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MENTOR YUVRAJ
MUST BE PROUD
NOW: ABHISHEK
12 SPORTS



THE ARC OF TERROR IS COMPLETE: FROM KASHMIR TO JAMMU, INDIA BLEEDS

FOUR ARMY JAWANS MARTYRED IN MERCILESS MURDER BY TERRORISTS

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

At least four Indian Army soldiers were martyred and five others were grievously injured in yet another provocative terror strike on an Army vehicle near Badnota village of Machhedi under the jurisdiction of Lohai Malhar block in Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on Monday. The area falls under the 9 Corps of the Indian Army. The attack took place a month after a group of foreign terrorists targeted a pilgrim bus in which nine civilians were killed and 41 others were injured in the Reasi district on June 9. A similar attack was attempted on an Army post by another group of terrorists in the frontier Rajouri district early on Sunday morning. However, the same was repulsed by one of the alert troopers manning the periphery of the Army installation. According to preliminary reports, a group of terrorists pitched atop a prominent hill feature targeted the Army vehicle by first hurling a grenade and later opening indiscriminate firing to inflict

maximum casualties. The terrorists also took advantage of the foggy weather and poor road conditions before targeting the Army vehicle. During the heavy exchange of firing several soldiers were badly hit. The fate of terrorists could not be known immediately as the anti-terrorist operation was still going on in the thickly forested area. Confirming the firing incident, a spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir police in a brief statement said, "Exchange of fire between terrorists and security forces going on in the Machhedi area of Kathua district. Two Army personnel were injured in the initial round of firing. A massive search operation has been launched". Meanwhile, additional troops have been rushed to the spot to plug the escape routes and neutralise the terrorists. Senior police and Army officers were supervising the ongoing operation. The Army authorities have issued an advisory to the residents in the area to remain indoors and not to venture out to prevent injuries in the heavy



File photo: PTI

exchange of gunfire. A day after gunning down six terrorists in two back-to-back encounters in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam Brigadier Prithviraj Chauhan, Commander 1 sec RR, on Monday claimed the security forces have inflicted a big blow to the Pro-Pakistan

terrorist outfit Hizbul Mujahideen in the Valley. The killing of six terrorists in South Kashmir is a significant blow to Hizbul Mujahideen," he said. The security forces are also investigating the role of the locals in sheltering the terrorists inside their homes.

During the routine searches, the security forces stumbled upon a well-fortified concrete hideout concealed behind a wardrobe in a civilian residence situated in the Chinnigam Frisal area of Kulgam. The senior Army officer also paid tributes to the martyred

soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty during the twin encounters. Briefing media persons, Brigadier Chauhan said after concluding the operation, we found and promptly destroyed an IED weighing approximately 6 kilogram, keeping collateral damage in mind. Speaking on the Modergam encounter, Javed Ahmad Matoo, DIG South Kashmir, said two terrorists were killed in the second operation. "Adil, who had multiple FIRs against him in different police stations, was killed in one operation. The second encounter took place in the Chinnigam area based on specific information, resulting in the killing of four terrorists. Among them was Yavar Bashir Dar, a Category 'A' terrorist. The others were identified as Tauheed Ahmed, Shakeel Ahmed Wani, and Zahir Ahmad Dar. A significant cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from the encounter site. Both locations had hideouts that the terrorists had been using for a considerable time," Matoo said.



Students at the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi, on Monday. The apex court has begun the hearing for a number of petitions regarding the alleged irregularities in the NEET UG 2024 exams

Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

NEET re-test if exam sanctity lost, says SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Directing the National Testing Agency (NTA) for full disclosures on three major aspects of the NEET-UG paper leak case, the Supreme Court on Monday said the fact there was a paper leak in the NEET-UG exam cannot be denied and it has to be ascertained if the nature of the leak was widespread or isolated to decide on ordering a re-test. Referring to legal position on ordering re-test, the bench said it will have to be "scrutinised whether the alleged breach has taken place at systemic level, whether the breach has affected integrity of the entire exam process and whether it is possible to segregate the beneficiaries of fraud from

the untainted students". "In a situation where breach affects the entirety of process and it is not possible to segregate the beneficiaries from others, it may be necessary to order a re-test," the bench said. The court said if the sanctity of NEET-UG 2024 is "lost" and if the leak of its question paper has been propagated through social media, then a re-test has to be ordered. The bench said the extent of question paper leak and the beneficiaries across geographical boundaries have to be ascertained before the top court may order a re-test in the controversy-ridden exam which was taken up by 23.33 lakh students at 4,750 centres in 571 cities including in 14 cities overseas.

In State 2 low-pressure areas likely to trigger heavy rains

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Even as the weather office on Monday predicted that the rainfall intensity would decrease in the State from Tuesday, it said two low-pressure areas the over Bay of Bengal might trigger heavy to fairly widespread rains in the State till July 18. There is a moderate probability of formation of a cyclonic circulation or low-pressure area over west-central and adjoining northwest Bay of Bengal with subsequent north-westwards movement between July 7 and 11 and July 12 to 18, said the Regional Office of India Meteorological Department (IMD) here. Fairly widespread to widespread rain or thundershower along with isolated heavy to

very heavy rains are likely in the State during the first week and overall rainfall is likely to be normal during this period. The IMD further said there is a probability of formation of another low-pressure area over west-central Bay of Bengal during the latter half of second week (after July 13). Fairly widespread to widespread rain or thundershower might occur in the State and overall rainfall activity is likely to be slightly above normal with possibility of isolated heavy to very heavy rain in some districts. "There is a possibility of formation of two low-pressure areas. However, there are also chances that there could be only cyclonic circulations and they may not intensify further, IMD Regional Director Manorama Mohanty said.

NH approach road subsides in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

An approach road to the flyover on National Highway-16 at Aiginia in Bhubaneswar caved in on Monday disrupting vehicular traffic for some time. The incident occurred when a mini truck was on its way from the city to Khordha in the afternoon. As the driver took the vehicle to the approach road to go to the flyover on the NH-16 near Aiginia, the road caved in. The front right wheel of the vehicle got stuck and the driver

sustained minor injuries. Soon, a crater was formed in the place. It led to a traffic jam and panic spread in the area. However, an NH rescue team rushed to the spot. They pulled the mini truck out of the crater and helped restore movement of vehicles. The NH officials also started immediate repair of the damaged portion of the road. Locals said the road was constructed around six months back. They alleged that inferior-quality construction by the executing agency led to the incident.

In Sambalpur ASI suspended for thrashing tribal man

But villagers demand revoking of suspension order

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

A group of villagers of Chiplima gathered before the district police headquarters demanding withdrawal of the suspension of Assistant Sub-Inspector (ASI) of Chiplima outpost under the Burla police station in Sambalpur district. The ASI was suspended for allegedly beating a tribal, Rajesh Mirdha, suspected of stealing a tractor battery. Mirdha sought action against the ASI and approached the District Welfare Officer (DWO) on June 5. The DWO had forwarded the matter to the district police, for investigation. The district police suspended Chiplima outpost ASI Gangadhar Sahu on Sunday. However, the supporters of ASI in the village reached the DPO on Monday demanding

revocation of the suspension of ASI. Burla police have registered a complaint against Rajesh Mirdha for stealing a tractor battery. Villagers claimed that Mirdha was a habitual offender and was also earlier involved in such cases. He is levelling false allegation against the ASI. "ASI Gangadhar is a good person; he has helped in maintaining peace in the Chiplima area. We have requested the SP to withdraw his suspension order" said a villager. Additional Superintendent of Police Hareesh Pandey stated, "We have suspended the ASI on the basis of video evidence showing brutal torture in addition to the grievance letter given by Mirdha to the DWO. However, Burla police are investigating whether Mirdha was involved in the theft or not. We will decide on the continuation or revocation of suspension based on the investigation's outcome and order of higher authority"

'Lord's darshan, seashore stroll brought me inner peace'

Prez Murmu calls for united efforts to protect Mother Nature

PNS ■ PURI

President Droupadi Murmu, who is on a four-day visit to Odisha, on Monday, took a stroll at the pristine beach in Puri. She termed her visit as 'meditative experience' as mountains, forests, rivers and seashores not only appeal to something deep within us but these places also bring us in closer touch with the essence of life and remind us that we are part of nature. Taking to her official X (formerly Twitter) handle, President Murmu wrote, "As I walked along the seashore today, I felt a communion with the surroundings - the gentle wind, the roar of the waves, and the immense expanse of water. It was a meditative experience. It brought to me a profound inner peace that I had also felt when I had a darshan of Mahaprabhu Shri



Jagannathji yesterday. And I am not alone in having such an experience..." According to President Murmu, people lose this connection with Mother Nature in the hustle and bustle of the daily grind. Humankind believes it has mastered nature and is exploiting it for its own short-term benefits. The result is for all to see. "This summer, many parts of India suffered a terrible se-

ries of heat waves. Extreme weather events have become more frequent around the globe in recent years. The situation is projected to be far worse in the decades to come," wrote the President. In her tweet, Murmu said that more than seventy percent of the surface of the earth is made up of oceans, and global warming is leading to a rise in global sea levels, threatening to submerge coastal areas.

The oceans and the rich variety of flora and fauna found there have suffered heavily due to different kinds of pollution. "Fortunately, people living in nature's lap have sustained traditions that can show us the way. Inhabitants of coastal areas, for example, know the language of the winds and waves of the sea. Following our ancestors, they worship the sea as God," tweeted the President.

Nod for 1,524-ha forestland for Brutanga dam

CM Majhi had raised issue before Centre during Delhi visit

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) has accorded grant of Stage-II forest clearance for diversion of 1,524.17 hectares (ha) forest land for construction of the Brutanga irrigation project in Nayagarh district. After careful examination of the proposal by the Forest Advisory Committee, 'in principle' approval to the proposal had been granted in August 2010 subject to fulfilment of certain conditions prescribed therein. Chief Minister Mohan

Charan Majhi raised the issue with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Minister Environment Forest and Climate Change, Bhupendra Yadav during his recent visit to New Delhi. Thanks to the sincere efforts of the ACS Forest, Environment and Climate Change, Satyabrata Sahu, PCCF and HoFF Debidatta Biswal, PCCF (Nodal) Susanta Nanda, the Union Government cleared the project. "On the basis of the compliance report furnished by the State Government.....final approval of the Central Government under Section 2 of the Van (Sanrakshan Evam Samvardhan) Adhiniyam, 1980 is hereby granted for non-forestry use of 1,524.17

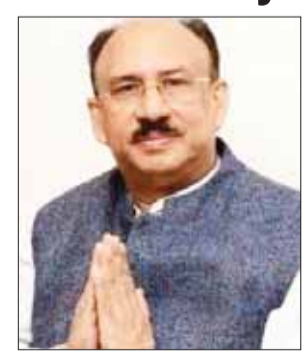
ha of forest land for construction of Brutanga irrigation project in favour of executive engineer, Cuttack investigation division, Cuttack in Nayagarh district of Odisha subject to fulfilment of the conditions," read a letter issued by Assistant Inspector General of Forests, Dr Dheeraj Mittal. As per the conditions set by the MoEF, legal status of the diverted forest land shall remain unchanged. The State Government shall ensure that the Compensatory Afforestation (CA) will be carried out over 1,524.17 ha of non-forest land already transferred and mutated in favour of the State Forest Department, it said. The State will have to ensure that the user agency shall

provide sufficient crossovers at their own cost as advised by the wildlife experts over the link canal to ensure unhindered movement of elephants from and towards the Baispalli Wildlife Sanctuary and also provide sufficient points for watering spots for the wildlife on the sides of canal as advised by the wildlife experts. The Centre has asked the State to set up at least three anti-poaching cum anti-depredation camps at strategic locations and deploy adequate numbers of forest staff along with sufficient numbers of supported staff. It will also need to construct at least two watch towers at strategic locations and depute adequate numbers of forest staff.

Santrupt as Naveen's secy surprises many

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The appointment of Santrupt Misra, a former corporate leader, as political secretary to BJD president Naveen Patnaik has come as a major surprise to many as Misra has very little experience in politics. He had joined the BJD just a few days before the Lok Sabha polls this year. Santrupt is seen as a close aide of V Karthikeyan Pandian, who is blamed for the BJD's poll debacle. Though Pandian has announced Sanyas from politics, sources say he is still active in the BJD politics. Santrupt was working in a multinational company,



which has reportedly made huge contributions to the BJD's fund in the shape of electoral bonds. In an order on Sunday, Naveen had said the existing panel of national spokespersons has been replaced by five new leaders, including Santrupt.

Prez visits Udayagiri, interacts with students

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

President Droupadi Murmu visited the historic Udayagiri caves in Bhubaneswar on Monday.

Soon after returning from Puri, where she witnessed Lora Jagannath's Rath Yatra on Sunday, she visited the group of Jain caves on the Udayagiri hill and spent some time there. These caves are rare specimens of early Indian rock-cut architecture, showcasing a civilisational and cultural thread of about 1,200 years starting 1st Century BC.

Associated with Kharvela, the great king who became a follower of Jainism, these caves are a precious heritage of Odisha.



Later, Murmu interacted with the students of BK College of Arts and Crafts and the Utkal University of Culture. She recalled her student days in Bhubaneswar.

Recalling that the area near Udayagiri had once been surrounded by dense forests, Murmu said modern infrastructures are gradually replacing the forests. She underlined the need to preserve the nature.

The President also recalled how saints used to live in Udayagiri and how she along with friends used to interact with them.

She said the Udayagiri rock inscriptions and caves are the symbols of the uniqueness of Odishan arts.

Prez unveils Divine Retreat Centre



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

President Droupadi Murmu on Monday inaugurated a Divine Retreat Centre of Brahma Kumaris at Haridamada village near Bhubaneswar on Monday in the presence of Governor Raghubar Das and Chief Minister Mohan Majhi. She also launched a national campaign 'Lifestyle for Sustainability' of Brahma Kumaris.

But humans should remember that abundance in nature is for their needs not for their greed. Human beings are exploiting nature for their indulgence and, by doing this, are becoming victims of nature's wrath.

The President said Indian culture has always emphasised a lifestyle compatible with nature. In our philosophy, the earth has been called mother and the sky has been called father. The river has also been given the title of mother. Water has been called life. We worship rain as Lord Indra and the ocean as Lord Varuna.

CM declares Rs 15L each for Kishore, Amit

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday announced Rs 15-lakh incentive each for ace javelin thrower Kishore Jena and hockey star Amit Rohidas, who are set to represent Odisha in the Paris Olympics.



The cash incentive announced by the CM is aimed to act as a motivation for the two talented sportspersons of the State.

The CM expressed the hope that this would inspire and motivate both Jena and Rohidas. It would provide them motivation for presenting an excellent performance at the upcoming Olympics.

Describing Olympics as a mega event in sports and games, Majhi said that by qualifying to partici-

pate in the global event, Jena and Rohidas have made their native places as well as whole Odisha proud.

Noting that strong willpower, hard work, dedication and perseverance displayed by the two sportspersons would inspire young and budding talents in Odisha, the CM wished them success in the mega event.

'Remove encroachments from govt lands'

CM directs Collectors

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday directed the district Collectors to take steps to remove encroachments from government lands across the State.

