. "I think today is the time we can overcome financial and other banking issues by renewing our trade and expanding our trade under a barter," Shehbaz told Putin. "That will be very beneficial to Pakistan and we will be able to overcome many problems." Putin said both countries could enhance their cooperation in energy and agriculture and expressed his readiness to promote cooperation with cash-strapped Pakistan in the field of food security. Meanwhile, Shehbaz also proposed to establish tripartite institutional mechanisms, particularly in economic and investment areas to strengthen Pakistan-Türkiye-Azerbaijan economic and commercial cooperation.

# Sweden protests against death penalties to 3

**Copenhagen (Denmark):** Sweden's Foreign Ministry said on Thursday it will summon the Iraqi charge d'affaires in Stockholm to protest against death sentences received by Swedes in Iraq. Last month, Stockholm protested over a death sentence given to a Swede. On Thursday, two more cases were confirmed, bringing the total to at least three Swedes who have been sentenced to death in Iraq in recent weeks. All were related to a deadly shooting earlier this year, the Foreign Ministry said. The ministry said it has also received information that a fourth Swedish citizen has received a death sentence that could be drug related. However, "there are certain uncertainties regarding the person's identity, which is why the Ministry of Foreign Affairs cannot confirm the sentence at the moment", it said. "We are acting to ensure that the sentences are not carried out," the ministry said.

# Floated rise in gasoline prices may spark new protests in Iran

AP ■ DUBAI

As Iran's runoff presidential election nears, comments by an official in the campaign of reformist Masoud Pezeshkian raised the possibility of his government increasing government-set gasoline prices — a move that has sparked nationwide protests in the past. While still tentative, economists long have warned Iran needs to overhaul its system of subsidies, estimated to cost the Islamic Republic tens of billions of dollars a year. In 2019, a similar hike triggered mass demonstrations and a bloody crackdown that grew even more intense after the 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini. On Saturday, Pezeshkian campaign head Ali Abdolalazadeh told journalists that his possible presidency would see price hikes for fuel and other items handled without any outcry. "Don't worry, petrol at any ... price, you will see that it would be allowed with calmness and cooperation by the people," Abdolalazadeh said. Hard-liners immediately accused Pezeshkian of planning to increase fuel prices by a factor of eight. Pezeshkian's camp claimed the price under Saeed Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator Pezeshkian is facing in Friday's election, would be 12

times higher, based on remarks by those close to the hard-liner. That official, Majid Karimi, suggested Iranians should be paying the "world price" at the pump. People gathered at a Jalili rally carried a sign warning against any price hike, saying: "We do not want petrol at price of 250,000 Rial" a litre. That would be 40 cents a litre, or USD 1.55 a gallon. But no matter who is elected, it is likely Iran will see fuel price hikes. Iran raised minimum gasoline prices by 50 per cent to 15,000 rials per litre in 2019 — or 12 cents a litre, or about 50 cents a gallon. But with Iran's currency crashing since then, that's now 2 cents a litre, or 9 cents a gallon. After a monthly 60-litre quota, it costs 30,000 rials a litre. That had been nearly 24 cents a litre or 90 cents a gallon then, but now is nearly 5 cents a litre, or 18 cents a gallon. By comparison, an average gallon of regular gas in the US costs USD 3.50, according to AAA. Iran spent USD 52 billion on oil subsidies in 2022, according to the Paris-based International Energy Agency, the most of any country in the world. Iran spent 36 per cent of its overall gross domestic product, or USD 127 billion, that year on oil, electricity and natural gas



Reformist candidate for the Iranian presidential election Masoud Pezeshkian clenches his fists during a campaign rally in Tehran, Iran

subsidies. Though it costs the Iranian government tens of billions of dollars in subsidies, cheap gasoline is practically considered a birthright in the country, home to the world's fourth-largest crude oil reserves despite decades of economic woes since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Gasoline there remains among the cheapest in the world, in part to help keep costs low for its underemployed, who often drive taxis to make ends meet. The 2019 hikes led to demonstrations across some 100 cities and towns across Iran, with gas

stations and banks burned down. The crackdown that followed included at least 321 people killed, according to Amnesty International. Thousands were detained. During the 2022 protests over the death of Amini, after she was arrested for wearing her hijab not to the liking of security forces, over 500 people were killed and 22,000 locked up — part of a pattern of widening unrest in the Islamic Republic. On the streets of Tehran, people have grown increasingly anxious about the price of fuel

rising. "Do you know what that means? I may buy fuel to set fire to everything," said taxi driver, Rasool Kashani, 45. "I will not vote at all. Both plan to slaughter ordinary people." Shahrooz Imani, a 41-year-old mother of three, said she planned to vote for Jalili as she believes he cares more about the poor given Pezeshkian's apparent plan to raise prices. "This will deprive us of our daily needs — even vegetables and bread — if price of fuel hikes up," she said. A bookseller on Tehran's famed Enghelab — or "Revolution" — Street also worried about the poor. "We cannot tolerate this again, maybe we need to flee to neighbouring countries to work," said Abbas Irani. Mahdi Robati, a business analyst and CEO of an Iranian brokerage firm, warned that Jalili's economic policies and hard-line positions could bring about economic damage on the scale of China's Mao Zedong. "The output of this thinking is the complete destruction of the rial, the spread of absolute poverty throughout the country, the deprivation of all political and social freedoms, famine and the complete coupisation of the economy, and many other nightmarish consequences," he wrote on the social media platform X.

# Ukraine army retreats, Russia closer to seizing Chasiv Yar

**Kyiv (AP):** A spokesperson for Ukraine's military said its army has retreated from a neighbourhood in the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, a strategically important town in the eastern Donetsk region which has been reduced to rubble under a months-long Russian assault. Chasiv Yar lies a short distance west of Bakhmut, which was captured by Russia last year after a bitter 10-month battle. For months, Russian forces have focused on capturing Chasiv Yar, a town which occupies a strategic, elevated location. Its fall would put nearby cities in jeopardy, compromise critical Ukrainian supply routes and bring Russia closer to its stated aim of seizing the entire Donetsk region. The Ukrainian army retreated from a northeastern neighbourhood in the town of Nazar

Voloshyn, the spokesman for the Khortytsia ground forces formation, told The Associated Press in a written message on Thursday. Ukraine's defensive positions in the town were "destroyed," he said, adding that there was a threat of serious casualties if troops remained in the area and that Russia did not leave "a single intact building." Months of relentless Russian artillery strikes have devastated Chasiv Yar, with homes and municipal offices charred, and a town that once had a population of 12,000 has been left deserted. The intensity of Russian strikes on Ukraine's defensive line in the area of Chasiv Yar has increased over the last month, Voloshyn said. In the past week alone, Voloshyn said Russia has carried out nearly 1,300 strikes, fired

nearly 130 glide bombs and made 44 ground assaults. Other Russian attacks in recent weeks have focused on capturing nearby settlements that would allow them to advance to Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, the biggest cities in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Donetsk region. Ukrainian commanders in the area say their resources remain stretched, largely due to a months-long gap in military assistance from the United States which threw Ukraine's military onto the defensive. In June, members of the artillery brigade in Chasiv Yar reported that supplies of American ammunition had started to arrive. Elsewhere in Ukraine, the governor of the northern Chernihiv region, Viacheslav Chaus, said Russia launched 22 drones over Ukraine last night.