As per the latest direction, the CM has ordered removal of illegal encroachments in both urban and rural areas. In a release, Majhi said that usually the government lands are used for development and welfare works for the general public.

As the development process is

adversely affected due to illegal occupations, such encroachments must be cleared immediately. The CM directed the Collectors to put up proper signboards and fencing after clearing all encroachments.

Earlier, The Additional Chief Secretary of the Revenue and Disaster Management Department had asked the Collectors to make a realistic survey of rural and urban encroachments and remove them as per the rules.

In the letter, the Collectors were directed to protect government lands by fencing and displaying boards by utilising the funds they received.

BEADS unveils Odisha Craft Odyssey

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Bhubaneswar Experimental Art Design Studio (BEADS) has launched its latest initiative, the Odisha Craft Odyssey, dedicated to showcasing the rich heritage of bell metal artisans in the State.

This new edition by BEADS aims to highlight the intricate craftsmanship and cultural significance of bell metal work deeply rooted in Odisha's traditions. Founded as Odisha's pioneering commercial studio pottery organisation, BEADS has expanded its horizons to embrace various craft formats including bell metal, dokra and sabai.

Guided by the eminent artist Jagannath Panda, BEADS has curated a collection featuring handmade ceramic tableware,



home décor and jewelry items, all meticulously crafted by a team of talented designers and artists.

Sandeep Hota, Co-Founder and Managing Director, BEADS said, "We work hand in hand with local artisans and craftsmen and through mentorship programme, empower them to blend traditional craftsmanship with contemporary design sensibility."

In Ganjam Girl dies of snakebite in residential school

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A girl student of a residential school reportedly has died due to snakebite in Ganjam district.

Sources said the student, Ridhi Pradhan was studying in Class-I and staying in the hostel of the residential school at Darpangia under Bhanjanagar block of the district.

On Sunday night, she had dinner with other hostel boarders and went to sleep in her room.

Later at night, she cried out of pain as a snake bit her. Other students and hostel staffs rushed to her room and beat the snake to death.

They informed Ridhi's father Gobarsingh Pradhan and rushed her to a hospital at Bhanjanagar. But she succumbed during treatment in the hospital on Monday morning.

The hostel staffs identified the snake as a Common Krait, a highly venomous species. It is a nocturnal snake with black skin having grey or white rings.

Interview of the week

We believe in transparent selection of human resources



SUGYAN CHOUDHURY



PROF DR SARITA SUPKAR

Prof Dr Sarita Supkar is currently working as the officiating Chairperson of Odisha Public Service Commission (OPSC). She had opened her innings to her career joining as a Lecturer in Economics in the year 1990. After a career spanning over more than three decades in teaching, research and education administration, she was elevated to the post of Director, Students Welfare and Chairperson of Post Graduate Council at Rama Devi Women's University. As a Professor of Economics, she was known for her innovative teachings and immensely contributed research articles to various national and international journals. She was a trendsetter in bringing about many reforms as the Controller of Examinations of the Rama Devi varsity. As an ideal Red Cross Officer, she has become a votary for inspiring students towards volunteerism for building a better society with an emancipated social order. During her tenure as Controller of Examinations of the varsity, she purged this premier educational institution of all evils and devils by effectively distributing the hitherto long-pending distribution of original degree certificates to the deprived students even during the prevalence of Covid-19. As a star figure in the realms of career counselling, she has changed the lives and careers of many students by administering their proper counselling at the proper time so as to enable them in building ambitious career plans of their enterprises. She resigned from the post of Prof of Economics and Controller of Examinations of RD varsity and joined as a Member of OPSC in 2022.

In an interview to *The Pioneer*, Dr. Supkar spoke to *Sugyan Choudhury* at the OPSC headquarters in Cuttack.

OPSC, a statutory body, is overburdened with the onerous task of conducting and selecting officers of very many cadres of

the State. But the Commission seems to be precariously understaffed. What are your plans to revamp the hackneyed establishment to suit the needs of the modern times?

I would like to answer to your question in three parts. Firstly, the OPSC was constituted pursuant to Article 315 of the Constitution of India and functioning with headquarters at Cuttack since April 1, 1949. The OPSC recruits human resources for the State with the provisions of Articles 320 & 321 of the Constitution. We are committed to support the human resources capability of the government through absolute transparency, fairness, use of advanced technological platforms and best practices available anywhere in the world. Secondly, it is a fact that the commission has faced staff shortfall situation since its inception. But in the recent years, it has already completed recruitment of base-level staffs, i.e., Junior Assistants, last year and 29 Junior Assistants have already joined the office in 2024. They are being trained in various traits as per the requirements of the commission. Thirdly, I strongly believe that through proper manpower planning, the commission can optimally utilise its available human resources with more technological interventions and achieve the targets effectively.

A lot of spurious and obnoxious litigations are being filed from time to time. There is no special legal cell in the commission. How do you contemplate to cope up with the litigations?

We have a legal section to deal with litigations. This section is headed by one senior officer at Special Secretary level along with an Assistant Director of Law. To meet the requirements of this section, the commission has engaged the services of six advocates with one senior standing counsel who take necessary care of the legal matters of the commission.

OPSC travelled a long journey since its incorporation in 1949

having two times' expansion. How smooth has had been its functioning till date?

The journey of OPSC has not been very smooth. It has faced the situation of shortage of staffs and officers and also limited infrastructure. But with persuasive efforts of previous chairmen, the GA & PG Department has restructured the commission and 58 posts have been created. Steps are being taken to fill up the posts as per the relevant OPSC Regulations. One such step is the recruitment of 29 Junior Assistants which I have already mentioned. To meet the requirement of infrastructure, an annex building is being constructed which will be completed by the end of this year.

As the first woman chairperson of OPSC, could you please share with us your feelings?

There were several very learned women members in the commission in the past who have contributed a lot to its functioning. I am privileged to be the first woman chairperson (I/C) in the last 75 years of journey of the commission. I feel extremely humbled to represent the women fraternity. I believe in teamwork. The commission presently comprises an excellent team and I am sure we can effectively handle the challenges of even higher number of recruitment commitments in the years ahead.

What are the reforms you are going to introduce in the OPSC system?

One of our key focus areas will be to ensure more transparency in the recruitment processes and faster publication of results. Article 320 (3) (b) states that the State Public Service Commission shall be consulted on the principles to be followed in making appointments to Civil Services and Article 320 (3) (c) states that the State Public Service Commission shall be consulted in all disciplinary matters affecting a person serving under the State Government. To strengthen the functioning, we already have made various technological interventions such as an online recruitment management system (e-Chayan), automation of promotion and disciplinary wing, Workflow Automation System (OSWAS), Online Query Management System, Visitor Management System, etc., which have reduced the burden. We will continue to leverage on technology for maintaining integrity of the system and adopt objective criteria in every step of the selection process. We believe in the motto "Merit, fair and transparent selection of human resources will build a progressive State and Nation".

Puri Rath Yatra on second day

PNS ■ PURI

After a gap of a few hours, pulling of chariots of Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra resumed as part of this year's two-day Rath Yatra in Puri on Monday. The chariots reached the Gundicha Temple.

On Sunday, the chariot pulling in Puri had to be halted for the day after sunset. While Lord Balabhadra's chariot Taladhwa halted at Marichikote Chhak, Devi Subhadra's chariot Darpadalana stopped near Srikrishna Cinema Hall and Lord Jagannath's chariot Nandighosa halted after rolling some distance from the temple's Singhadwar.

Since early morning on Monday, devotees were seen having darshan of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra on their respective majestic chariots.



On city outskirts Rs 1.5-cr ganja seized from van

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A team of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) have seized ganja worth more than Rs one crore from a vehicle on the outskirts of Bhubaneswar.

According to reports, following intelligence inputs about smuggling of the contraband, DRI officials kept an eye on the vehicles at Dhalapathar near the capital city.

The officials stopped the pickup van on suspicion and during checking of the vehicle, they found 25 sealed bags. On opening the bags, they found that those contained ganja.

The ganja weighed around 7.65 quintals. The value of the seized ganja was estimated to be around Rs 1.53 crore.

Foundation Day by DAV K Nagar Health camp, students' felicitation held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The DAV, Kalinga Nagar witnessed a day of zest and jubilation as it observed its 28th Foundation Day in its premises on Sunday.

As a holy spark to the memorable occasion, a sacred Havan was organised in the school premises early in the morning. It was followed by a free health check-up camp in collaboration with the IMS and SUM Hospital for the parents, grandparents of the students and staff members of the school. Nearly 280 parents including staff went for a health check-up. As a mark of remembrance, the school felicitated the meritorious students of Standard X and XII board examination on the occasion.

Chairman of the school Madan Mohan Panda extended the offi-



cial welcome address to the audience. Principal Balaram Mahapatra praised the achievement of the students in CBSE Class X and XII examination. Attending as the chief guest, Additional Secretary, School and Mass Education and Chairman of CHSE Ashwini Kumar Mishra felicitated the rank holders and IIT and NEET achievers.

During his address to the gathering, he highlighted different as-

pects of the deep rooted Vedic values and advised the children to be encouraged by the exemplary life and philosophy of Swami Dayananda Saraswati. Regional Director, DAV Institutions, Odisha Dr KC Satapathy delivered the foundation day lecture and encouraged the students and teachers to keep moving on the path of excellence in all spheres of academic pursuits.

MLA teaches people-friendly policing to JSpur cops

As they refused to provide woman pen and paper to write her plaint

KAHNU NANDA
JAGATSingHPUR

The Jagatsinghpur police have come under public criticism over the last two days due to their outright refusal to provide a pen and a sheet of paper to a complainant to write her FIR.

Jagatsinghpur's newly-elected BJP MLA Amarendra Das after knowing about the incident visited the police station, and taught the cops a lesson as to how to behave with the general public, who often visit police stations for lodging FIRs. He talked about the people-friendly policing practices. The young legislator also instructed the cops to follow the AMA Police scheme that has been implemented in



Odisha since April 2013.

According to sources, one poor woman had visited Jagatsinghpur police station to complain about a few of her kin involved in a family feud. She asked the police personnel present at the police station to give her a pen and paper for writing the FIR copy. But the police ignored the victim's plea citing non availability of pen and paper in the police station. She later met

MLA Das and shared her experience and the police behavior that she received in the police station.

Knowing this, MLA Das rushed to the police station. Instead of sitting in the IIC's office chamber he sat at the reception counter protesting the police's improper treatment of the woman. Later, he supplied four reams of paper and 20 pens to the police station for use.

Senior police officer SDPO Rashmi Ranjan Sahu arrived at the spot and begged an apology to MLA Das for the cops for their behavior to the woman. The confession of the SDPO could not satisfy MLA Das who clearly said that the police have no power to abuse innocent people. Jagatsinghpur SP Rahul PR informed that MLA Das's suggestions to police personnel are acceptable and mandatory under law.

KJD hails Rail Min Vaishnav

For augmenting hinterland rail connectivity in Odisha

PNS ■ ROURKELA

The Talcher-Bimalagarh line and the Khordha-Bolangir project which were languishing because of land acquisition problem will hopefully cross all hurdles under the new Governments in Odisha and the Centre. These landmark projects will be milestones in Railways' journey towards providing hinterland connectivity in Odisha said Kosal Janata Dal (KJD) State president Baidyanath Mishra in a Press release here.

In a letter to Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav, Mishra extolled the Minister's role in augmenting the hinterland rail connectivity in Odisha. Referring to Kesinga-Bhawanipatna-Kantabanji

(KBK) rail line via Utkela which has found place in the survey list, Mishra said, "By placing this KBK rail line in the preliminary survey list, you have addressed to resolve a long-standing demand of the Kalandians."

A favorable feasibility report will provide direct link between Bhawanipatna and Howrah through Ispat Express with extension of 40 km from Titilagarh. The Nuapada-Bargarh line is an addition to the hinterland connectivity, he said.

Mishra also thanked Rajya Sabha MP Sujit Kumar and the newly elected MP Malabika Deo for showing interest to improve rail connectivity of Kalandia. To be noted here that the KJD was persistently raising the issue of Kesinga-Bhawanipatna railway link in various platforms including submission of memoranda before the authorities concerned from time to time.

In Rourkela 4-yr-old girl drowns during swimming class

Family accuses trainer, lifeguard of negligence

PNS ■ ROURKELA

An FIR has been lodged against a trainer and lifeguard after a four-year-old girl drowned in a swimming pool at the Hockey Village near the Birsra Munda Stadium in Rourkela on Saturday evening.

The victim identified as Sumeha Singh was a resident of Sector-9 in the city.

The incident occurred when Sumeha was undergoing training on swimming along with 15 to 20 students as her mother waited outside the pool.

When she did not come out of the pool once the class got over, her mother inquired about her and was told she may

have gone to the washroom. Later, the girl was found floating in the pool. She was rushed to Ispat General Hospital but doctors there pronounced her brought dead.

It was alleged that the trainers present at the spot did not pay due attention to the child leading to the unfortunate incident.

The girl's father Sunny Singh alleged that the child's lifejacket had loosened and got unlocked, but none of the trainers paid attention to her.

He later lodged an FIR at the Chhend police station alleging that his daughter drowned due to the negligence of the trainer and lifeguard of the swimming pool.

"We have launched an investigation and we will take action against those responsible," said a police official.

In Baleswar Man gets 20-yr RI for raping 8-yr-old girl

UBACHAK MOHANTY
BALESWAR

Special Judge, POCSO, Ranjan Kumar Sutar here has convicted a 33-year-old rape accused and sentenced him to 20 years of rigorous imprisonment (RI) along with a penalty of Rs 5,000. The accused would undergo two more years of jail term in case he fails to pay the fine amount, the order said.

The convict was identified as Sk Mantaz of Bagada village, Kasafal, under the Marine police station. He had committed the offence against an eight-year-old victim of the same village. The girl's mother had lodged an FIR with police on September 28, 2023.

The accused took the victim

to a secluded place by alluring her with chocolate when she was playing in front of her house and committed the crime amidst dense casuarina trees, the complainant alleged in her FIR. Police, after registering a case under several sections including 376(3) of IPC, POCSO act and 3(1)(w), SC/ST(Prevention of Atrocities) Act, arrested the accused.

"The court after examining 16 witnesses and 20 exhibits pronounced the verdict. The accused would undergo 20 years of RI and cough up a penalty of Rs 5,000. Further, the court ordered a Rs 4-lakh compensation for the victim to be paid through the District Legal Services Authority," said Special Public Prosecutor Pranab Panda.

Cleanliness drive mere eyewash in Umarkote

PC factor to be blamed

MONOHAR MOHANTY
NABARANGAPUR

The cleanliness drive in the Umerkote Municipality is allegedly nothing more but an eyewash, as no work has been done on ground. Garbage piling up on the roads and overflowing drains reflect the sorry state of affairs on the sanitation front in the town.

Though the municipality privatised the sanitation service a year ago, there has been no change in the civic condi-

tion. Reports reveal that the municipality spends Rs 18 lakh per month for sanitation, but it seems only in pen and paper.

The municipal authorities have never conducted any surprise checks to bring errant contractors to book. The organic dumps not only attract flies but also turn into a breeding ground for mosquitoes.