# Hasina to travel to China next week

**Beijing (PTI):** China on Thursday announced that Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will visit Beijing early next week and meet China's top leadership, including President Xi Jinping, which will facilitate political mutual trust, and push bilateral relations to a new level. Hasina's visit from July 8 to 10, days after her India visit, is being seen as an apparent attempt to balance ties between India and China, one of Dhaka's biggest investors. "This is her (Hasina's) first visit to China since she started her new term. It is also her second visit to China in five years," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told a media briefing here. During her visit, she will meet President Xi, Premier Li Qiang and attend the signing ceremony of cooperation documents together, Mao

said. The leaders of the two countries will have an "in-depth exchange of views" on deepening traditional friendship, expanding mutually beneficial cooperation and international and regional issues of common concern, the spokesperson said, adding that Hasina will also attend the China-Bangladesh Business Trade and Investment Conference. "The visit will facilitate political mutual trust, strengthen the development strategies, promote high-quality joint construction of the 'Belt and Road', accelerate the implementation of the three major global initiatives, and push China-Bangladesh relations to a new level," Mao said. Hasina's China visit was expected to focus on more Chinese investments in Bangladesh under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

# Sri Lanka strikes private debt restructuring deal

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka has reached a debt restructuring deal with the international sovereign bondholders after protracted negotiations, state finance minister Shehan Semsinghe said on Thursday, calling it a "crucial step" in the cash-strapped country's efforts to restore debt sustainability. In a statement, State Minister of Finance Semsinghe said that an agreement on restructuring terms was reached on Wednesday, completing Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process. "ISBs (International Sovereign Bonds) account for USD 12.5 billion out of the total external debt of USD 37 billion. This agreement is a crucial step in our efforts to restore debt sustainability," Semsinghe said.

He added that the agreement with private bondholders was subject to the approval by the official creditor committee of nations, including India. "This marks another key milestone in our journey towards economic revival and strengthening," he said. Officials said the expected haircut agreed upon would amount to 28 per cent, with an upfront payment to ISB holders commencing from September this year. Officials said this completes Sri Lanka's debt restructuring process, which came as a prerequisite for debt sustainability in the ongoing International Monetary Fund (IMF) bailout of USD 2.9 billion extended in March 2023 over a period of four years. It follows the finalisation of debt restructuring agreements

with bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris on June 26, which President Ranil Wickremesinghe described as a "significant milestone" for bolstering international trust in the debt-ridden economy. Sri Lanka declared its first-ever sovereign default in mid-April 2022, having run out of its foreign exchange reserves. The halt to the debt services meant that the multilateral creditor nations and commercial lenders could not extend fresh financing to the country. The government faced criticism from the main Opposition after last week's announcement on bilateral debt restructuring, who claimed that the government had failed to achieve the best solution for the country.

# Russian-linked cybercampaigns put bullseye on France

AP ■ PARIS

Photos of blood-red hands on a Holocaust memorial. Caskets at the Eiffel Tower. A fake French military recruitment drive calling for soldiers in Ukraine, and major French news sites improbably registered in an obscure Pacific territory, population 15,000. All are part of disinformation campaigns orchestrated out of Russia and targeting France, according to French officials and cybersecurity experts in Europe and the United States. France's legislative elections and the Paris Olympics sent them into overdrive. More than a dozen reports issued in the past year point to an intensifying effort from Russia to undermine France, particularly the upcoming Games, and President Emmanuel Macron, who is one

of Ukraine's most vocal supporters in Europe. The Russian campaigns sowing anti-French disinformation began online early last summer but first became tangible in October 2023 when more than 1,000 bots linked to Russia relayed photos of graffitied Stars of David in Paris and its suburbs. A French intelligence report said the Russian intelligence agency FSB ordered the tagging, as well as subsequent vandalism of a memorial to those who helped rescue Jews from the Holocaust. Photos from each event were amplified on social media by fake accounts linked to the Russian disinformation site RRN, according to cybersecurity experts. Russia denies any such campaigns. The French intelligence report says RRN is part of a larger operation orchestrated by

Sergei Kiriyenko, a ranking Kremlin official. "You have to see this as an ecosystem," said a French military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to reveal information about the Russian effort. "It's a hybrid strategy." The tags and the vandalism had no direct link to Russia's war in Ukraine, but they provoked a strong reaction from the French political class, with denunciations in the legislature and public debate. Antisemitic attacks are on the rise in France, and the war in Gaza has proven divisive. The Stars of David could be interpreted either as support for Israel or as opposition. The effect was to sow division and unease. French Jews in particular have found themselves unwittingly thrust into the political fray despite, at just 500,000 people, making up a

small proportion of the French population. In March, just after Macron discussed the possibility of mobilising the French military in Ukraine, a fake recruitment drive went up for the French army in Ukraine, spawning a series of posts in Russian- and French-language Telegram channels that got picked up in Russian and Belarusian media, according to a separate French government report seen by The Associated Press. On June 1, caskets appeared outside the Eiffel Tower, bearing the inscription "French soldiers in Ukraine." The larger disinformation efforts show little traction in France, but the Russian audience may have been the real target, officials said, by showing that Russia's war in Ukraine is, as Putin has said, really a war with the West.

Among the broader goals, the French military official said, was a long-term and steady effort to sow social discord, erode faith in the media and democratic governments, undermine NATO, and sap Western support for Ukraine. Denigrating the Olympics, from which most Russian athletes are banned, is a bonus, according to French officials monitoring the increasingly strident posts warning of imminent unrest ahead of the Games. On June 9, the French far-right National Rally trounced Macron's party in elections for the European Parliament. The party has historically been close to Russia: one of its leading figures, Marine Le Pen, cultivated ties to Putin for many years and supported Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. And its leading contender for prime minister,

Jordan Bardella, has said he opposes sending long-range weapons to Kyiv. In more than 4,400 posts gathered since mid-November by antibot4navalny, a collective that analyses Russian bot behaviour, those targeting audiences in France and Germany predominated. The number of weekly posts ranged from 100 to 200 except for the week of May 5, when it dropped near zero, the data showed. That week, as it happens, was a holiday in Russia. Many of the posts redirect either to RRN or to sites that appear identical to major French media, but with the domain — and content — changed. At least two of the more recent mirrored sites are registered in Wallis and Futuna, a French Pacific territory 10 time zones from Paris. A click on the top of the fake

page redirects back to the real news sites themselves to give the impression of authenticity. Other posts redirect to original sites controlled by the campaign itself, dubbed Doppelganger. The redirects shifted focus for the European elections and continued after Macron called the surprise legislative elections with just three weeks to spare. Three-quarters of posts from the week ahead of the June 30 first-round legislative vote that were directed toward a French audience focused on either criticising Macron or boosting the National Rally, antibot4navalny found in data shared with The Associated Press. One post on a fake site purported to be from Le Point, a current affairs magazine, and the French news agency AFP, criticising Macron. "Our leaders have no idea how

ordinary French people live but are ready to destroy France in the name of aid for Ukraine," read the headline on June 25. Another site falsely claimed to be from Macron's party, offering to pay 100 euros for a vote for him — and linking back to the party's true website. And still another inadvertently left a generative AI prompt calling for the re-write of an article "taking a conservative stance against the liberal policies of the Macron administration," according to findings last week from Insiht Group, the threat research division of the cybersecurity consultancy Recorded Future. "They're scraping automatically, sending the text to the AI and asking the AI to introduce bias or slants into the article and rewrite it," said Clement Briens, an analyst for Recorded Future.

# Sensex, Nifty hit new lifetime highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher to scale fresh all-time high levels on Thursday, following buying in market heavyweights ICICI Bank, Infosys and TCS amid a largely positive trend in global equities. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 62.87 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 80,049.67. During the day, it rallied 405.84 points to hit a fresh all-time high of 80,392.64. The Nifty rose 15.65 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at a record closing peak of 24,302.15. Intra-day, it surged 114.5 points to hit a fresh lifetime high of 24,401. Among the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra and



shortened trading session. Stock exchanges will remain closed on Thursday on account of Independence Day. Global oil benchmark Brent crude fell 0.52 per cent to USD 86.89 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 5,483.63 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. On Wednesday, the 30-share index hit the historic 80,000 mark for the first time intra-day trade. It surged 632.85 points or 0.79 per cent to a record intraday high of 80,074.30. The index later closed near the 80,000 level at 79,986.80, up by 545.35 points or 0.69 per cent over the last close. The Nifty climbed 162.65 points or 0.67 per cent to end at an all-time high of 24,286.50. During the day, it zoomed 183.4 points or 0.76 per cent to hit a fresh intraday record peak of 24,307.25.

Mahindra were the gainers. In contrast, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul ended in the positive territory, while Shanghai closed in the red. European markets were trading in the green territory in mid-session deals. US markets ended higher on Wednesday during the

# Sebi mandates institutional mechanism for fraud prevention in stock broking

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Thursday issued a circular requiring stock brokers to establish an institutional mechanism for prevention and detection of fraud or market abuse in a bid to protect the interest of investors in securities market. The circular mandates the implementation of systems for the surveillance of trading activities and internal controls, introduction of a whistle-blower policy, among other obligations. These requirements are part of Sebi (Stock Brokers) (Amendment) Regulations, 2024, which aim to ensure higher standards of market integrity and investor protection. The standards for implementation of the same, including operational modalities will be formulated by the broker's Industry Standards Forum (ISF), in consultation with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the regulator said in the circular. The implementation will be based on the size of the stock brokers. Brokers with more



than 50,000 active Unique Client Codes (UCCs) are required to comply by January 1, 2025. Further, those with 2,001 to 50,000 active UCCs have to comply by April 1, 2025, and brokers with up to 2,000 active UCCs must comply by April 1, 2026. In addition, qualified stock brokers must comply with these requirements by August 1, 2024, considering their existing obligations for governance and client behaviour surveillance. Sebi directed the stock exchanges to bring the provisions of this circular to the notice of stock brokers and also disseminate the same on their websites. It also directed them to amend their bye-laws, and ensure that brokers notify the obligation/ requirement on the stock brokers to follow the standards adopted by the ISF, and issue a joint notice which indicates the date of applicability of the circular to various stock brokers based on the criteria. The provisions of this circular shall come into force in a risk-based, staggered manner to ensure smooth adoption, and effective implementation for all the stock brokers by providing enough time for stock brokers, based on their size, for making necessary changes, Sebi said.

# Coal recorded 10.2 per cent growth among eight key infra sectors in May

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The coal sector has registered a growth of 10.2 per cent among all eight core industries of the economy in May, the government said on Thursday. The index of coal industry has reached 184.7 points during May as compared to 167.6 points during the same month last year. "The coal sector has demonstrated highest growth of 10.2 per cent (provisional), following the electricity industry among the eight core industries for the month of May, 2024 as per the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) (Base Year 2011-12) released by Ministry of Commerce & Industries," the coal ministry said in a statement. The driving force behind growth can be attributed to a considerable rise in coal production during May. This increase in production underscores the sector's capacity to meet growing demand of energy and manufacturing industries.

# SBI announces initiatives to mitigate risks in agri loan portfolio

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest lender SBI on Thursday announced 11 new initiatives -- including enhancement of its digital banking features and opening of 35 new Agricultural Centralised Processing Cells -- to mitigate risks in its agricultural loan portfolio. On the occasion of the 69th Foundation Day, State Bank of India announced these initiatives to widen the bank's accessibility to address the banking needs of its potential customers, the lender said in a statement. SBI has enhanced its digital payment

experience, with the introduction of two exciting features like tap-and-pay on the BHIM SBI PAY app and end-to-end digital loans against mutual funds on the YONO app, it added. The bank has also announced an initiative, which is a fully digital end-to-end journey for SBI Surya Ghar Loan, it said, adding that the users can opt for credit to install solar rooftops under the central government's PM Surya Ghar Scheme, offering loans for up to 10 KW capacity. The entire process will be managed on SBI's digital platform from applicant registration on the MNRE/REC portal to



loan disbursement. Acknowledging the significant contributions and global presence of the Indian diaspora in shaping the nation's growth story, SBI opened a second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala, Punjab. To enhance its service to NRI clients, its Chairman Dinesh Khara inaugurated the second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala on Bank Day. SBI's dedicated GNCs reflect the bank's unwavering commitment to strengthening its ties with the global Indian community. "These centres serve as hubs of

excellence, providing specialised services to NRI customers. With a network of 434 specialised NRI branches in India, foreign offices in 29 countries, and partnerships with 45 exchange houses and 5 banks in GCC countries, SBI is well-equipped to offer comprehensive services to its NRI clientele worldwide," the statement said. In another move, SBI has launched comprehensively redesigned High Court branches aimed at enhancing services for the legal community. This initiative underscores SBI's commitment to providing tailored financial solutions that cater specifically

to the unique needs of lawyers and legal professionals, it added. The redesigned branches are equipped to offer top-tier services, including financial management, transaction facilitation, and personalised financial advice. With regard to home loans, the bank has made processing such loans more transparent. Home loan borrowers will now receive automated email and SMS notifications regarding the status of their loan application at various processing stages. This initiative aims to enhance customer satisfaction and convenience, it said.

# Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day on an almost flat note at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, resisting pressure from elevated crude oil prices. Forex traders said a positive trend in domestic equities, wherein benchmark indices touched all-time high levels, and significant foreign fund inflows supported the rupee and restricted the fall. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.52 and hit the intraday high of 83.48 and a low of 83.56 against the American currency during the session. It finally settled at 83.50 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa lower than its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 83.49 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on softness in the US dollar amid weak economic data and rise in risk appetite in global markets," said Anuj



Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. "However, elevated crude oil prices may limit the gains. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the US non-farm payrolls report tomorrow," Choudhary said, adding that USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.80.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.15 per cent lower at 105.24. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.47 per cent lower at USD 86.93 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, Sensex breached the historic 80,000-mark and

Nifty scaled a fresh lifetime high. The 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 62.87 points, or 0.08 per cent, up at its all-time high of 80,049.67 points. The broader NSE Nifty settled 15.65 points, or 0.06 per cent, higher at a fresh peak of 24,302.15 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 5,483.63 crore, according to exchange data. Meanwhile, according to an official of S&P Global Ratings, a sovereign rating upgrade for India in the next 24 months is possible if the central government is able to prudently manage its finances and bring down the fiscal deficit to 4 per cent of GDP. S&P Global Ratings Director, Sovereign Ratings, YeeFarn Phua, said the trigger for an upgrade would be the government (Centre + states) deficit falling below 7 per cent of the GDP, and a lot of this would have to be driven by the Central Government.

# Bright future for air cargo sector; need to ensure faster turnaround time: Official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To tap the potential of the country's air cargo sector, the focus should be on further improving processes as well as ensuring faster turnaround time, a senior government official said on Thursday. The government is working on developing logistics hubs. Piyush Srivastava, Senior Economic Advisor at the Ministry of Civil Aviation, said the air cargo sector has a bright future and the number of freighters in the country is expected to rise. Currently, Indian carriers have around 18 freighters. There will be a focus on further improving the ease of doing business and faster turnaround time in the air cargo sector, he said while speaking at the conference organised by the ACFI (Air Cargo Forum India) in the national capital. While passenger traffic has recovered after being hit by the coronavirus pandemic, air cargo is yet to fully recover to the pre-Covid levels. In 2023-24, the air cargo handled in the country was a little over 3.36 million tonnes.



Surendra Kumar Ahirwar, Joint Secretary at DPIIT, a lot of movement is happening on the logistics side, including the skilling of people. He also said there is sub-optimal utilisation of existing air cargo facilities and emphasised the need for developing hubs as part of the logistics infrastructure. According to ACFI President Yashpal Sharma, the air cargo sector accounts for nearly 10 per cent of domestic carriers' revenues. Citing market research reports, he said the country's air freight market is estimated to grow to USD 16.37 billion by 2027. Also, the plans to establish air transport shipment hubs at major airports are expected to drive the industry's growth, he added.

# Kolkata office leasing absorption in April-June jumps 33 per cent

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Office space leasing absorption in Kolkata surged 33 per cent year on year to 0.4 million square feet in the April-June quarter of 2024, according to the CBRE India Office Figures Q2 report. The key sectors driving absorption in Q2 2024 were technology (40 per cent), BFSI (21 per cent), and flexible space operators (10 per cent). "The office space leasing absorption in April-June 2024 was 0.4 million square feet against 0.3 million square feet in the YoY period, a CBRE official said. Another real estate consultant, Knight Frank India, also said that Kolkata's office market saw a significant increase in office leasing volume, with 0.7 million square feet of office space transacted in H1 2024 (January-June 2024). This represents a 23 per cent growth compared to H1 2023, according to Knight Frank India's report "India

Real Estate: Residential and Office" (January-June 2024). Average office space rents increased by 6 per cent year-on-year (YoY) during H1 2024, it said. Knight Frank also reported that Kolkata's residential real estate market experienced strong homebuying demand, with 9,130 residential units sold in H1 2024, marking a 25 per cent YoY growth in sales volume. The continued stamp duty rebate and new launches across various price segments contributed to the market's sustained upward sales momentum. However, the state government withdrew the stamp duty and 10 per cent rebate in circle rate effective July. According to CBRE, pan-India office leasing remained robust, with gross office leasing reaching 32.8 million square feet during Jan-Jun'24, a 14 per cent increase year-on-year across nine cities.

# Healing hands, caring hearts



On the occasion of National Doctor's Day Anil Agnihotri RH (Delhi South) visited Lady Harding Medical College and met with Dr Sarita Beri, director of institute, Rajeshwar Lal, Dy Director (Admin), Dr Anupam Parkash (CMO) many other doctors, greeted them with a flower bud and a small gift as a token of love.

# India among most active countries for Meta's Threads

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is one of the most active countries for Threads, which has notched over 175 million monthly active users globally, according to social media giant Meta. The update assumes significance as it marks the completion of nearly one year since Meta officially launched rival to Twitter (now X). "With a 175 million actives, we're seeing Threads become a place where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. India is one of the most active countries for Threads globally," the release said. Among the other major takeaways are creation of 50 million topic tags on Threads till date, globally.

popular tags and topics on Threads are centred around film, TV and OTT content, celebrity-related conversations and sports. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that Threads has over 175 million monthly active users as the social media giant asserted that Threads was launched with the belief that "everyone has something valuable to say". "It's been a year now, and we're seeing it become a place where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. In fact, India is one of the most active countries for Threads globally," the release said. Among the other major takeaways are creation of 50 million topic tags on Threads till date, globally.



"Cricket has been reigning on Threads in India, with players from the current Indian squad like Rishabh Pant and Ravindra Jadeja, to

former cricketers like Akash Chopra and Suresh Raina, experts like Riddhima Pathak and international cricketers like AB de Villiers sharing their passion for the game," Meta said. The T20 Cricket World Cup, IPL, and Women's Premier League 2024 have been some of the moments that have sparked cricket conversations on Threads this year, it further said, adding that over 200 creators shared updates about the concluded IPL season on Threads. Threads scaled highs immediately after it was unveiled in July 2023 — it snapped up 100 million user sign-ups within a week of its launch. The initial euphoria, however, wore off and according to industry watchers, the app struggled subsequently with steady decline in engagement metrics.

# AI-powered ROI calculator introduced

PNS ■ Mumbai

Jaro Education, a name in online higher education and upskilling, recently introduced a game-changing tool: The AI-powered ROI (Return on Investment) calculator for upskilling. This innovative feature is designed to help working professionals make informed choices about their upskilling journey. This is one of the first innovations of its kind launched by any online higher education and upskilling company in India. In today's fast-paced world, staying updated with the latest skills is more important than ever, according to the company.