The drains and the surrounding area adjacent to Gulipatna, Sontosi Nagar, Old Bus Stand and Bhanja Chowk are only a few examples of poor sanitation of

the civic body. Crores of rupees have gone down the drain in the name of improving civic facilities and development, the residents alleged. Most roads in the town have developed cracks and potholes within six months of being renovated. A major portion of the town has no streetlights; as a result, people feel unsafe after dusk.

Large scale irregularities have been reported in the works allotted to the SHGs, SDA and MUKTA Yojana and prevailing PC factor in the Municipality Office spoils all the developmental

works of the town, alleged Parsuram Patro, a resident of the town. He further demanded a Vigilance inquiry into the alleged corruption in the municipality.

There is a public perception that all the grants that come from the Ministry of Urban Development Department of both the State and the Centre under sanitation and urbanisation development programme to the municipality should be released only after high-power teams inspect sanitation of different wards including functionality of drains.

Chhatia Lords' 11-km chariot journey longest in State

Pulling began amid chanting of hymns by large numbers of devotees

AKSHAY ROUT ■ JAJPUR

The chariot pulling covering 11 km from Chhatia to Badagumari in Jajpur district is the longest journey in the State and takes five days.

Flagged off by chief priest of the temple Upendra Ojha on Sunday afternoon amidst chanting of hymns, the Rath embarked on the journey through the national highway No. 5 and congested village roads. The chariot halted at many places as the devotees worshipped Lord Jagannath, Lord Balabhadra and Maa Subhadra enroute.



"Earlier the authority had denied us permission for the chariot to cover 14 km due to bad condition of roads. But in 1999, the authority for the first time allowed the temple

temple. A huge crowd thronged the temple and then joined the procession as it began its journey under the watchful gaze of police personnel who had spread out through the journey routes including the NH-5.

The villagers and the managing committee members of the temple cleaned the village roads for the smooth journey of the chariot. In the past, the chariot got stuck at some places due to poor condition of the road.

42-year-old queen Aparna Bhir Singh Bharadwaj swept the floor of the wooden chariot as part of the rituals associated with the annual Rath Yatra of Lord Jagannath in Gadamadupur. Dharmasala MLA Himanshu Sekhar Sahoo also joined the fest at Dharmasala and gave his good wishes to all on the occasion.

In Brahmapur Eye donation motivation by Friends Helping Club

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

The sixth eye donation motivation of this year and first eye donation of 2024-25 was conducted by the Friends Helping Club here.

Gandham Ammaji, wife of Late G Eswara Rao, a resident of Park Street, passed away on Sunday morning at their house due to old age.

Kota Ravi Kumar, a member of the club, motivated the family members for donation of the deceased's eyes. Dr Alok Sharma, Dr Rupali Mishra of the Eye Department, MKCG Medical College Hospital, collected both eyeballs of the deceased at her residence.

The deceased is survived by her two sons Srinivasa Rao,



Balakrishna and a daughter G Kumari.

A big salute to the family for donating their kin's eyes, due to which two people can get vision. The family members, relatives, friends and members of the club were present at the time of eye donation.

In Bhadrak Lecturer axed for slapping principal

PNS ■ BHADRAK

Lecturer of a women's college has been suspended for allegedly slapping the college Principal in Bhadrak town. The principal has lodged a police complaint in this connection.

According to reports, Bhadrak Women's College Urdu Lecturer Naseema Khatun had gone to the room of Principal Supriti Kar for getting her signature on an application on Saturday. As the principal was busy, she told her to come later.

Livid with rage over this, Khatun had an argument with the principal and allegedly slapped her several times. This led the principal to file a complaint with the college management committee.

Acting on the complaint, the college management committee suspended Khatun from service. Kar has also lodged a complaint at the Bhadrak Town police station against Khatun. The police have registered a case and started an investigation. However, Khatun has not issued any statement in this regard.

Week-long plantation drive by activist Tripathy

On occasion of Van Mahotsav

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the Occasion of the Van Mahotsav, a week-long plantation drive and awareness campaign was initiated by social activist Dr Sitakanta Tripathy. On July 1, the programme was launched at Bhadrak and ended on July 6 at Tulasadeipur, a tribal village under Daruthenga panchayat of Khordha district.

Plantation of seedlings of different varieties was undertaken by Tripathy along with the villagers to enhance green cover, promote biodiversity, and contribute to the environmental health of the villages.

Tripathy appealed to the villagers to take care of the saplings like their babies and highlighted the critical role of the flora and fauna in maintaining the ecological balance. He



urged everyone to actively participate in preserving the lush green beauty of the village.

The main objective of the

programme was to disseminate the message of conservation of forests, preservation of biodiversity and saving the environment by planting

trees to make the earth sustainable. Among others, social worker Ajaya Kumar Muduli and child environmentalist Som Ashirbad assisted.

In Nuapada 75-yr-old home-cooked castor oil in big demand

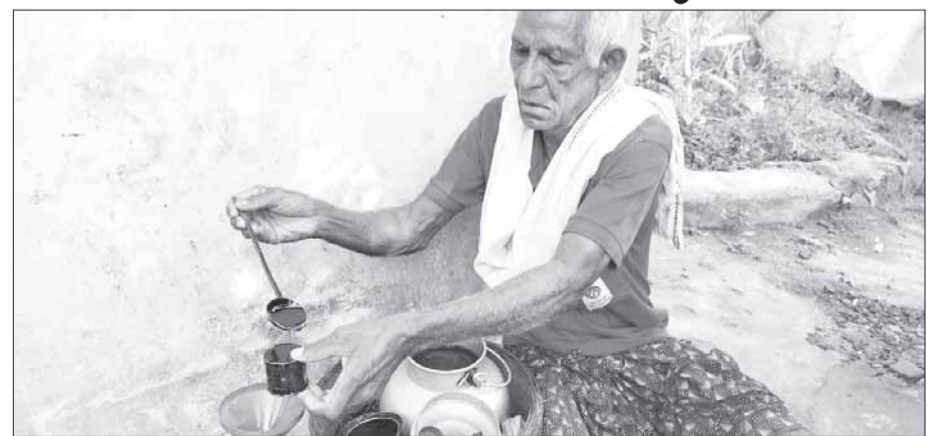
AJIT PANDA ■ NUAPADA

Bhubaneswar Satnami (75) from Duajhar village in Khariar Block of Nuapada District has been extracting and selling castor oil for over 60 years.

Satnami started learning the profession from his mother during his childhood. "I have been in this profession since I was a child," he recalls. "I helped my mother pound the seeds in a pounding equipment and watched her boil them to extract the oil."

Satnami still follows the traditional method of selling his home-cooked oil by visiting houses in nearby villages. His familiar voice announcing his presence prompts villagers to come out and buy from him. "His oil is home-cooked; so it works better for our health," says a local woman.

Due to his age and the lack



of interest from his children in continuing the trade, Satnami now restricts his sales to weekly markets in the area. He buys castor seeds from traders in Khariar at Rs 60 per Maan (about 4 kg) and extracts about 250 ml of oil per kg of seeds. By purchasing 20 kg at a time, he produces four liters of oil, which he sells for Rs 1,000.

Carrying his bamboo bas-

ket filled with the aluminium container with oil and traditional measuring instruments (Ada, Sola, Gidha and Boda etc) Satnami starts his journey early in the morning and returns after selling his stock. Reflecting on the changes over the years, he notes, "The roads have transformed from earthen to metal to concrete to black tar and now cement blocks. Earlier, I walked bare-

foot; now, I wear chappals." Despite the changing times and generational shifts, Satnami's dedication to his craft has remained unwavering. "I have seen three generations. Today's generation only knows this oil for lighting lamps during Diwali, but the older generation understands its medicinal value," he says, highlighting the enduring demand for his product.

Rahul visits Manipur for the third time

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Monday attacked Prime Minister Narendra Modi, saying while it will be Rahul Gandhi's third visit to Manipur since violence broke out in May last year, the PM has neither found the time nor even had the inclination to visit the state for even a few hours.

"Today, the non-biological PM goes to Moscow while the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha heads for Assam and Manipur. Of course, the drum-beaters of the non-biological PM have claimed that he stopped the Russia-Ukraine war for some time. Presumably, this Moscow trip will lead to even more bizarre claims," he said.

Leader of the Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi visited relief camps in Manipur's Jiribam and Churachandpur districts and interacted with the inmates.

People displaced by the ethnic violence in the northeastern state, which claimed over 200 lives since May last year, are staying in those relief camps. Rahul, accompanied by senior Congress leaders, visited Manipur for the first time



after the Congress won both Lok Sabha seats in the state. He first visited Manipur weeks after ethnic violence broke out in Manipur on May 3 last year. He also began his Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra from the state in January 2024.

From Jiribam, Rahul Gandhi came to Imphal airport via Silchar in Assam and reached by road a relief camp in Tuibong village in Churachandpur district.

There also he interacted with inmates. Ethnic violence between Meitei and Kuki communities since May last year claimed more than 200 lives in

Manipur. The Congress leader also visited Assam and arrived at Kumbhirgram airport en route to strife-torn Manipur.

Rahul was received at the airport by Assam Pradesh Congress Committee president Bhupen Borah and other senior state and district party leaders.

Borah submitted a memorandum to Rahul Gandhi urging him to take up the issue of the devastating flood with the Centre as a special case to get adequate relief and compensation for the severe losses incurred due to the deluge.

VP Dhankhar slams Chidambaram's comments on new criminal laws

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Monday said a member of Parliament shows concurrence by not participating in a debate on a bill, as he launched a fresh attack on former Union minister P Chidambaram over his comments on the three criminal justice laws.

This is for the second time since Saturday that Dhankhar has targeted Chidambaram over his remarks on the three criminal justice laws -- the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, the Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita, and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam -- which came into force on July 1.

Addressing a group of Rajya Sabha interns, Dhankhar, without naming Chidambaram, said, "He said nothing in the House (Rajya Sabha). He was a member of the committee (department-related standing committee on Home)."

If a member is part of the committee, makes his point of view before the committee, the committee by majority holds otherwise, that member has great opportunity to participate in the proceedings before the House and make his point



known and try to convince others by persuasion, logic and rationality, Dhankhar said.

"If you do not discharge your constitutional duty, if you do not participate in the debate, if you do not take your point further, you are in a sense not performing your duty.

And then if you say something outside, you suffer the handicap that you had valuable opportunity, constitutional platform, a rare opportunity that is available only to members of Parliament, you fail to avail the opportunity, in a sense you forfeit your right," the vice president said.

Dhankhar asserted that "you show your concurrence by non-participation, by observ-

ing silence". He said by not participating in the (House) proceedings and making remarks outside is not correct.

On Saturday, the vice president had lashed out at Chidambaram over his comment that the three new criminal laws were "drafted by part-timers", terming it as "inexcusable" and urged him to withdraw his "derogatory, defamatory and insulting" observation.

Dhankhar said he was "shocked beyond words" when in the morning he read Chidambaram's interview to a leading national daily where he had said that "the new laws were drafted by part-timers".

SC asks Centre to frame model policy on menstrual leave for women

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday directed the Centre to frame a model policy on menstrual leave for women employees by holding consultations with states and other stakeholders.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said the issue related to policy and was not an issue for the courts to look into. Moreover, such a decision from a court on granting such leave to women may prove to be counterproductive and "detrimental" to the cause as employers may avoid employing them.

How will the leave encourage more women to be part of the workforce, the court asked the petitioner and said mandating such leave will lead to women "being shunned from the workforce". "...We do not want that," the bench said.

"This is actually a government policy aspect and not for the courts to look into," it said. "Petitioner says that a representation was submitted to the Centre in May 2023. Since the issues raise multifarious

objectives of state policy, there is no reason for this court to intervene in light of our previous order," it said.

The bench, however, permitted lawyer Rakesh Khanna, appearing for petitioner and lawyer Shailendra Tripathi, to move the secretary of the Ministry of Women and Child Development and Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati.

"We request the secretary to look into the matter at the policy level and take a decision after consulting all stakeholders and see if a model policy can be framed," it ordered.

The court made it clear that the consultation process of the Centre will not come in the way of states if they take any steps in this regard. The top court had earlier disposed of a plea seeking menstrual pain leave for women students and working women across the country.

It had then said that since the issue falls under the policy domain, a representation can be made to the Centre. The senior lawyer said that till date no decision has been taken by the Centre.

Namami Ganga: ₹ 211 cr splash to keep Maha Kumbh eco-friendly

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As Uttar Pradesh readies itself for Maha Kumbh Mela 2025 in Prayagraj, the focus is on enhancing environmental sustainability ahead of an anticipated gathering of 50 crore participants from around the globe along the banks of the Ganga river.

In this context, the Namami Ganga Mission, a central flagship has drawn a Rs 211 crore massive plan towards initiatives aimed at preserving the purity of the Ganga river and ensuring cleanliness throughout this significant religious event slated from January 14 to February 26, 2025, in Prayagraj.

Three projects were cleared at the 55th meeting of the Executive Committee held under the chairmanship of Rajiv Kumar Mittal, Director General of National Clean Ganga Mission.

In the meeting, additionally, a project costing Rs 134.71 crore was sanctioned for interception and diversion, along with STP works in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh.

Furthermore, Rs 27.02 crore was allocated to enhance the capacity of the STP located in Barikala, Lucknow.

Notably, Rs 152.37 crore has been allocated for sanitation-related infrastructure for Mahakumbh 2025 in Prayagraj. This project includes the construction of 54,400 toilets and urinals, along with a primary solid waste collection system. The objective is to provide adequate facilities for the con-



venience of pilgrims attending Mahakumbh by constructing temporary sanitation facilities and ensuring cleanliness and improved river water quality during the event, said an official from the Mission.

Additionally, Rs 55.57 crore has been approved to intercept and treat sewage from 22 drains in Prayagraj during Mahakumbh. The main aim of this project is to stop and completely treat the sewage from these drains, thereby ensuring the continuity and purity of the Ganga and Yamuna rivers during the festival. During the meeting, a

project worth Rs 134.71 crore was approved for interception and diversion and STP works in Deoband, Uttar Pradesh. The project aims to enhance sewage infrastructure by constructing and implementing measures to prevent and divert sewage and pollution of local water bodies.

Additionally, Rs 27.02 crore has been approved to increase the capacity of the 1 MLD STP at Barikala in Lucknow to 3.5 MLD. This upgrade is intended to strengthen the existing sewage treatment infrastructure to handle the increasing

flow of sewage more effectively. A senior official said, "Given the massive influx of pilgrims, the event requires extensive infrastructure to manage accommodations, sanitation, healthcare, security, and transportation.

Temporary tent cities (Kumbh Nagars) are set up to accommodate millions of pilgrims. "Ensuring cleanliness and sanitation is crucial during the Maha Kumbh.

Large-scale projects are undertaken to build temporary toilets, urinals, and solid waste management systems to main-

tain hygiene and prevent pollution of the rivers.

The sanctioned project aims to ensure cleanliness and contamination free water to the visitors and pilgrims," he added. Since the inception of the Namami Gange Programme in financial year 2014-15 till 2022-23, the Government has released Rs 14329 crore to the scheme for the implementation of the project aimed to implement a comprehensive set of interventions for pollution abatement measures to tackle different sources of pollution.