# Office leasing in Gurugram

PNS ■ New Delhi

Leading real estate developer M3M has leased 220,000 sq ft in Gurugram to Flexible workspace provider Incuspaze in their boutique office project - M3M Urbana Premium on the Golf Course Extension Road, people aware of the deal said. "M3M is looking at Office leasing as a major drive this year and aims to lease 20 lakh sq ft of Grade-A office space in the most sought after locations in Gurugram. As part of this focus, we have signed a mega deal with Incuspaze - a leading flexible workspace provider where 2,20,000 sq ft space has been provided on lease to them," said Sudeep Bhatt, president M3M.

# RONALDO VS MBAPPÉ: CLASH OF GENERATIONS AT EURO 2024

**AP ■ HAMBURG (GERMANY)**  
A clash of soccer icons. A They'll go head to head when Portugal plays France in the Euro 2024 quarterfinals on Friday, and this heavyweight meeting might have got just that little bit bigger. "It is, without doubt, my last European Championship," the 39-year-old Ronaldo said after his tearful, emotionally charged performance in Portugal's penalty-shootout victory over Slovenia in the last 16. That may have just confirmed what many were presuming anyway. Still, there's now a definitive specter of finality to Ronaldo's long, headline-grabbing Euros adventure that could be brought to an end by Mbappé, the heir apparent to Ronaldo and Lionel Messi after their long-time dominance of the sport. Mbappé grew up with pictures of Ronaldo on his bedroom wall. A photo is inevitably

doing the rounds on social media of what is apparently their first ever meeting, at Real Madrid's training ground at Valdebebas in 2012 when a 13-year-old Mbappé stood beside Ronaldo after a visit to the Spanish club where his sporting hero was the star player. In 2020, Mbappé posted on Twitter, now X, that Ronaldo was his "idol." And only a few months ago, Ronaldo reacted to Mbappé clinching a highly anticipated move to Madrid by writing on Instagram: "Excited to see you light up the Bernabeu." That Mbappé can now end Ronaldo's European Championship career - who knows, it might even be his last ever major tournament - adds an intriguing subplot to a match that will be watched around the world. "Let's go, let's go to war," Ronaldo said of the match against France, whom he considers as the top contender at Euro 2024 along with Spain.

He said he was driven to tears against Slovenia not at the prospect of elimination but because his main motivation these days is "making people happy" and he had a penalty saved in extra time.

"I'm moved by all that football means - by the enthusiasm I have for the game, the enthusiasm for seeing my supporters, my family, the

affection people have for me. "It's not about leaving the world of football. What else is there for me to do or win?" Ronaldo heads into Friday's game having failed to score in

eight straight matches at major tournaments - Portugal's last four at the 2022 World Cup and its four games at Euro 2024 - and with growing concerns about

whether he deserves what appears to be a guaranteed spot in the team under Roberto Martinez. Things haven't been straightforward for Mbappé, either, at Euro 2024. He sustained a broken nose in France's group opener against Austria and has since been wearing a vision-limiting protective facemask during games. Mbappé has scored one goal and that was from the penalty spot against Poland - it's the only goal scored by a France player at these Euros. "He will have to get used to it," France coach Didier Deschamps said of Mbappé and his mask, "because, to protect (his nose), he will have to wear it for a few weeks - or even a few months." Few would have predicted the top scorer at the last World Cup (Mbappé) and the record scorer in men's international soccer (Ronaldo) to have just one goal between them heading into the quarterfinals. But no one will be surprised if

they come alive in Hamburg, with the pressure on and the occasion so big. Mbappé, remember, scored a hat trick in the World Cup final and has been logging Ronaldo-esque scoring numbers in the first part of his career. He's already on 48 goals for France at the age of 25, and is also on 48 goals in the Champions League from 73 appearances. He is chasing down Ronaldo's scoring records at both international (130) and Champions League (140) level and will likely only succeed by showing the same undimmed passion and desire as the player he used to copy as a kid. As their countries' respective captains, they'll shake hands and embrace before kickoff. You can bet they'll do the same after the match. By that time, one of them will be on his way home. For Mbappé, there will surely be more European Championships down the road.



## Germany star Kroos aims to disappoint Real Madrid teammates at Euro 2024

**AP ■ BERLIN**  
Germany great Toni Kroos hopes the next game isn't his last. Heavyweights Germany and Spain clash at the European Championship on Friday, when the winner will advance to the semifinals. Kroos is ending his playing career after Germany's last game at Euro 2024. He hopes that will be the final in Berlin's Olympiastadion. But he knows it could be as soon as Friday if Spain - the most impressive team so far - knocks out the host nation in Stuttgart. "I'm not nostalgic at all," Kroos said Wednesday at potentially his last press conference as a player. He said he wasn't assuming Spain "will be my last game. So, I think we can all look forward to seeing each other again." Kroos has played a key role in lifting the pre-tournament gloom surrounding the German team and turning it to optimism that the hosts can go on to win Euro 2024. It would be a fitting sendoff for a player who has already signed off on a glittering club career by winning the Champions League and Spanish league with Real Madrid. "It's pretty difficult to plan a European



Championship title but having it as a goal is of course the case," Kroos said. "I think it will be really difficult to finish more successfully than I left it with Madrid. And now of course I'm trying to do the same here." Kroos retired from the national team

already in 2021, after Germany lost to England in the last 16 of the pandemic-delayed Euro 2020 tournament. But one of the first things Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann did after his appointment in September 2023 was ask the cool-headed midfielder if he'd consider returning to help Germany's title bid in its home tournament. Fortunately for Germany - which was really struggling with two defeats and a draw from Nagelsmann's first four games - Kroos said yes. It's arguably the single biggest factor in the team's upturn as Kroos' experience and calmness under pressure gave confidence to the players around him. The 34-year-old returned to help Germany beat France and the Netherlands in friendlies in March, and Greece before Euro 2024, then he helped Germany progress from the group stage with wins over Scotland and Hungary, and a draw with Switzerland. Kroos maintained a calm, assured presence in a turbulent win over Denmark in the last 16, helping Germany get further than it had in the last edition. "We're now finally in the stages of the

tournament that we really wanted to be in, and we can be happy with that," Kroos said. "We're motivated, however, in the team and in the locker room, to get much further. And we're convinced we can manage that." Kroos will face former Real Madrid teammates Dani Carvajal, Nacho and Joselu on Friday. The latter said he wants to send him into retirement, but Kroos took it with good humor. "I know him very well. I know how he meant it," Kroos said. "So, I'll let him wish and do everything I can so that it doesn't come true." Kroos said his future involves kids, both his own and young players at an academy he plans to open in Madrid. Seemingly unflappable on the field, Kroos appeared at peace with the fact that Friday's game could be his last, comforted because the decision is not dependent on the whims of anyone else. "There will never be anything I can do as well as playing football. And this phase will be over," Kroos said. "On the other hand, I'm really looking forward to this new phase, because at some point this day comes for every active player. And I'd rather pick this day out for myself."