Justice UU Lalit to head panel on appointment of VCs in West Bengal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday appointed former Chief Justice of India UU Lalit to head a search-cum-selection committee to oversee the appointments of vice-chancellors for state-run universities in West Bengal.

The ruling TMC dispensation has a running feud with West Bengal Governor C V Ananda Bose, who is also the chancellor of state-run universities, over how the state's universities should be run.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan directed that the committee be constituted within two weeks after noting that both the state and the office of the governor agreed on the formation of the panel.

Besides Justice Lalit, the committee will comprise five members, who will prepare a panel of three names in an alphabetical order for appointment of vice-chancellors in each university.

The time period prescribed for completing the entire process is three months, the apex court said.

The apex court said the committee's recommendations, endorsed by the chairperson, will be presented to the chief minister.

"If the CM finds any candidate unsuitable, the supporting material and remarks will be forwarded to the chancellor (governor) within two weeks," the bench said.



The committee's remuneration will be borne by the state and former CJI Lalit will receive Rs three lakh per effective meeting of the committee.

The West Bengal Assembly had passed an amendment bill raising the number of members in the search committee set up for appointing vice-chancellors in state-run universities from three to five. The BJP had opposed the West Bengal University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2023 alleging that the new search committee would further enhance the ruling party's control over the appointment of vice-chancellors.

The top court was hearing an appeal of the West Bengal government against the June 28, 2023 order of the Calcutta High Court, which said there was no illegality in the orders issued by the West Bengal governor appointing interim vice-chancellors (VCs) in 11

state-run universities in his capacity as the ex-officio chancellor of these institutions.

In October last year, the top court had stayed the emoluments of the newly appointed interim vice-chancellors and asked the governor to sit with the chief minister "over a cup of coffee" to resolve the deadlock over appointment of VCs. The apex court had said there was a need for reconciliation between the governor and the chief minister "in the interest of educational institutions and the future careers of lakhs of students".

Sanat Kumar Ghosh, a petitioner who moved the high court, and the West Bengal government claimed the orders appointing VCs to state-run universities were illegal as the governor had not consulted the higher education department before making the appointments.

SC to review bail of Soumya Vishwanathan murder convicts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday agreed to examine the pleas filed by Delhi Police challenging the high court's order granting bail to four convicts, who were sentenced to life imprisonment in the murder case of TV journalist Soumya Vishwanathan.

A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma issued notice on the four pleas filed by Delhi Police and tagged them with the pending petition of Vishwanathan's mother against the bail granted to the four convicts. At the outset, Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, appearing for Delhi Police informed the court that since a notice has already been issued by the apex court, all the pleas be tagged. The bench issued notice and tagged the pleas with the pending matter.

The high court had on February 12 suspended the sentence of Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Singh Malik and Ajay Kumar till the pendency of their appeals challenging their conviction and sentence and enlarged them on bail. The high court had noted that



the convicts have been in custody for over 14 years. On April 22, the apex court had agreed to examine the plea filed by Vishwanathan's mother against the bail granted to the four convicts. It had issued notices to Delhi Police and the four convicts on Madhavi Vishwanathan's petition.

Vishwanathan, who worked with a leading English news channel, was shot dead in the early hours of September 30, 2008 on Nelson Mandela Marg in south Delhi while she was returning home from work in her car. A special court had on November 25 last year awarded two life terms to Kapoor, Shukla, Malik and Kumar

under section 302 (murder) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) and section 3(1)(i) (committing organised crime resulting in the death of any person) of the Maharashtra Control of Organised Crime Act (MCOCA). The court had made it clear that the sentences will run "consecutively". The fifth convict, Ajay Sethi, was handed down three years of simple imprisonment under section 411 (dishonestly receiving stolen property) of the IPC.

He was sentenced to the period already undergone in custody during the trial. While sentencing Kapoor, Shukla, Malik and Kumar to double life imprisonment, the trial court had also imposed a fine of Rs 1.25 lakh on each of them. It had imposed a fine of Rs 7.25 lakh on Sethi.

Out of the four convicts, Kapoor, Shukla and Malik were also convicted for killing IT professional Jigisha Ghosh. According to the prosecution, the trio later confessed to police they were also behind Vishwanathan's murder, and the weapon used for killing her was recovered from their possession.

Farmer leader Tikait demands Dharmik Fund after Hathras tragedy

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Farmer leader Rakesh Tikait on Monday said if the NDA government wants to make India a Hindu nation, it should set up a "religious fund" for giving compensation after Hathras-like tragedies.

The Bharatiya Kisan Union (BKU) spokesperson made the jibe when he visited Hathras and demanded Rs 50 lakh compensation to the victims of the Hathras stampede that killed 121 people on July 2. Talking to reporters, he said there is no responsibility of anyone in "accidents" like these and urged the authorities to learn from the incident in order to prevent future tragedies.

Advocating governmental responsibility, Tikait said, "If the government wants to make it a Hindu nation, then it should also create a 'Dharmik Fund' (religious fund) for disbursing compensations in such accidents. If not the government, then who will compensate for such acts?"

Responding to queries about the political implications of the gathering, Tikait alleged that the religious programmes are



the government's agenda. He alluded to broader political strategies, and said, "For the next 'Yudh' (religious war), the government has already said Mathura is our agenda. This area (Hathras) falls in the 'paridhi' (range) of Mathura. Such programmes will be held."

Asked about the timing and context of the event, Tikait remarked, "The agenda was started 20 years ago, much before 2014," and highlighted the longstanding nature of

religious and political movements in the region.

He said India is based on "krishi" (agriculture) and "rishi" (saints).

"Any fiddling with either will lead to 'andolan' (protests)," he said.

Tikait, who had played a leading role in the year-long farmer protest against the three farm laws which were later withdrawn, referred to recent government initiatives and said,

"If in Ayodhya, the govern-

ment is running free trains, then how would anyone stop such events here?" he added.

Tikait stressed the need for compensation and preventive measures in the wake of the stampede after the 'satsang' of self-styled godman Surajpal, who is also known as Narayan Sakar Hari and Bhole Baba, at Fulrai village in Hathras' Sikandra Rau area.

"The victims should get a compensation of Rs 50 lakh, like it was done in the Lakhimpur Kheri case. Give them the compensation and it will help victims," he said.

In the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, some farmers were mowed down allegedly by a car linked to the then Union minister Ajay Mishta Teni in October 2021. Tikait criticised the use of provocative language used in the Hathras stampede.

He dismissed the efficacy of lodging cases or conducting a Special Investigation Team (SIT) probe, suggesting instead that such inquiries merely serve to acknowledge the possibility of accidents at crowded events.

Prior to Tikait's visit, Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha

Rahul Gandhi also met with victims' families and called for a hike in compensation awarded to them.

The Centre and the UP government have announced Rs 2 lakh each for the dead and Rs 50,000 for those injured in the July 2 stampede.

So far nine people, including the chief organiser and fundraiser of the July 2 event, Devprakash Madhukar, have been arrested as part of the police investigation into the case which does not mention the name of preacher Surajpal as an accused.

Separately, a judicial commission headed by a retired high court judge and a special investigation team led by an additional director general of police are carrying out their inquiries into the episode.

Government agencies, including police, have so far blamed the organisers for mismanagement at the event, noting that the size of the crowd exceeded to over 2.50 lakh from the permitted 80,000, even though the lawyer of the "godman" on Saturday claimed "some poisonous substance" sprayed by "some unidentified men" triggered the stampede.

UDF attacks Kerala Govt over delay in Jal Jeevan Mission implementation

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The opposition Congress-led United Democratic Front on Monday criticised the Left government in Kerala over its alleged apathy with regard to implementing the Jal Jeevan mission in the state.

UDF MLA Anoop Jacob, part of the Kerala Congress (Jacob) group, sought a notice for adjournment motion in the Assembly and said the Jal Jeevan Mission, which was introduced to provide clean drinking water to rural communities, was being stalled in the state.

"Even now, people are lining up in many places for clean drinking water. Even though the government claims that new connections were given, at least six lakh water pipe connections have just air coming through them," Jacob alleged. He also said the transparency of the project was also affected.

"The maintenance contractors of the water authority are also suffering. The department has yet to pay them for the past 19 months. At least 33 projects under the mission have been completely stopped. A majority of roads in the state are dug up and damaged in the name of this mission, and people are suffering," Jacob said.

However, Water Resources Minister Roshy Augustine dismissed the charges and



said the Jal Jeevan Mission was a huge project that was happening simultaneously across the state.

"A project worth Rs 44,000 crore is happening to provide clean drinking water to the people of the state. The project is not happening in just one panchayat or one constituency. At least 1,04,400 km of roads under panchayats and the PWD are being excavated for this purpose," Augustine said. He further said, as of now, all houses in 92 panchayats have access to clean drinking water, while 100 more panchayats will join this list by December this year.

Meanwhile, Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan rejected the claims of the minister and said the project

which began in 2019, was supposed to be completed within five years—in 2024.

"Of this project, which is worth over Rs 44,000 crore, only around Rs 9,730 crore has been spent till now. The government has not utilised the funds. The project is stalling...," Satheesan said. He also said out of the Rs 9,730 crore, the Centre has given almost half of the amount.

Countering the arguments of the opposition, Augustine said when the mission started, there were only 17 lakh water connections, but in the last three years, 19 lakh more connections were given.

Augustine dismissed the opposition's claim that only 38.86 per cent of the project

was completed. "When we started, only 23.5 per cent houses had a water connection, which has now gone up to 54.5 per cent," the minister said.

Satheesan ridiculed this statement and said giving connections to 54 per cent of the houses was not enough. He said water supply through these connections should be ensured.

"When you have not identified the water sources to provide water connections, when you have not set up any purification system for drinking water connections, what's the point of claiming a high number of water connections," Satheesan asked.

In connection with the roads being dug up by the Water Authority in the name of Jal Jeevan Mission and failing to restore them, Augustine said out of the over one lakh km of roads, as much as 51,000 km has been restored until now.

"It is a massive project that is happening across the state, not just something that is happening at a particular place. We are coordinating with various departments, including the LSGD, PWD and the KSEB among others," the Minister said. Based on the reply given by the Minister, Speaker A N Shamsheer refused to allow notice for an adjournment motion, following which the opposition staged a walkout.

AIADMK chief tells DMK regime to give free hand to police

PTI ■ SALEM

AIADMK general secretary Edappadi K Palaniswami on Monday said law and order could be handled well only by giving full freedom to the police department and slammed Chief Minister M K Stalin over the issue.

Just after the state government replaced Chennai police commissioner Sandeep Rai Rathore with senior officer A Arun, Palaniswami, the leader of opposition said that merely by transferring an official, law and order maintenance cannot become efficient. The high profile transfer comes days after the murder of BSP state unit chief K Armstrong.

Speaking to reporters here, Palaniswami said that only by making sure proper governance, law and order could be guarded. It is the Chief Minister who holds the portfolio of police department and had he led the department efficiently, law and order could have been maintained well.

However, he is a 'puppet Chief Minister, an inept CM,' and there is no complete freedom for police officials and hence they could not properly maintain law and order, the former Chief Minister alleged.

"After the DMK assumed power, the police department



is unable to function independently." The leader of opposition alleged that such a scenario was the reason for prevalence of drugs and for the incidence of crime including murders, dacoity and robbery. "Not a single day passes without a murder." He reiterated that there is no safety for anyone including leaders in the state.

Only by giving a free hand to the police department, law and order could be maintained well and rowdy elements shall be reined in. On the killing of BSP leader Armstrong and allegations that those who really perpetrated the crime have not been arrested, Palaniswami said the accused had surrendered and they were not arrested. It is the responsibility of the government to clear air, he added.

Incessant rain lashes Goa; 5 killed in wall collapses



PTI ■ PANAJI

At least five persons have lost their lives in wall collapse incidents over two days in Goa which received heavy rains on the third consecutive day on Monday, inundating several low-lying areas.

A 70-year-old woman and her 51-year-old son were killed on Monday after a wall of their house collapsed on them in Mandur village near Panaji, police said.

"Maria Rodrigues and her son Alfred lost their life after a backside wall of their house collapsed on them in Mandur village near Panaji in the afternoon. Their bodies were extricated by villagers," a senior police official told PTI. On Sunday, three labourers were killed after a wall collapsed on them at Kunda Industrial Estate in North Goa, according to police.

Goa has been witnessing heavy rains since Saturday, with the state education department declaring a

holiday for all schools till Class 12 on Monday.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued an orange alert, forecasting moderate to heavy showers with strong surface winds, gusting to 40 to 50 km per hour, likely at many places in North and South Goa districts.

In 24 hours ending 8.30 am, Panaji recorded the highest rainfall of 360 mm, while Quepem received the lowest 175 mm.

Several areas in Canacona taluka in South Goa have been inundated since Sunday night. Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has appealed to people to stay indoors and avoid visiting flood-prone areas.

He said the disaster management authority is active, and collectors of both districts were monitoring the situation round the clock.

According to the water resources department, the state's largest reservoir, Selaulim Dam, reached full capacity on Sunday night.

Landslides snap surface communication in Arunachal

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Surface communication in several districts in Arunachal Pradesh was disrupted by landslides triggered by rains, officials said on Monday.

Landslides buried a person in Shi-Yomi district on Friday, according to a report of the state disaster management department. So far four people have died in the state since April due to natural calamities.

The Tezu-Hayuliang road remains blocked at Mompani area in Lohit and Anjaw districts, while landslides blocked the Dari-Chambang and the Palin-Taraklengdi via Langdang village PMGSY road in Kra Daadi district, they said.

NH 513 also remained blocked at Geying in East Siang district, a report said.

Over 72,900 people and 257 villages have so far been affected by floods and landslides in Arunachal since April this year.

Floods and landslides also caused extensive damage to



roads, bridges, culverts, power lines, electric poles, transformers and water supply systems.

According to the report, 160 roads, 76 power lines, 30 electric poles, three transformers, nine bridges, 11 culverts, and 147 water supply systems have been damaged so far.

Besides, 627 kutcha and 51 pucca houses and 155 huts have been damaged, it said. The state capital Itanagar has been reeling under a severe water crisis for the last couple of days due to damage in pipelines. Though the restoration process is on, it will take several days, officials said.

Damin, Parsi Parlo and

Panyasang administrative circles under Kurung Kumey district are reportedly cut off from the rest of the state, following incessant rain this week that triggered major flashfloods and landslides.

Multiple blockades occurred on the road towards Damin via Parsi Parlo, reports said. A massive landslide occurred at Karsingsa block point along the vital NH-415 connecting Itanagar with Banderdewa, forcing the Capital Itanagar administration to close the road for commuters' safety.

After a thorough inspection of the site by Deputy Commissioner Shweta Nagarkoti Mehta, it has been decided to close the road and divert all traffic via Gumto.

Assam flood: 131 wild animals dead, 97 rescued in Kaziranga

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

At least 131 wild animals have died so far in floods in the Kaziranga National Park while 96 others have been rescued, an official said on Monday.

The dead animals include six rhinos, 117 hog deer, including 98 by drowning, two by vehicle hits and 17 during treatment, two sambar, a rhesus macaque and an otter due to drowning in the park.

A total of 25 animals have died during treatment and these include 17 hog deer, one each of swamp deer, Rhesus Macaque and an otter pup. The forest officials rescued 85 hog deer, two each of rhino, sambar and scops owl and one each of swamp deer, Indian hare, Rhesus Macaque, otter, elephant and a jungle cat. Currently, 25 animals are under medical care while 52 others have been released after treatment, the official said.

The park is experiencing the worst-ever deluge in recent years with the previous large-scale devastation occurring in 2017 when over 350 wildlife died in the flood waters and in vehicle hits while migrating



through animal corridors to the highlands.

The NH-715 is a corridor for the animals to cross over to the hills of Karbi Anglong. Meanwhile, Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday said that the floods in the state have affected humans and animals alike and 'Team Assam is working round the clock to aid everyone'.

'Recently, while passing through Kaziranga, I noticed this stranded rhino calf and instructed its immediate rescue', Sarma posted on 'X'.

Out of the total 233 camps in the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, 69 are still inundated till Friday evening as against 68 the previous day, the official said.

In the Eastern or Agorotoli range, 14 of the 34 camps have been inundated while 22 of the 58 camps are in central range, 20 out of the 39 in Western or Bagori range and 4 each in Burapahar range, Bokakhat and Nagaon along with one in Biswanath Wildlife Division are under flood waters.

Altogether four camps have

been vacated by the forest personnel so far with two each in central range and Bokakhat. Forest department employees including security personnel stay in camps inside the national park to conduct patrolling for the protection of flora and fauna.

Meanwhile, prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) to restrict the movement of vehicular traffic on NH-37 (New NH-715) and its speed to between 20 to 40 km/hour is in force.

TN CM orders setting up of panel to suggest State amendments in criminal laws



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Taking the first step to effect Tamil Nadu-specific amendments to the new criminal laws, Chief Minister M K Stalin on Monday ordered setting up of a one-man committee, to be led by a retired High Court judge, to study the three laws and make recommendations to the state government over making amendments.

After chairing a high-level consultative meeting at the Secretariat here to deliberate on state amendments to the Central laws, Stalin directed officials to set up a one-man panel to be led by retired judge of the Madras High Court, Justice M Sathyannarayana.

"This committee will clearly examine the new laws, hold consultations with stakeholders including advocates at the state-level and submit a report (on state-level amendments) within one month to the state government," an official release here said.

Advocate-General P S Raman, state public prosecutor Hasan Mohamed Jinnah, Water Resources Minister Duraimurugan, Chief Secretary Shiv Das Meena, Director General of Police Shankar Jiwaj, top officials and Rajya Sabha MPs, P Wilson and NR Elango (both senior advocates) took part in the meeting.

The government recalled Stalin writing to Union Home Minister Amit Shah on June 17, 2024 on 'issues' in the new laws and urging the Centre to defer enforcing the three laws. It was pointed out by the Chief Minister that there were 'flaws' in some basic sections. Also, the views of the state governments were not fully obtained by the Union government in this regard, the Chief Minister had conveyed to the Centre, the government said.

Overloaded bus overturns near Haryana's Pinjore, 50 injured

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

An overloaded Haryana Roadways mini bus overturned near Pinjore on Monday, leaving 50 passengers injured, most of them school children, officials said.

The bus veered off the road near a turn when it was passing through a hilly patch near Pinjore in Panchkula district, a police official from Kalka said.

Panchkula Deputy Commissioner Yash Garg told PTI that after the accident about 50 passengers, most of them children, were brought to hospitals in Panchkula and Pinjore. Most of them escaped with minor injuries, he said, adding that during the screening, it was found that most of the children were in a state of shock.

"About 23-24 children who were brought are fine. They will be discharged soon. I think only five to seven or maybe even less will remain hospitalised which includes two children," the DC said and added that two-three children have suffered fractures.



suffered serious injury and had been referred to PGIMER at Chandigarh, he said. Some accounts said the woman was on the road when the accident occurred. The conductor of the bus was among the injured.

Haryana Assembly Speaker Gian Chand Gupta, who is BJP MLA from Panchkula, told reporters at the Panchkula Civil Hospital, that the driver and conductor of the bus have been suspended.

"The bus was overloaded and we have been told that the vehicle's speed was slightly in excess. As it approached a turn, it overturned," Gupta said. "Our first priority was to

rescue and give best treatment to the injured," he added.

When asked if the mini bus was packed beyond capacity, Garg said preliminary reports suggest that the vehicle had a capacity of 40-50, but more people were travelling in it. "Some children have said the speed of the bus was slightly in excess...A detailed probe is being conducted into the cause of the accident," he said.

Earlier speaking to reporters at the Panchkula civil hospital, Garg said the mini bus of Haryana Roadways overturned near a turn. "The reasons behind the accident are under investigation. Our main

focus at the moment was on rescue. The matter of relief is that all children are stable, no one has a threatening injury or critical injury," Garg said. In addition to 30 children who were brought to Panchkula Civil Hospital, four adults were also brought there and one of them is a 60-year-old woman, who suffered crush injury on her arm and was referred to PGIMER.

Garg said another injured person has been shifted to ICU.

A passenger on the bus, Jaipal, told reporters in Panchkula that the bus was overcrowded. "Suddenly, the bus started shaking near a turn and turned turtle," Jaipal said.

Haryana Roadways General Manager of the Panchkula Depot, Ashok Kaushik told PTI that an inquiry will be held into the incident. On the speaker's assertion that the bus was overloaded and speeding, Kaushik said, "A detailed investigation will be conducted into all aspects". Gupta said from Tuesday an additional bus will ply on the route for the convenience of the public.

Dengue warrants no medical emergency in Karnataka: Minister

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Health Minister Dinesh Gundu Rao on Monday said the situation now doesn't call for declaring dengue as a "medical emergency" in the state, as he rejected the suggestion made by the opposition BJP.

He said, amid a spike in dengue cases, officials have been issued directions to take all preventive measures. Leader of Opposition in Assembly R Ashoka, eminent cardiologist and Bangalore Rural BJP MP Dr C N Manjunath had urged that the Congress government declare dengue as a "medical emergency", and called for more efforts to control its spread.

"We have held separate meetings with CEOs of Zilla Panchayats from all districts and the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP). Instructions have been given to spray medicines at places where mosquitoes germinate and spread more awareness among the public," Rao said. Speaking to reporters here, he said as there are many active dengue cases in the state, the number of tests being conducted have been



increased and arrangements have been made for treatment. Also, there are a couple of Zika virus positive cases.

The Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) met on Sunday in the backdrop of advice from opposition leaders and others to declare dengue as a medical emergency, the Minister said. "But the situation is not such, to declare it a medical emergency, because all the facilities are there, like beds, medicines. The TAC was of the opinion that the situation was not so grave," he said. As per health department data, Karnataka has till last evening recorded 7,165 dengue positive cases since

January this year, with areas coming under the city civic body, the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) accounting for the largest at 1,988.

On Sunday, the state reported 159 fresh dengue infection cases, including 80 in BBMP areas.

To a question about any discussion at the TAC meeting regarding reserving beds for dengue patients, Rao said dengue infection doesn't spread from person to person, unlike COVID, but still hospitals have been advised to keep beds.

"These cases can be handled at general wards, as there will be no need for any isolation...There is a need to spread awareness among people as to at which stage of fever they need to go to hospitals, and it will be done," he said, adding that there is need to be cautious for another two-three months as rains are likely to continue. Asked about reports that some private hospitals were still charging more for dengue testing, despite the government capping the rates, he said: "If anyone complains we will take action, I will also ask our officials to check."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Macron makes it

From the UK to Iran and now France, progressive voices and inclusive thinking is making a comeback

France has just about managed to keep the ultra-right at bay. ultra rightwingers have lost to the liberals in the snap poll ordered by French President Emmanuel Macron. France has a rich history of liberalism and social progressivism, yet in recent years, the country has seen a rise in far-right nationalism. However recent elections and political movements indicate a resurgence of progressive values. A left-wing alliance secured the most seats in the French parliament after tactical voting in Sunday's second-round election thwarted Marine Le Pen's far-right party. But the victory of the Left is not decisive. France now faces political uncertainty, as no party achieved an absolute majority in the National Assembly. President Emmanuel Macron's gamble seems to have worked as he had ordered a snap poll and decided to go to elections despite his waning popularity. He has championed a centrist approach that blends liberal economic policies with progressive social reforms. His administration has focused on addressing climate change, promoting gender equality, and fostering a more inclusive society. His surprise win, despite predictions to the contrary, suggests that people across the globe are moving towards liberal values and giving them prominence over reactionary forces.



This shift could have far-reaching implications for the European Union and beyond. However, to take a pragmatic approach, France has just about managed to defeat the far right who went on a rampage after the elections did not go in their favour as was widely expected. In the time to come, the challenges for President Macron may multiply as no one has secured a simple majority in the lower house of 577 seats. So now France enters the uncharted waters of coalition politics. The new government would be anything but stable and may give right-wingers a chance to discredit it. President Macron would face several significant challenges. Politically, he would need to navigate a fragmented landscape with diverse parties, address low public trust, and manage frequent protests. Economically, tackling inequality, unemployment, and high public debt while balancing social spending demands would be critical. Right now, France is struggling to pull back its economy from crisis. So far annual growth has been 0.7 per cent in 2024 after a significant slowdown in the second half of 2023 but may gain momentum in 2025 (1.3 per cent). Socially, issues like immigration integration, pension reforms, and the housing crisis would require careful attention. Finally, Macron would have to address sensitive cultural issues, including secularism, religious freedom, and debates around national identity and multiculturalism. To effectively tackle the far right, President Macron would have to focus on reducing socioeconomic disparities to address the economic grievances that fuel extremism.

PICTALK



The chariots of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra prepared for annual Rath Yatra festival, in Puri

Indians dying on the Russian frontline

The presence of Indian nationals on the Russian side of the Ukraine conflict raises broader questions about the ethics of foreign combatant recruitment.



BHOPINDER SINGH

The issue of Indians fighting along with the Russian forces in the Ukraine War is particularly piquant, given India's historic relations with the Soviet Union earlier and Russia now. The fact that many had claimed to have been 'forced' to fight had forced the Indian Government to intervene. It is a claim that hasn't been conclusively confirmed as the Indian Embassy was aware of many Indians having signed up for support jobs in the Russian Army. Pending confirmation that their terms of service had been unfairly and involuntarily extended to fight on the frontline, the Indian authorities had formally sought their discharge. It further advised Indians to "exercise caution" and "stay away from this conflict" - diplomatese for dissuading Indians from joining any Russian Army, in any capacity, given the situation. But as it routinely happens e.g., as it happened with advisories to Indian students to leave Ukraine before the full-fledged assault, some heeded the call and some didn't, till the situation became desperate and inextricable for them. The Russians have been particularly keen to swell their ranks with foreigners given the heavy loss of lives in the bloody stalemate and the accompanying sense of fatigue and despondency amongst its combatants.

The inclusion of private militias like the 'Wagner Army' is under that impulse. But the inclusion of individual foreigners is a formalized initiative that can be traced back to Law 29 March 1998 'On Military Obligation and Military Service' - which has since then been made increasingly attractive and lenient to attract new intake. Talks of individuals from Central Asian Countries (for the Soviet Union), Cuba, Afghanistan, Nepal, Syria, Somalia etc., have been doing the rounds. For these foreign inductees, besides the relatively lucrative salary (\$2000-\$3000), the additional lure of Russian citizenship is dangled. Estimated to be numbering in thousands, BBC reported that as of last year's end, 254 foreigners had been killed in the conflict. How many of them had enlisted



for support jobs and how many were forcibly taken for active combat, remains a matter of conjecture.

The tact of enlisting 'mercenaries' is an old and convenient practice, as besides the relatively low levels of accountability, they also come with the plausible option of deniability. Under the International Criminal Court and the International Humanitarian Law, the status of 'mercenary' does not constitute a specific crime. But they are not entitled to the status of 'prisoner of war' and its necessities. The idea is to discourage mercenaries as material greed-based and amoral entities as opposed to soldiers of the nation who are driven by a sense of national purpose, patriotism, and professional excellence. To qualify as 'mercenaries', six criteria need to be fulfilled. Firstly, the person is specially recruited internally/abroad. Secondly, the belligerent participants in conflict. Thirdly, he/she is motivated by private gain, as promised by one side in the conflict. Fourthly, they are not national, resident or interested party in the said conflict. Fifthly, they do not belong to the militaries of either side. Sixthly and lastly, they have not been sent by a non-interested state on any official duty as a member of their military. Therefore, it could be pre-



THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY KEEN TO SWELL THEIR RANKS WITH FOREIGNERS GIVEN THE HEAVY LOSS OF LIVES IN THE BLOODY STALEMATE AND THE ACCOMPANYING SENSE OF FATIGUE AND DESPONDENCY AMONGST ITS COMBATANTS

sumed some Indians who are unfortunately caught in a form of combat that they probably had not imagined whilst signing up, and may still qualify as 'mercenary'.

Such a scenario does not reflect well on the nation as it is suggestive of limited job opportunities domestically and therefore suggests societal desperation which is understandable for broken nations like Somalia or Syria, but not India. Sadly, portents of 'cannon fodder' or even 'human trafficking' are rife, but given the opaqueness that surrounds the Russian reality, nothing can be confirmed. Such times birth human trafficking networks that paint a very different picture to recruit the gullible when the truth is starkly different.

There have been gut-wrenching pleas from some Indians beseeching the Indian authorities to secure their release, with some losing their lives, soon after that. The Indian External Affairs Minister is believed to have reiterated his concern to his Russian counterpart during a recent bilateral in Astana, Kazakhstan. To the query, if S Jaishankar had taken up the issue of stranded Indians, he assured, "Very clearly and strongly... several Indians have been pressed into service with the Russian Army. Only when they come back will we know the full cir-

cumstances. But whatever the circumstances are, to us it is unacceptable that Indian citizens find themselves in the army of another country in a warzone. I told him that we seek their cooperation and that they are our friend and partners. We have to find a way so that these people can return to India as quickly and effectively as possible." Thankfully, despite the ostensibly pro-Ukraine position taken by Delhi, it has maintained a parallel and strong relation with Russia, replete with non-linear moves as part of its 'strategic independence'. However, while the government had initiated the needful from Russian authorities, there is a reciprocal expectation of Indians abroad to heed advisories, and not wait for situations to deteriorate.

No right-thinking country would encourage its citizens to partake in conflicts given the diversity of complex geopolitical and societal ramifications, amongst which guaranteeing their safety would be paramount.

For Russians, foreign recruitment makes practical sense - for Indians to be availing the same, reflects poorly.

(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

Implications of Iran's election



The untimely demise of Iran's conservative President Ebrahim Raisi has necessitated an election amidst regional tensions,

exacerbated by the Gaza conflict and disputes over Iran's nuclear program. India anticipates evolving bilateral ties under reformist President-elect Pezeshkian. Despite historical ties spanning language, culture, and commerce, both nations face a crucial juncture. With shared roots and significant strategic interests, India and Iran navigate a relationship poised for new dynamics.