## I am going to Olympics at 14, all sacrifices were worth it: Swimmer Dhinidhi

**PTI ■ BENGALURU**  
At times, she misses the carefree pleasures her peers enjoy and occasionally experiences a sense of solitude, but all of that has been worth it for 14-year-old swimmer Dhinidhi Desinghu, who is gearing up to fulfil her dream of competing at the Olympics later this month. The Bengaluru swimmer, who studies in class ninth, is set to be the youngest member of the Indian contingent at the Paris Olympics. "Sometimes I miss the fun generally kids of my age have. I do not go out much with friends and feel lonely. But then I wanted to swim and I wanted to go to the Olympics," Dhinidhi told PTI Bhasha in an exclusive interview at her residence. "I am the one who chose this path for me. With that comes a lot of sacrifices but I do feel different, extraordinary and proud. At 14, I am going to the Olympics, so all the sacrifices are worth it," she added. The Olympic cycle has been an underwhelming one for Indian

swimmers as none of the swimmers were able to breach either the 'A' or 'B' qualification time. But Dhinidhi has been on a roll, winning medals at the National Games and the senior National championships last year. Her performances this season made her the top-ranked Indian female swimmer with the Swimming Federation of India handing her one of the two Universality places and an opportunity of a lifetime. "I knew that I had a chance (of making the Olympics) because I have been working really very hard but it was surprising that I got this chance so early in my career. Being the youngest one in the Indian contingent is a big honour." "I am super excited to be a part of the Indian Olympic contingent as I will get a chance to meet the greatest athletes," said Dhinidhi, who will compete in the women's 200m freestyle event. Having got the opportunity to compete at the Olympics at such a young age, Dhinidhi wants to soak in everything and gain experience.

"This is just the beginning and I have a long long way to go. I am really excited to know what more I can do in 2028 and 2032. "I want to experience the feeling of staying at the Olympic village. What kind of races are being held there as the competition in India is totally different from what we get at international level. I want to see the dedication, the focus and the preparation of world class athletes. "I am not thinking about performance as it is just about learning this time. I am sure whatever learnings I have here, that will make me a better athlete." She is excited to meet her idol - seven-time Olympic gold medalist swimmer Katie Ledecky. "I made a greeting card last year for her. I used to think that whenever I get a chance to meet her, I will give this to her. I looked up at her from a very young age and luckily, I got this chance. Hopefully I can give it to her in Paris. I will be on the seventh moon if I get a chance to even see her," she said.

## Indian-origin schoolgirl chess prodigy to be youngest in England team

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
Bodhana Sivanandan, a nine-year-old Indian-origin schoolgirl is set to make chess history after she became the youngest person selected to represent England internationally in any sport. Bodhana, from Harrow in north-west London, will join the England Women's Team at the Chess Olympiad in Budapest, Hungary, in September. The others in her team are all in their 20s, 30s or 40s. "I found out yesterday after I came back from school when my dad told me. I was happy. I hope I'll do well and I'll get another title," she told the BBC on Wednesday. Malcolm Pein, manager of the England chess team, described the schoolgirl as one of the most remarkable British chess prodigies he has ever seen.

"It's exciting - she's on course to be one of the best British players ever," he said. Her father, Siva Sivanandan, says he remains mystified about where his daughter got her talent. "I'm an engineering graduate, as is my wife, but I'm not good at chess," he said. Bodhana first picked up chess during the pandemic lockdown when Siva's friend was going back to India and gave her a few bags which also had a chess board. "I was interested in the pieces, so I started playing," she recalls. Last December, Sivanandan won the European Blitz Chess Championship in Zagreb, Croatia, and was dubbed "super talented" at the time. Soon after, she was among a group of young chess enthusiasts



invited by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to 10 Downing Street to mark the government's major new GBP 1 million investment package for the game. The package has since been in place to support children attending schools in disadvantaged areas across England to learn and play chess, improve the visibility and availability of the

analysis for international events to assist current grandmasters and up-and-coming players. Alongside the support committed to elite players, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) will provide GBP 250,000 to 85 local authorities across England to install 100 new chess tables in public parks and outdoor green spaces to allow more people to play, connect, tackle loneliness, and develop problem-solving skills. In addition, the outgoing Sunak-led government set out plans to encourage more primary school children, particularly girls, to learn to play the game. The UK Department for Education offered grants of up to GBP 2,000 to at least 100 schools in disadvantaged areas across England, subject to interest.

## Haas F1 team signs teenage British driver Oliver Bearman on multi-year deal from 2025

**AP ■ KANNAPOLIS (US)**  
Oliver Bearman has been signed on a multiyear deal by the Haas Formula 1 team from 2025 onward. Haas announced the signing in a statement Thursday, without giving more details. The 19-year-old British driver will take the seat vacated by German driver Nico Hulkenberg, who is joining Sauber at the end of the year ahead of its rebranding to Audi for 2026. "It's hard to put into words just how much this means to me. To say out loud that I will be a Formula 1 driver for (the) Haas F1 Team makes me so immensely proud," Bearman said. "To be one of the very few people who get to do the thing that they dreamed of as a child is something truly incredible." Bearman impressed with a stunning seventh-place finish at the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix in March, when he stood in for Carlos Sainz Jr. He got the



unexpected F1 debut after Sainz was diagnosed with appendicitis and needed an operation. Bearman, who was 18 at the time, became the third-youngest driver in F1. He had only had two practice sessions with Haas - in 2023 - yet produced a commanding drive on a tricky circuit that was way beyond his limited experience. He is currently competing in the F2 championship and is a reserve driver for both Ferrari and Haas - which uses a Ferrari engine. He won the Austrian GP sprint race last weekend driving for Prema Racing in F2.

Bearman signed for the prestigious Ferrari academy in 2021 after being earmarked as a rising star. "I wouldn't be here without you," he told Ferrari. "Thank you for preparing me since F4 for this incredible opportunity and know I will give it everything I have." Haas team owner Gene Haas has high hopes for Bearman. "He's undoubtedly an exciting rookie prospect, not just based on what he showed in Saudi Arabia but also through his time developing his relationship with our team," Haas said. "I'm personally excited to see how he grows as a driver, and we look forward to seeing him deliver for (the) Haas F1 Team next season and beyond." Bearman's promotion means there will be four British drivers on the F1 grid next year, with Lewis Hamilton (who is joining Ferrari), George Russell (Mercedes) and Lando Norris (McLaren) the others.

## Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff lead the Olympics entry list

**AP ■ LONDON**  
Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Andy Murray all were included on the entry list for tennis at the Paris Olympics released by the International Tennis Federation on Thursday, as was Daniil Medvedev, who technically will be competing as a "neutral" athlete rather than representing Russia because of that country's ongoing war in Ukraine. Djokovic (Serbia) and Murray (Britain) are both 37, and Nadal (Spain) is 38, and all own multiple Grand Slam titles. Djokovic holds a men's record of 24 major trophies - but has never won a gold medal at the Olympics. Nadal, next on the men's Slam list with 22, won golds in singles in 2008 and in doubles in 2016. He skipped Wimbledon, which is currently being played, to prepare for the Olympics. Murray won three major championships and is the only tennis player with consecutive singles gold medals at the Summer Games. He has said he plans to retire after the Paris Olympics, which will hold tennis



matches from July 27 to August 4 on the clay courts at Roland Garros, the site of the French Open - where Nadal is a 14-time champ. The leading women on the entry list are No. 1 Iga Swiatek (Poland), No. 2 Coco Gauff (United States) and No. 4 Elena Rybakina (Kazakhstan). No. 3 Aryna Sabalenka decided not to go to the

Olympics; her nation, Belarus, aided Russia in its invasion of Ukraine. So, she would have competed as a "neutral" athlete, like Medvedev. Swiatek is a five-time Grand Slam champion - including at the French Open in four of the past five years - and Gauff and Rybakina have won one major apiece. Gauff made the US team

for the Tokyo Games three years ago. But, she did not go because she tested positive for COVID-19. There are 64-player draws for women's and men's singles, and 32 teams each in women's and men's doubles. The 16 entries for mixed doubles will be determined on July 24. The draw to determine the brackets will be in Paris on July 25. Among the other players announced Thursday are three-time major champion Carlos Alcaraz - who will play doubles alongside Nadal for Spain - No. 1 Jannik Sinner (Italy), Tokyo Olympics gold medalist Alexander Zverev (Germany), 2008 doubles gold medalist Stan Wawrinka (Switzerland), four-time Grand Slam winner Naomi Osaka (Japan), 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu (Canada) and 2018 Australian Open champion Caroline Wozniacki (Denmark). Osaka lit the cauldron at the Tokyo Olympics. Lebanon will debut in Olympic tennis, with Benjamin Hassan entering in singles and also partnering with Hady Habib in doubles.



# Rajawat stuns Gemke, enters second round of Canada Open

**PTI ■ CALGARY (CANADA)**  
Promising Indian shuttler Priyanshu Rajawat stunned higher-ranked Rasmus Gemke of Denmark in a hard-fought three game contest to advance to the second round of men's singles event at the Canada Open here.  
World No.39 Rajawat had to dig deep to get the better of eighth seed Gemke of Denmark 17-21 21-16 21-14 in

# Moreeng appointed as USA women's cricket team coach



**PTI ■ NEW YORK**  
Former South Africa cricketer Hilton Moreeng has been appointed as the coach of USA's national women and Under-19 teams, the country's governing body announced.  
Moreeng will take over from West Indian legend Shivnarine Chanderpaul, and will prepare the team for the T20 World Cup which will be held later this year in Bangladesh. The 46-year-old, who served as South Africa women's team coach for over a decade, said he wanted to contribute to the growth of cricket in the USA.  
"I am eager to collaborate with both current players and emerging talent. My goal is to methodically build a competitive squad capable of



# Plenty of intrigue, even if Messi, Vinicius can't participate

**AP ■ LOS ANGELES**  
Lionel Messi's leg injury was the only major obstacle that fell into Argentina's path while it rolled through group play and into the Copa America quarterfinals.  
Bigger challenges await the defending champions, and they're hoping Messi will be there to lead the way in perhaps his final international tournament.  
The 15-time Copa America champion Albiceleste are still the Americas' biggest soccer tournament when quarterfinal play gets underway, but the other 15-time Copa champs - Uruguay - top the list of challengers capable of taking them down.  
With the host Americans and Mexico eliminated in group play, the spotlight shifts firmly to the South American powerhouses determined to raise the trophy.  
**ARGENTINA VS ECUDAOR**  
In Houston, it's unclear whether Messi will play in the opening quarterfinal due to a leg injury that sidelined him in the team's most recent match against Peru. Coach Lionel Scaloni said Messi's availability will be a game-time decision.  
"Depending on how he responds, we will decide," Scaloni said Wednesday before training. "There are ramifications when Leo is not able to play. We'll try to make sure that he can play. If not, we'll try to find the best solution for the team. I will talk

# Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag signs contract extension until 2026

**AP ■ MANCHESTER (ENGLAND)**  
Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag has signed a contract extension through to 2026, the Premier League club said Thursday.  
The Dutchman has won back-to-back trophies in his first two years at Old Trafford, but faced uncertainty over his position after leading it to its worst league finish in 34 years last season.  
After a performance review, United decided to stick with Ten Hag and he has now agreed on a new deal, which is a one-year extension on his previous contract, which was due to expire at the end of the upcoming season.  
"Looking back at the past two years, we can reflect with pride



on two trophies and many examples of progression from where we were when I joined," Ten Hag said.  
"However, we must also be clear that there is still lots of hard work ahead to reach the levels expected of Manchester United, which means challenging for English and European titles.  
"In my discussions with the club, we have found complete unity in our vision for reaching those goals, and we are all strongly committed to making that journey together."  
Ten Hag joined United from Ajax in 2022 and won the English League Cup in his first year in England. He followed that up last season with a victory over Manchester City in the FA Cup final.

successful coaches in European football. While the club's review of last season highlighted areas for improvement, it also reached a clear conclusion that Erik was the best partner for us to work with in driving up standards and outcomes," said United Sporting Director Dan Ashworth.  
"This group of players and staff have already shown they are capable of competing and winning at the top level; now we need to do it more consistently."  
"With our strengthened football leadership team now in place, we are looking forward to working hand-in-hand with Erik to achieve our shared ambitions for this football club.

# Spain face hosts Germany in quarterfinals with a potential record on line



**AP ■ STUTTGART (GERMANY)**  
Spain meet host nation Germany on Friday in the quarterfinals of the European Championship in an eagerly-anticipated match between two of the best performing sides at the tournament.  
There is also a potential record on the line as Spain and Germany have each won three European Championships, better than any other nation.  
Two of the most exciting talents will be on show in Spain teenager Lamine Yamal and 21-year-old Germany forward Jamal Musiala.  
**MATCH FACTS:** The winner will advance to face France or Portugal in the semifinal in Munich on Tuesday.  
Spain and Germany are the leading scorers at Euro 2024, having netted nine and 10 goals respectively in their four matches. They have also conjured the most attempts on target.  
Spain has never eliminated a host nation, either at a European Championship or at the World Cup.  
La Roja is the only team to

have won all its matches at Euro 2024, beating Croatia, Italy and Albania in the group stage before thumping Georgia 4-1 in the round of 16. Germany beat Scotland and Hungary but drew against Switzerland before eliminating Denmark.  
Germany hasn't beaten Spain in a major tournament since a group-stage victory at Euro '88.  
**TEAM NEWS:** Lamine Yamal, Nico Williams and Fabian Ruiz all missed Spain's training session on Tuesday, while Aymeric Laporte only jogged once around the field.  
However, all are expected to be fit for Friday's match.  
Germany defender Jonathan Tah returns from suspension and coach Julian Nagelsmann has reported no injury concerns.  
**BY THE NUMBERS:** Spain and Germany have only conceded three goals between them. The only time Spain goalkeeper Unai Simón had to pick the ball out of his net was against Georgia, while Germany conceded against Scotland and Switzerland.