The future of Iran under liberal leadership holds promise for significant domestic and international shifts. Potential reforms could ease tensions, particularly regarding Iran's nuclear program, fostering better relations with the West. Internally, liberal policies may encourage socio-economic progress and cultural openness, reshaping Iran's global image and regional dynamics. Dimple Wadhawan Kanpur

Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

nerable government.

The common man eagerly anticipates budgetary relief through increased exemption limits, revised tax slabs, and measures to alleviate everyday financial burdens. Expectations include provisions for healthcare subsidies, travel benefits for senior citizens, and incentives supporting livelihood stability, reflecting hopes for tangible improvements in quality of life.

AG Rajmohan | Anantpur

KEIR STARMER'S VISION FOR CHANGE

Madam - Apropos, "Now we get to work, Starmer to cabinet," The Pioneer, July 7. The British election results that led to Labour leader Keir Starmer's entry into 10 Downing Street mark a pivotal moment in the country's politics, promising to steer the nation through the turbulent aftermath of 14 years of Conservative governance. The enormity of Labour's victory cannot be overstated. Achieving a massive majority in Parliament, Labour has been given a clear mandate to implement change. His

acknowledgment of the public's lack of trust in politics is a refreshing departure from the often defensive posture of recent administrations. His promise to heal this mistrust through actions rather than words is a step in the right direction.

The British public has grown cynical after enduring repeated scandals, including the infamous Downing Street parties during the Covid-19 lockdowns, which eroded confidence in government integrity. Economically, Mr Starmer inherits a nation grappling with significant challenges.

The tax burden is at its highest since the post-World War II era, and public services, particularly the National Health Service, are under immense strain. His government's ability to deliver on ambitious promises, such as green spending initiatives and public service improvements, will be a key measure of success.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

HOPE FOR INDIA'S FUTURE

Madam - Observing Rahul Gandhi's political trajectory reveals his focused objectives: welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Once dismissed with derisive labels, he now stands as a pivotal opposition figure and a national benefactor. In Parliament, he champions crucial issues like poverty rights, constitutional protection, and unemployment, spotlighting concerns from the Agniveer scheme to NEET. We trust he will persist in combating corruption for India's bright future.

Rahul Gandhi's tenure as Leader of the Opposition has been marked by a transformation from skepticism to significance. Initially dismissed, he has emerged as a pivotal voice, advocating for the marginalized and pressing critical issues in Parliament. His agenda emphasizes welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Gandhi's relentless pursuit of transparency and accountability has kept the government accountable on issues ranging from poverty alleviation to constitutional protection. His proactive stance on national challenges like unemployment and inflation underscores his commitment to India's future, positioning him as a proactive and influential leader in the opposition ranks.

Masood Ahmad | Barabanki

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE BUDGET

Madam - Amidst anticipation of the upcoming budget session, national attention is fixated on its contents. India Inc. hopes to retain production incentives, while salary earners seek raised exemption limits and improved tax slabs. The common man yearns for relief from economic hardships, and farmers seek guaranteed minimum returns. Senior citizens anticipate travel benefits and healthcare subsidies. Supporters are poised, their lists ready, crucial for the government's survival. The budget's essence lies in who gains and by how much from this vul-

Paving the way for India's own Green Silicon Valley

Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through cooperation and collaboration

Growth, Employment and Climate Change, the trifecta of modern economic challenges, have rekindled the interest of policymakers in bringing back the craft of industrial policymaking right at the centre of the discussion table. Ominous estimates highlight climate change as a critical factor negatively impacting growth and employment, whereby ~18% of GDP and labour productivity equivalent to 72 million jobs might be lost, therefore the argument by Nicholas Stern and Joseph E. Stiglitz that "the only long-run growth trajectory is a green trajectory" echoes loudly for adaptation by industrial policymakers globally. Fashionably rechristened as Green Industrial Policy, the craft embeds within itself a series of government intervention measures (supply and demand focussed subsidies, regulations, incentives and standards) that aim at achieving economic development while simultaneously cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Globally leading nations have com-



bined different elements of the Green Industrial Policy craft for building national competitive advantage towards catalysing economic growth, increasing skilled employment and climate action:

Japan: Introduced five policy tools of Grant funding, Tax incentive, Guidance policy on transition finance, Regulatory reforms and international collaboration, targeting over 18 trillion yen for fourteen green growth sectors such as wind power, nuclear power, mobility & battery etc.

The US: manufacturing, strengthening national security through supply chain resilience and accelerating the energy transition by supply and demand side spending and tax cuts of ~\$400 billion that aims to create ~1.5 million jobs.

India has made some formidable moves towards a green future by focusing on domestic market formation and localization of components. Its Long Term-Low Emission Development Strategy submitted at COP27 articulates seven transitions to low-carbon development such as electricity systems, transport systems, sustainable urbanization etc.

The production-linked incentive schemes in renewable energy equipment space and technology-focused national missions on hydrogen and energy storage are steps in the right direction that can be aptly followed by a broader green industrialisation policy for India.

The broader green industrialisation policy by catalysing investments in manufacturing of decarbonisation technologies which are foundational in the short run can trigger the Schumpeterian process of innovation and discovery in the medium term towards high-carbon growth and employment. In this regard, the thrust on clean energy

entrepreneurship through industrial policy and a green R & D policy can foster breakthrough innovations and patents that can create and monetise new solutions. Japan and Korea have acknowledged this potential of startups as open innovation resources and introduced industrial policy support that encourages them to partner with larger conglomerates to propel the innovativeness of the economy at large and compete with their European, Chinese and American competitors. Green startups with their agility and Conglomerates with their market power and experience can aspire to create our own green Silicon Valley. Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through international cooperation and collaboration. These initiatives can catalyse a virtuous cycle of growth, employment and carbon neutrality.

(The writer is a Chevening Scholar and an International Development expert; views are personal)



SAIRAM SUBRAMANIAN



FIRST COLUMN

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE

Embracing life's challenges with a grateful heart leads to a profound awakening



RAVI VALLURI

Almighty divinity, through the prowess of nature, and the resplendent and ever-mutating cosmos is eternally showering bounties on humans. However, the human mind is not wakeful or grateful to accept this materiality. A question of attitude is primarily and predominantly our attitude which reinforces gratitude within our personalities. The word gratitude strikes its roots in the word the Latin word gratis, meaning to be thankful. It is always sagacious to recite a short prayer before a meal. Language is no trammel. Annadata Sukhi Bhava. By remembrance of these lines (Sanskrit), we express our gratefulness and indebtedness to the agrarian community and the cook for producing and preparing the meal respectively. Body: a divine instrument Nature has gifted us with something incomparable and priceless, the human body. We have been provided with a supercomputer of a brain. Prowess of the breath Next humans are blissfully unmindful of the power of our breath. It can be likened to a cell phone which nature has provided to connect us with divinity. Breath is perhaps the most potent form of effervescence and pizzazz of our personalities. Humans are insensible to the fact that ninety per cent of toxins get expatriated from our bodies through the potency of breath. If we delve deep into the ancient practices like pranayama or the unique rhythmic technique of Sudarshan Kriya (imparted in various bouquets of courses of the Art of Living) the primacy of breath is under-



stood by us. An inestimable nun Aeon's ago lived an exalted and celebrated Zen nun. There were far and few like her. It was believed that few women could attain the venerable state like this pious lady. Once she had undertaken an arduous pilgrimage and arrived at a village as the sun sank in the horizon. In all humility, she begged for lodgings for the night. However, the villagers slammed their doors and were unwilling to accommodate her in the village. They were opposed to the tenets of the Zen school of thought. They thought it to be exceedingly revolutionary. Thus, the clichéd and conformist individuals were unwilling to accept the nun into their fold even for a night. The traditionalists banished her from the village and she was compelled to wage the battle against inclement weather out in the cold. At the stroke of midnight, she woke up abruptly, unearthed the cherry tree which fed her ravenous body with sweet fruits, talking to the full moon which lightened up the sky. Immediately she was engulfed with waves of emotions and suffused with love and affection for all those who had exiled and expatriated her from the village. She experienced the quintessential silence of an awakened one. She was extremely grateful to the villagers who had not accommodated her, to the cherry tree that fed her, the meditative silence that encompassed her body, all of which had wily nicely contributed to her awakening, an almost celestial spectacle. "Thus, a stock individual, a savant, a sage or a nun becomes a Buddha the moment he/she accepts all that life brings with its variegated, paradoxical situations. The one who accepts these situations which gratitude and gratefulness, without admonishing anyone or carping verily becomes an awakened one." - The Buddha. "Good men and bad men differ radically. Bad men never appreciate kindness shown them, but wise men appreciate and are grateful. Wise men try to express their appreciation and gratitude by some return of kindness, not only to their benefactor, but to everyone else," said Gautama Buddha.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living)

The cost of freebies and the legal quagmire



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a Supreme Court ruling highlighting the impact of freebies on election fairness, political parties continue to leverage public funds for electoral gain



In the Maharashtra Budget for 2024-25 presented by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the BJP-led MahaYuti has announced financial assistance of Rs 1,500 per month for eligible women between 21 to 60 years of age, a stipend up to Rs.10,000 per month for youth in industrial and non-industrial sectors, electricity bill waiver for farmers etc. Unambiguously, these are freebies - an acronym for something given by the State free of charge - aimed at garnering votes during the State assembly elections later this year. In a July 2013 order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors, the Supreme Court (SC) had said that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people; that "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree". Yet, it had held that promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as "corrupt practice" under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state assembly. In the same order, it directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) "to frame guidelines that could govern the contents of the election manifesto of all the recognized political parties as when it had acted while framing guidelines for general conduct of the candidates, meetings, processions, polling day, etc". Further "this can also be included in the model code of conduct - under a separate head for guidelines for election manifesto - for guidance of political parties and candidates". The ECI never came out with any such guidelines. Emboldened by ECI inaction, the political parties who in the past, were placing freebies in a corner of their manifestos, have started catapulting them to the centre stage. Now, freebies hold the key to winning elections. In February 2020, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led by Arvind Kejriwal mesmerized Delhi, voters, by promising free or heavily subsidized electricity and free water, free bus rides for women, free Wi-Fi, and so on. In 2022 in Punjab, AAP promised free electrici-



NOW, FREEBIES HOLD THE KEY TO WINNING ELECTIONS. IN FEBRUARY 2020, THE AAM AADMI PARTY (AAP) LED BY ARVIND KEJRIWAL MESMERISED DELHI, VOTERS, BY PROMISING FREE OR HEAVILY SUBSIDISED ELECTRICITY AND FREE WATER, FREE BUS RIDES FOR WOMEN, FREE WI-FI, AND SO ON

ty to each household for consumption up to 300 units per month, waiver of all outstanding power bills, Rs 1000 per month to every woman aged 18 or above etc. The party won the state with a thumping majority. In Uttar Pradesh also in 2022, BJP promised 20 million smartphones for poor students, two free LPG cylinders every year, Rs 100,000/- for the marriage of girls from poor families, and so on. Meanwhile, the matter came up before the SC through a public interest litigation (PIL). On January 25, 2022, it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue. Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget". It also reiterated that "this disturbs the level playing field". On August 3, 2022, it gave a sense that it is for Parliament, besides the ECI, to take the initiative to enact a law on curbing freebies. It also sought suggestions on the composition of a committee that could go into the issue "dispassionately" and make recommendations. But, the above decisions haven't been acted upon. Although, on its part, the ECI had sent out questionnaires asking parties to give 'specifics' of what they intend to promise voters, financial impact and how this will be funded, there hasn't been any follow-up. Meanwhile, the freebies continue to proliferate. In Karnataka elections in May 2023, the grand old party (GOP) promised five guarantees viz. Gruha Jyoti, Gruha Lakshmi, Sakhi programme, Yuva Nidhi, and Anna Bhagya. The trend continued during elections in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana held in November/December 2023. While, in Rajasthan, Congress promised Rs 10,000 every year to the female head of the family under the Gruha Lakshmi Yojana, in MP, BJP increased the grant to Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli

Behna Yojana; the amount to be hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. Additionally, in MP, under Ladli Lakshmi Yojana, the BJP promised girls Rs 200,000/- till they get married. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'. In Telangana, the GOP beat all promising 10 grams of gold besides Rs 100,000/- cash to women getting married. In the run-up to the general elections, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on December 23, 2023 supply of free foodgrain under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) to over 800 million persons, Congress gave ten guarantees in its manifesto "Nyay Patra" released in April, 2024. Meanwhile, in Delhi, Kejriwal promised Rs 1000 per month to all women above the age of 18 years under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY). For State elections later this year, parties are readying to give another round of big doles. As mentioned earlier, the BJP-led MahaYuti has already announced a bountiful package for Maharashtra. For others viz. Haryana, and Jharkhand, parties will follow suit. The SC assertion on January 25, 2022 "Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget" is confirmed by facts on ground zero. Whereas, in Delhi, these cost the exchequer around Rs 12,500 crore annually, in Punjab the impact is close to Rs 20,000 crore. In Karnataka, at over Rs 60,000 crore, the cost of five guarantees exceeds the existing fiscal deficit. Redeeming the guarantees promised in GOP's "Nyay Patra" could cost the Central Government a mammoth around Rs 46,00,000 crore. In Maharashtra, Rs 1,500 per month to eligible women alone

would cost Rs 46,000 crore a year. When the top court says freebies are bad, why doesn't it ban them? A big deterrent is none other than the SC order of July 2013 which says "... it can't be construed as corrupt practice..." Within the meaning of section 123(1)(A) of the RPA, 1951, the expression 'bribery' has been defined to mean any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent of any gratification with the object of inducing an elector as a reward to his candidature. The irony is, that when a candidate uses his own pocket money to bribe the voter, it is treated as corrupt practice, but when the party on whose symbol he is seeking election bribes voters using 'public money', the top court doesn't treat it that way. The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognized policy or custom". The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognized policy/custom nor it is sanctioned in a court of law. It is a blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely to gain electoral advantage. The SC should change its stance to recognize this and force the Parliament to enact a law if it feels existing laws don't provide for it. *(The writer is a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)*

Transforming healthcare with digital technologies

The health-tech sector is poised for exponential growth, reshaping the future of healthcare for all its citizens

Digital technologies are anticipated to offer swift and personalized clinical services to each patient through their handheld devices. New Age Technologies (NATs), including Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), mobile technologies, cloud computing, Big Data, and 5G, are becoming essential tools in the realm of "Smart Health." Smart Health refers to an interconnected healthcare system that utilizes NATs for clinical analysis, treatment, medical setups, and hospital management. Examples of Smart Healthcare systems include surgical robots, RFID-based supply chains, and integrated health management platforms or Health-stacks. These Smart