# Tvesa T-24, Diksha T-46 in London Aramco Series

**PTI ■ LONDON**  
Tvesa Malik Sandhu was unable to hold on to her early gains and finished at even-par 73 to be tied-24th at the end of the first round of the Aramco Team Series London here.  
Fellow Indian Diksha Dagar, who will play in the Major Evian Championships next week, shot 2-over 75 to be tied-46 at the Centurion Club,



She added a birdie on the 18th to turn in 2-under.

while Pranavi Urs carded a disappointing 7-over 80 and looks unlikely to make the cut. Tvesa, who lost a play-off last week and missed out on a maiden win on the Ladies European Tour (LET), began well from the 10th tee. She had a bogey on 12th but it was followed by an eagle, her third in her last three rounds. She had eagles in the second and third rounds of last week's Swiss Ladies Open.  
She dropped three shots on the second, third and seventh but got one back with a birdie on the eighth to close at 73. Diksha had three birdies, three bogeys and a double-bogey. Ireland's Leona Maguire led the individual standings, while her team comprising Solheim Cup winner, England's Liz Young, Spain's Marta Sanz Barrio and amateur Yana Wilson, was joint leader after day 1 at 14-under. Leona's team shared the lead with Team Nuria Iturriz and Team Georgia Hall. Leona sits at the top of the leaderboard after producing a bogey-free first round. The two-time LPGA winner rolled in back-to-back birdies on her fifth and sixth holes, before making three on the trot from holes 8 to 10 before adding further birdies on the 13th and 15th for her round of seven-under par.

# Coco Gauff and Carlos Alcaraz advance at Wimbledon. Naomi Osaka loses



**AP ■ LONDON**  
Coco Gauff likes No. 1 Court at Wimbledon. It's where she beat Venus Williams back in 2019 when Gauff made her Wimbledon debut at age 15. On Wednesday, Gauff beat qualifier Anca Todoni 6-2, 6-1 to advance to the third round at the All England Club.  
"This is the court where I first started here at Wimbledon. Court 1 is always a special place for me to play on," the 20-year-old Gauff said in her on-court interview.  
The victory also allows Gauff, the No. 2 seed, to move another step away from last year's first-round exit.  
"Overall, I just learned about life a lot," the U.S. Open champion said when asked about putting that three-set loss to Sofia Kenin behind her.  
"I just realized that, yes, what I do I'm very passionate about, but it's not ever that serious and sometimes the world can make you feel like there's so much pressure, there's so much expect-

ation," she said. "At the end of the (day), it's a game. It's sport." The 19-year-old Todoni is from Romania and was making her Grand Slam debut. "I do think I could have played cleaner at some moments," Gauff said.  
Five years ago, Gauff beat Williams - a five-time Wimbledon champion - 6-4, 6-4 in the first round and eventually reached the last 16, all in her Grand Slam debut.  
Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz trailed 6-5 in the first set Wednesday before coming back to beat Aleksander Vukic 7-6 (5), 6-2, 6-2, setting up a third-round meeting with No. 29 Frances Tiafoe after the American eliminated Borna Coric 7-6 (5), 6-1, 6-3.  
When told by the on-court interviewer that Tiafoe said he's "coming after you," the 21-year-old Spaniard replied with a smile: "I'm going for him."  
"We played a really good match in the U.S. Open," the No. 3 seed said of their 2022 semifinal that Alcaraz won at Flushing Meadows.  
In other results, four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka was eliminated in the second round by No. 19 Emma Navarro by a score of 6-4, 6-1, while No. 1 Jannik Sinner got past 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (3), 7-6 (4), 2-6, 7-6 (4) at Centre Court in an all-Italian contest.

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER**  
**RURAL WORKS DIVISION-II, JAJPUR AT JARAKA** *rwddivision\_jaraka@yahoo.co.in*  
**E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE NO. RWD-II/JJPR-01/24-25, DTD -**

1. **Name of work** : Building works in the District of Jajpur for the year 2024-25.  
2. **Total No of Work** : 03 nos. of works.  
3. **Estimated Cost(Approx.)** : As indicated against each work in the NIT  
4. **Period of Completion** : As indicated against each work in the NIT  
5. **Class of contractors** : As indicated against each work in the NIT

**Other details as follows:**  
a) **Procurement officer** : Superintending Engineer, Rural Works Division-II, Jajpur at Jarak  
b) **Availability of tender online & submission of bid** : 10.07.2024 at 11.30 AM to 25.07.2024 upto 5.00 PM  
c) **Last date & time of seeking of tender clarification** : 24.07.2024 upto 5.00 PM  
d) **Opening of Tender** : 26.07.2024 at 11.30 AM

Further details can be seen from the Govt. website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
Executive Engineer  
Rural Works Division-II  
Jajpur at Jarak  
OIPR-25080/11/0002/2425

**GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA**  
**OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER**  
**RURAL WORKS CIRCLE: SUNDARGARH**  
**AT/PO-SANKARA, SUNDARGARH-770020, E-mail address-serw\_sundargarh@yahoo.com**

**No. Tender Online - RWCCESNG - 04 of 2024-25 , Letter No 1469 /Dtd. 02.07.2024**  
**e-Procurement NOTICE**

1. **Type of the Work:** Buildings ( DMF )  
2. **Class of Contractor:** As specified in the column-6 of the Annexure  
3. **Time of Completion:** As specified in the column-5 of the Annexure  
4. **Detail Projects:** As per Annexure attached  
5. **Estimated Cost :** As specified in the column-4 of the Annexure  
6. **Other details:**

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of Tender on-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of Seeking Tender Clarification	Date & Time of opening of tender	
		From	To		Technical Bid	Financial Bid
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Chief Construction Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Sundargarh	RWCCESNG-04 of 2024-25	15.07.2024 11:00 AM	05.08.2024 5:00 PM	03.08.2024 5:00 PM	06.08.2024 11:00 AM	Will be intimated separately

Further details can be seen from the website [www.tendersodisha.gov.in](http://www.tendersodisha.gov.in)  
Chief Engineer (Design & Quality Control)  
Chief Construction Engineer (I/C)  
Rural Works Circle, Sundargarh  
OIPR-25133/11/0006/2425