CHARRU MALHOTRA

Healthcare systems provide real-time connectivity to doctors, reduce treatment costs, and offer predictive, personalized information to patients. For example, IoT-based wearable smart devices can track patients' progress, help manage medical emergencies, and promptly notify healthcare providers. India's National Health Policy 2017 aims to achieve "Universal Health Coverage for all citizens," grad-

ually transitioning from fragmented healthcare systems to a holistic approach using digital technologies. The Ayushman Bharat scheme, launched in September 2018, is a notable nationwide public health insurance program that provides health coverage of up to 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization through the 'Abha-ID' for each patient. Additionally, the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), launched on August 15, 2020, aims to create an integrated healthcare system linking practitioners and patients digitally, allowing real-time access to health records. Driven by these national initiatives, along with the rise of health startups, increased

healthcare spending, and growing demand for high-quality healthcare services, the health-tech sector in India is experiencing significant growth. According to recent reports, the health-tech industry in India is expected to reach \$6.5 billion by 2024 and \$78.4 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.67% during this period. India has already implemented initiatives such as the National Health Portal and the Health Management Information System (HMIS), with several state-level initiatives as well. Programs like the CoWIN Vaccine Platform, the Aarogya Setu contact tracing app, and the eSanjeevani National Telemedicine Service Platform



deserve special mention. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, private equity firms are increasingly investing in health tech companies. The health startup ecosystem in India primarily consists of six segments: telemedicine, pharmacy, fitness, wellness, IT healthcare, and home healthcare. Leading telemedicine startups such as Practo, 1mg, mFine, iCliniq, Digi-Doctor, and myUpchar are reporting impressive increases in tele-

consultations. These systems provide information on health indicators, identify individuals, verify them, and connect their health records with informed consent. However, the adoption of these technologies presents significant technical, legal, and socio-economic challenges. There is a lack of a cohesive and robust legal and regulatory framework, particularly in the health-tech domain. Security in smart healthcare is crucial, as it is an ecosystem susceptible to attacks or infiltration by individuals or hackers. The privacy of patients' sensitive health data requires an extra layer of protection beyond what is currently available through India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. Data interoperability and dig-

ital connectivity are essential for the seamless exchange of health data. The emerging 5G communication network in India can address this gap, but technological constraints hinder the widespread adoption of in-home health monitoring services. Healthcare specialists also face challenges such as limited access to and adaptability to digital technologies. These issues are further compounded by inadequate logistics support, a shortage of skilled manpower, and a tech-resistant attitude among various stakeholders. Drawing inspiration from the globally recognized Unified Payment Interface (UPI), a digital public infrastructure (DPI) for healthcare should be made accessible to all. Our anganwadi workers, in partic-

ular, should be supported by additional tech-savvy personnel. Capacity building for our healthcare providers and ensuring their access to digital devices and connectivity should be prioritized through common service centers (CSCs) and Public Health Centers (PHCs). Additionally, it is time for India to expand the scope of its Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, by including special provisions for handling the sensitive health data of patients. With these efforts, every Indian will not only have easy access to but also trust the "Digital Doctor in their pocket." *(The writer is a professor at Indian Institute of Public Administration, New-Delhi; views are personal)*

Xi urges global powers to facilitate direct Russia-Ukraine talks

AP ■ TAIPEI

Chinese President Xi Jinping called on world powers to help Russia and Ukraine resume direct dialogue during a meeting on Monday with Hungary's Prime Minister Viktor Orban, state broadcaster CCTV reported.

Orban made a surprise visit to China after similar trips last week to Russia and Ukraine to discuss prospects for a peaceful settlement of more than the two-year war. Hungary assumed the rotating presidency of the European Union this month and Orban has since embarked on a peace mission, which, however, lacks the endorsement of other European leaders.

"China is a key power in creating the conditions for peace



in the Russia-Ukraine war," Orban wrote on the social media platform X. "This is why I came to meet with President Xi in Beijing, just two months after his official visit to Budapest." Orban is widely seen as having the warmest relations with Xi and Russian President Vladimir Putin among European leaders. His visit to

Moscow last week drew condemnation from Kyiv and EU officials, who insisted Orban was not acting on behalf of the whole European bloc. Their rebuke failed to deter Orban from extending a similar visit to Beijing, which he called "Peace mission 3.0" in a picture posted on X.

During his meeting with Xi, Orban described China as a stabilising force amid global turbulence and praised its "constructive and important" peace initiatives. China has been promoting its own six-point peace plan, which it issued with Brazil in May. Beijing says it is neutral in the conflict, though in practice it supports Moscow through frequent state visits, growing trade and joint military drills. While hosting Orban, Xi called on Russia and Ukraine

to cease fire and on other major powers to create an environment conducive to talks. Only when all major powers project "positive energy rather than negative energy" can a cease-fire occur, Xi said, according to CCTV.

Orban hosted the Chinese leader in Hungary only two months ago as part of a three-country European tour that also included stops in France and Serbia, which unlike the other two is not a member of the EU or NATO.

During the trip, China upgraded its ties with Hungary to an "all-weather, comprehensive strategic partnership", one of its highest designations for foreign relations that in addition to Hungary applies only to Belarus, Pakistan and Venezuela. Hungary under Orban has

built substantial political and economic ties with China. The European nation hosts a number of Chinese electric vehicle battery facilities, and in December it announced that Chinese EV manufacturing giant BYD will open its first European EV production factory in the south of the country.

The Hungarian prime minister broadly opposes Western military aid to Ukraine and has blocked, delayed or watered down EU efforts to assist Kyiv and impose sanctions on Moscow over its invasion. Orban has long argued for a cessation of hostilities in Ukraine but without outlining what that might mean for the country's territorial integrity or future security. That posture has frustrated Hungary's EU and NATO

allies, who have denounced Russia's invasion as a breach of international law and a threat to the security of Eastern Europe.

Standing alongside Orban last week in Moscow, Putin declared that Russia wouldn't accept any cease-fire or temporary break in hostilities that would allow Ukraine "to recoup losses, regroup and reararm".

Putin repeated his demand that Ukraine withdraw its troops from the four regions that Moscow claims to have annexed in 2022 as a condition for any prospective peace talks. Ukraine and its Western allies have rejected that demand, suggesting it is akin to asking Kyiv to withdraw from its own territory.

China meanwhile has spread its influence in Central Asia

and Eastern Europe in recent years beyond its "no limits" partnership with Moscow. Over the weekend, China held "anti-terror" military drills with Belarus — a key ally of Russia — near the border with Poland. The drills came after last week Belarus joined a regional security organisation led by China and Russia.

Orban will next head to Washington, D.C., where NATO leaders are holding a summit to discuss ways to assure Ukraine of the alliance's continued support.

"Next stop: Washington," Orban posted on his social media account Monday. It was not clear whether he would meet separately with President Joe Biden, or Donald Trump, whose presidential candidacy Orban openly supports.

French vote divides among left, center, and far-right, risking political deadlock

AP ■ PARIS

French voters divided their legislature among left, center and far right, with no single political faction getting even close to the majority needed for form a government. The risk of paralysis loomed Monday for the European Union's second-largest economy.

President Emmanuel Macron gambled that his decision to call snap elections would give France a "moment of clarification," but the outcome showed the opposite, less than three weeks before the start of the Paris Olympics thrusts the country on the international stage. France's main share index opened with a dip in response to the vote.

According to the second-round results tallied early Monday, a leftist coalition surged to take the most seats in parliament. Macron's centrists have the second-largest faction and the unpopular president will have to form alliances to run the government. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally, which

Leaders express relief mixed with concern about French election result

Berlin (AP): Leaders across Europe reacted with relief but also some concern to the results of the snap election in France which leave a key EU country facing the prospect of a hung parliament and political paralysis. Relief, because the far-right National Rally did not come out as the strongest party, as many pro-European leaders had feared — but also concern, because no political grouping has a majority in the National Assembly. The government in Germany, which

together with France has long been viewed as the engine of European integration, expressed relief on Monday that the nationalist far right had not topped the polls. "For now, a certain relief prevails that things that we feared have not materialised," Steffen Hebestreit, a spokesperson for German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, told reporters in Berlin. "Only time will tell what happens with this election result and France will decide."

led in the first round of voting, came in third after political maneuvering to keep its candidates from power.

Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said he would present his resignation Monday, but could stay on through the Olympics or longer if needed. Newly elected and returning lawmakers

were expected to arrive at the National Assembly to begin negotiations in earnest. Macron himself will leave later in the week for a NATO summit in Washington.

Political deadlock could rattle markets and have far-ranging implications for the war in Ukraine, global diplomacy and

Europe's economic stability. According to official results released early Monday, all three main blocs fell far short of the 289 seats needed to control the 577-seat National Assembly, the more powerful of France's two legislative chambers.

The results showed just over 180 seats for the New Popular Front leftist coalition, which placed first, ahead of Macron's centrist alliance, with more than 160 seats. Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally and its allies were restricted to third place, although their more than 140 seats were still way ahead of the party's previous best showing of 89 seats in 2022.

Macron has three years remaining on his presidential term. In announcing his resignation, Attal made clearer than ever his disapproval of Macron's shock decision to call the election, saying "I didn't choose this dissolution" of the outgoing National Assembly, where the president's centrist alliance used to be single biggest group, albeit without an absolute majority.

NATO summit hosted by Biden to show strong support for Ukraine

PTI ■ WASHINGTON



The NATO summit, being hosted by US President Joe Biden here this week, is likely to show a strong demonstration of America and its allies' support for Ukraine and make significant new announcements to increase military, political and financial support for the war-torn European country, according to administration officials.

The three-day NATO summit to be held here from July 9 to 11 will be the first to include Sweden as a member of the alliance. Sweden officially joined the alliance in March.

The historic summit would also mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which is now a strong military alliance of 32 countries.

"It has been truly indispensable to Euro-Atlantic security, deterring threats to the United States and our allies," a senior administration official told reporters ahead of the summit.

On Sunday, President Biden also spoke about the upcoming NATO summit in Washington, DC.

"I'm about to host the NATO nations in Washington. We put them together," Biden said. "The world's looking to us. Not a joke. The world is looking to America not to carry their burden, but to lead their hopes."

Being held in the American capital, soon after Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a summit meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, the NATO summit, officials said "will send a strong signal to Putin that if he thinks he can outlast the coalition of

countries supporting Ukraine, he is dead wrong."

"We are also going to send an important message to the rest of the world, including through our partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, as we stand together united and in support of democratic values," said the official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The Washington summit will kick off on Tuesday, with Biden welcoming NATO leaders, and along with the First Lady, hosting a 75th anniversary commemoration event at the Mellon Auditorium, which is the site of the original signing of the North Atlantic Treaty that established the NATO on April 4, 1949. It is also the site of the 1999 50th anniversary commemorative event hosted by the then president Bill Clinton.

NATO was created to provide collective security against the Soviet Union.

On July 10, the president will welcome Sweden as the newest member of the alliance at a meeting of NATO's 32 allies. Later in the evening, the president would host the NATO leaders for a dinner at the White

House. On July 11, NATO will hold a meeting with the European Union (EU) and NATO's Indo-Pacific partners — Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand — to deepen their cooperation. Officials also said there will be a strong language regarding China.

"We are bringing together some of our closest non-NATO partners to have a discussion around issues like resilience and cyber disinformation, technology and the like. In terms of deterrence and defence, of course, NATO is focused on the Euro-Atlantic area, and that is where its capabilities are being deployed," an official said.

"But the United States has a range of partnerships with countries around the world, which you might call variable geometry, with different partners including in the Indo-Pacific. This particular grouping of the IP4, as we call them in NATO lingo — Australia, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea — these are some of our closest partners that we work within the region," the official added.

Sunak makes apology calls to ex-MPs

London (PTI): Former British prime minister Rishi Sunak spent the weekend calling the Conservative Party candidates who lost their seats in the general election last week to apologise for the party's worst performance at the ballot box, with just 121 seats in the House of Commons.

Several former members of Parliament told "The Daily Telegraph" about the "very sympathetic call" they received from the British Indian MP, who won his own seat of Richmond and Northallerton in Yorkshire and remains the Leader of the Opposition until the Tories elect his successor.

The 44-year-old had apologised to his party colleagues and the nation in his farewell speech at 10 Downing Street on Friday, when he also announced his resignation as Tory leader after the Labour Party won a landslide victory with 411 MPs in a 650-seat Commons.

UK's PM Starmer seeks to improve on 'botched' trade deal with EU

AP ■ LONDON



From left, Northern Ireland Secretary Hilary Benn, Northern Ireland's First Minister Michelle O'Neill, deputy First Minister Emma Little-Pengelly and Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer pose for a photo, at Stormont Caste, during the Prime Minister's tour of the UK following Labour's victory in the 2024 general election, in Belfast, Monday.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is seeking to reset relations at home and abroad. During a visit on Sunday to Edinburgh, that he billed as an "immediate reset" with the regional governments of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, Starmer said he would also seek to improve the UK's "botched" trade deal with the European Union (EU).

"I do think that we can get a much better deal than the botched deal that (former prime minister) Boris Johnson saddled the UK with," he said in reference to the pact negotiated after Brexit.

Starmer said there were many discussions ahead to strengthen trading, research and defence ties with the EU. But he said those talks had begun as his top diplomat made his first visit abroad to Germany, Poland and Sweden.

With two of Starmer's ministers in Europe ahead of a NATO meeting, the premier made a point of visiting the leaders of the regional govern-

ments in the UK following his party's landslide victory last week.

Starmer, who said he has a "mandate to do politics differently", met with Scottish First Minister John Swinney in an effort to "turn disagreement into cooperation".

"We will serve every single person in Scotland," Starmer told a group of enthusiastic supporters. "Performance, self-interest — they are the politics of the past. The politics of this Labour government of 2024 is about public service, restoring standards of making sure that we always, always have in our mind's eye the people who elected us into government."

While each of the devolved nations in the UK elects members to the House of Commons in London, they also have their own regional parliaments.

Starmer's Labour Party trounced Swinney's Scottish National Party for seats in Parliament. But the SNP, which has pushed for Scottish independence, still holds a majority at Holyrood, the Scottish Parliament.

'It's time for party drama to end'

Washington (AP): President Joe Biden, in a letter to congressional Democrats, continued to stand firm against calls for him to drop his candidacy and called for an "end" to the intra-party drama that has torn apart Democrats about whether he should stay in the race.

Biden wrote in the two-page letter Monday that "the question of how to move forward has been well-aired for over a week now. And it's time for it to end."

He stressed that the party has "one job", which is to defeat presumptive GOP presidential nominee Donald Trump in November.

"We have 42 days to the Democratic Convention and 119 days to the general election," Biden said in the letter. "Any weakening of resolve or lack of clarity about the task ahead only helps Trump and hurts us. It's time to come together, move forward as a unified party, and defeat Donald Trump."

The letter was sent from the campaign to Democratic lawmakers as they return to Washington following the July

4 recess. Deeply torn over President Joe Biden's candidacy, Democratic lawmakers return to Washington at a pivotal moment as they decide whether to work to revive his campaign or edge out the party leader, a make-or-break time for his reelection and their own political futures.

Anxiety is running high as top-ranking Democratic lawmakers are joining calls for Biden to step aside after his dismal public debate performance and defiant response to the uproar.

At the same time, some of the president's most staunch supporters are redoubling the fight for Biden's presidency, insisting there is no one better to beat Republican Donald Trump in what many see as among the most important elections of a lifetime.

As lawmakers weigh whether Biden should stay or go, there appear to be no easy answers in sight.

It's a tenuous and highly volatile juncture for the president's party. Democrats who have worked alongside Biden for

years — if not decades — and cherished his life's work on policy priorities are now entertaining uncomfortable questions about his political future. And it's unfolding as Biden hosts world leaders for the NATO summit this week in Washington.

Time is not on their side, almost a month from the Democratic National Convention and just a week before Republicans gather in Milwaukee to renominate Trump as their presidential pick.

Many Democrats are arguing the attention needs to be focused instead on the former president's felony conviction in the hush money case and pending federal charges in his effort to overturn the 2020 election. It's what Biden himself might call an inflection point.

As he defiantly says he will only step aside if the Lord almighty comes and tells him to, Democrats in the House and Senate are deciding how hard they want to fight the president to change course, or if they want to change course at all.

South Korea to cancel plan to suspend licenses of striking doctors

Seoul (AP): South Korea said Monday it'll withdraw its earlier plan to suspend licenses of striking doctors as part of its efforts to resolve the country's months-long medical impasse.

It wasn't immediately known whether and how many of thousands of the striking doctors would return to work in the wake of the government's announcement. Also, the plan could invite criticism that it hurts the principle of fairness over the government's dealing with other previous labour strikes as well as doctors who already returned to work.

Health Minister Cho KyooHong said Monday the government has decided not to suspend their licenses of the strikers, regardless of whether they return to their hospitals or not.

He said the government's decision is meant to address a shortage of doctors treating



emergency and serious patients and restore a training system to add more professional doctors. More than 13,000 junior doctors, who are medical interns and residents, walked off the job in February in protest of the government's plan to sharply boost school admissions. Their walkouts have significantly burdened operations of university

hospitals where they had worked while training. A Seoul court in May ruled in support of the government's plan. The government later withdrew its plan to suspend licenses of doctor who returned to their hospitals but didn't do so on others who remained off the job. Officials have said they want to add up to 10,000 doc-

tors by 2035 to cope with the country's fast-aging population and a shortage of physicians in rural areas and in low-paying yet essential specialties like pediatrics and emergency departments. Doctors say schools aren't ready to handle an abrupt increase in students and that it would ultimately undermine the country's medical services. But critics argue that physicians, one of the best-paid jobs in South Korea, are mainly worried that having more doctors would lower their incomes. The striking doctors are a fraction of all doctors in South Korea, estimated to number between 115,000 and 140,000. But in some major hospitals, they represented about 30 per cent to 40 per cent of the doctors, assisting fully qualified doctors and department chiefs during surgeries and other treatments while training.

Beryl makes landfall in Texas

AP ■ MATAGORDA

Houston. More than 1,000 flights have been canceled at Houston's two airports, according to tracking data from FlightAware.

Beryl dumped soaking rains across Houston after coming ashore and was expected to bring damaging winds into East Texas, near Louisiana, as the storm pushed north after making landfall.

"Beryl's moving inland but this is not the end of the story yet," said Jack Beven, senior hurricane specialist at the National Hurricane Center. Beryl strengthened and became a hurricane again late Sunday. The storm had weakened after leaving a path of deadly destruction through parts of Mexico and the Caribbean.

A hurricane warning remains in effect for the Texas coast from Mesquite Bay north to Port Bolivar, the center said. Beryl is expected to weaken to a tropical storm Monday and a tropical depression Tuesday,

the weather service said, forecasting a turn to the northeast and increase in speed Monday night and Tuesday.

The storm's center is expected to move over eastern Texas on Monday and then through the lower Mississippi Valley into the Ohio Valley on Tuesday and Wednesday, the weather service said.

People on the Texas coast boarded up windows and left beach towns under an evacuation order. As the storm neared the coast Sunday, Texas officials warned of power outages and flooding but also expressed worry that not enough residents and beach vacationers in Beryl's path had heeded warnings to leave.

"One of the things that kind of trigger our concern a little bit, we've looked at all of the roads leaving the coast and the maps are still green," said Texas Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who is serving as the state's acting governor while Gov. Greg Abbott is travelling overseas. "So we

don't see many people leaving." Tropical storm winds extended 115 miles (185 kilometers) from the center and the hurricane center warned residents to be prepared for possible flash flooding in parts of middle, upper and eastern Texas as well as Arkansas as the storm gradually turns to the north and then northeast later Monday.

Along the Texas coast, many residents and business owners took the typical storm precautions but also expressed uncertainty about the storm's intensity.

In Port Lavaca, Jimmy May fastened plywood over the windows of his electrical supply company and said he wasn't concerned about the possible storm surge. He recalled his business had escaped flooding in a previous hurricane that brought a 20-foot (6-meter) storm surge. "In town, you know, if you're in the low-lying areas, obviously, you need to get out of there," he said.

Kyiv children's hospital among buildings bombarded; dozens killed

AP ■ KYIV A major Russian missile attack across Ukraine on Monday killed at least 31 people and injured 154, officials said...

Western leaders who have backed Ukraine will hold a three-day NATO summit in Washington beginning Tuesday. They will look at how they can reassure Kyiv of the alliance's unwavering support...

crews worked in protective masks. The attack forced the evacuation of the hospital and its temporary closure. Some mothers carried their children away on their backs...



Emergency services work at the site of Okhmatdyt children's hospital hit by Russian missiles, in Kyiv, Ukraine AP/PTI

Ukraine's Emergency Service said. In the capital's Shevchenkivskyi district, a three-story section of a residential building was destroyed. Emergency crews searched for casualties, and AP reporters saw them remove three bodies.

Ukraine's Emergency Service said. In the capital's Shevchenkivskyi district, a three-story section of a residential building was destroyed. Emergency crews searched for casualties, and AP reporters saw them remove three bodies.

Japan, Philippines sign defence agreement

AP ■ MANILA Japan and the Philippines signed a key defence pact on Monday allowing the deployment of Japanese forces for joint drills in the Southeast Asian region...

concern over the dangerous and escalatory actions by China" in Second Thomas Shoal, the scene of a recent confrontation between Chinese and Philippine forces in the South China Sea...

however, have steadily deepened defence and security ties. Kishida's moves dovetail with Marcos' effort to forge security alliances to bolster the Philippine military's limited ability to defend its territorial interests in the South China Sea...

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New offshoot of banned JuD resume political activities

PTI ■ LAHORE After a break of some five months, the political offshoot of banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) of the Mumbai terror attacks mastermind Hafiz Saeed has resumed its political activities in Pakistan by holding a demonstration here in Punjab province...

burden on the masses by imposing huge taxes. Qayyum said that on the next stage the PMML might stage a sit-in against the government if it failed to give relief to the masses. As the PMML is the 'new political face' of the JuD, a spokesman of the party denied any affiliation with Saeed's organisations...

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Indonesia landslide triggered by heavy rain leaves 12 dead

AP ■ JAKARTA A landslide triggered by torrential rains crashed onto an unauthorised gold mining operation on Indonesia's Sulawesi island, killing at least 12 people, officials said on Monday. Dozens others were reported missing.



Informal mining operations are common in Indonesia, providing a tenuous livelihood to thousands who labour in conditions with a high risk of serious injury or death. Landslides, flooding and collapses of tunnels are just some of the hazards facing miners.

Pak will continue to seek IMF bailouts if it fails to boost tax revenue: Finance minister

Islamabad (PTI): Pakistan Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb has warned that the cash-strapped country will continue to seek IMF bailouts if it fails to boost tax revenue, according to a media report on Monday. The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader in an interview with the UK-based Financial Times newspaper said that he was "relatively confident" of reaching a staff-level agreement with the Washington-based lender this month for an estimated loan of USD 6-8 billion.

public. Weeks after slashing the fuel prices ahead of the Eid ul Adha festival, the cash-strapped Pakistan government on July 1 sharply hiked their prices for the next fortnight as it began the new fiscal year. The tax rises will mostly fall on salaried workers, who comprise a relatively small part of Pakistan's mostly informal economy, as well as some retail and export businesses.

Army to be deployed across Pakistan during Muharram

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD The Pakistan government on Monday decided to deploy the Army across the country to maintain law and order during Muharram, amidst fear of attacks by militant groups on Shiite rallies. Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, began on Monday. Shiite Muslims take out rallies during the first ten days of the month to commemorate the martyrdom of Hussein ibne Ali, the grandson of the Prophet of Islam.

of troop deployment, which will be enforced indefinitely, will be finalised with the authorities of the provinces concerned, including Gilgit Baltistan, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Islamabad. "The date of de-requisitioning of said deployment will be decided subsequently after mutual consultation among all stakeholders," the notification stated.

resistance to tyranny, and the Shiite Muslims take out rallies culminating in huge processions on the 9th and 10th day of the month. The Sunni Muslims have a historic theological rivalry with the Shiite, and extremist Sunni groups brand them as heretics, and target them through bombings, with Pakistan witnessing numerous such attacks in the past.

Boeing accepts plea deal to avoid criminal trial over 737 Max crashes

AP ■ WASHINGTON Boeing will plead guilty to a criminal fraud charge stemming from two crashes of 737 Max jetliners that killed 346 people after the government determined the company violated an agreement that had protected it from prosecution for more than three years, the Justice Department said on Sunday night.

for it. The plea deal, which still must receive the approval of a federal judge to take effect, calls for Boeing to pay an additional USD 243.6 million fine. That was the same amount it paid under the 2021 settlement that the Justice Department said the company breached. An independent monitor would be named to oversee Boeing's safety and quality procedures for three years.

liner during an Alaska Airlines flight in January, a Justice Department official said. The deal also does not cover any current or former Boeing officials, only the corporation. In a statement, Boeing confirmed that it had reached the deal with the Justice Department but had no further comment.

of Boeing's crime are being hidden," said Paul Cassell, a lawyer for some of the families. Federal prosecutors alleged Boeing committed conspiracy to defraud the government by misleading regulators about a flight-control system that was implicated in the crashes, which took place in Indonesia in October 2018 and in Ethiopia less five months later.

Advertisement for the Punjab State Cooperative Milk Producers Federation Ltd. Notice Inviting e Tender.

Advertisement for Verka, a cooperative milk producer, regarding a tender for outsourcing services.

Advertisement for Maharaja Ranjit Singh Punjab Technical University, Dabwali, regarding an e-tender notice.

Advertisement for NCDFI (National Cooperative Development Finance Corporation) regarding an e-auction for the purchase of various items.

Time to push disinvestment of public sector banks: SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government should go ahead with disinvestment of public sector banks (PSBs) as they are in good condition, SBI said in its research report on Monday. The report also pitched for the consolidation of existing government-owned banks.

"As banks are in good condition, the government should take stance on disinvestment of PSBs," the report titled 'Prelude to Union Budget 2024-25' said.

With regard to the privatisation of IDBI Bank, it said the government and Life Insurance Corporation of India are selling an almost 61 per cent stake in the lender. "They invited bids from buyers in October 2022. In January 2023, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) received several expressions of interest for the



IDBI Bank stake on offer. We expect the government to clarify this in the Budget," it said. Presently, the government owns over 45 per cent stake in IDBI Bank, and LIC has a 49.24 per cent shareholding.

The report also recommended that the government should tweak the tax on deposit interest and make flat tax treatment across the maturity ladder in line with mutual fund and equity markets.

"Household net financial savings has declined to 5.3 per

cent of GDP in FY23 and is expected to be 5.4 per cent in FY24. If we make deposit rate attractive in line with MFs, then this could push up household financial savings and CASA," it said.

As this amount will be in the hands of depositors, the report said, it could unleash additional spending and thereby, more GST revenue to the government.

"Increase in bank deposits will bring not only stability in core deposit base and financial

Markets settle on flat note in muted trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Stock market benchmark Sindices Sensex and Nifty ended flat on Monday in a lacklustre trade as investors opted to book profits after the recent record rally in equities. Weak cues from Asian markets also added to the muted trend in domestic equities.

After beginning the trade on a weak note, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 36.22 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 79,960.38. During the day, it went lower by 264.77 points or 0.33 per cent to 79,731.83. The NSE Nifty dipped 3.30 points or 0.01 per cent to 24,320.55.

Among the Sensex pack, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints,

Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv were the biggest laggards.

ITC, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle, HCL Technologies and Tata Motors were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were trading in the positive territory. US markets ended with gains on Friday.

In a volatile session on Friday, the broader NSE Nifty continued its record-breaking run and inched up 21.70 points or 0.09 per cent to close at its lifetime high of 24,323.85. The BSE benchmark, however, dropped 53.07 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 79,996.60.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.97 per cent to USD 85.70 a barrel.

Rupee falls 1 paisa to 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared initial gains to settle 1 paisa lower at 83.50 against the US dollar on Monday, as muted domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.45 and hit the intraday high of 83.44 and a low of 83.50 against the American currency during the session.

It finally settled at 83.50 against the dollar, registering a loss of one paisa over the previous close.

On Friday, the rupee settled at 83.49 against the US dollar.

Forex traders said the rupee gained on a weak dollar and decline in crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets put pressure on the domestic unit.

"The US Dollar declined on disappointing non-farm payrolls report on Friday, which raised expectations that US Federal Reserve may cut

interest rates in its September Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting," said Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.90, higher by 0.03 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.88 per cent to USD 85.78 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak tone in the US Dollar and FII inflows. However, a correction in the domestic markets and political uncertainty in France as the election results indicate a hung parliament may cap the sharp upside," Choudhary added.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 36.22 points, or 0.05 per cent, lower at 79,960.38 points.

Mercedes-Benz India posts record half-yearly sales at 9,262 units



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz on Monday reported a 9 per cent growth in sales at 9,262 units in India in the first half of 2024, its highest ever half-yearly sales in the country, riding on strong demand across categories and availability of volume models.

The company had posted sales of 8,528 units in the January-June period of 2023, which was its previous highest half-yearly sales, Mercedes-Benz India said in a statement.

It plans to launch six new products in the second half (H2) of 2024.

SUV penetration was at 55 per cent in H1 2024, while the TEV (top-end vehicle) segment priced above Rs 1.5 crore comprised 25 per cent of total sales, it added.

The SUV segment saw robust performance from the GLA, GLE, GLE and GLS models, while the sedan portfolio comprising the A-Class, C-

Class, outgoing LWB E-Class and S-Class topped customer preference for luxury sedans, it added.

The BEV (battery electric vehicle) portfolio grew by 60 per cent in H1 24, comprising 5 per cent of total sales volumes, Mercedes-Benz India said.

"New and updated products, elevated customer experience at retail and ease of ownership, combined with positive customer sentiments boosted our best-ever H1 sales performance," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director & CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The company further said availability of volume models also played a part in delivering record sales in the first half of this year.

On the outlook for the rest of the year, Iyer said, "We have new products coming up for the upcoming festive season. So we feel we should be able to close the year with a double-digit growth as projected earlier."

Tata Consumer Products to accelerate growth of core businesses

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Leading FMCG company Tata Consumer Products Limited (TCPL) will continue to invest in its brands and accelerate the growth momentum of the core businesses, tea, coffee and salt, the company's annual report said.

In the annual report for 2023-24, TCPL said that to strengthen and accelerate core businesses, contribution of modern trade to total sales within the country was 14 per cent driven by the growth of

new businesses.

During 2023-24, the company continued to undertake focused brand-building efforts and launched several products. TCPL said that central to the company's growth strategy was on focusing on the core businesses of tea, coffee and salt.

TCPL (formerly Tata Tea) said the company strengthened the tea and coffee businesses and also created new vectors of growth. The company was also successful in driving profitable growth in the key international markets of UK, USA and



Canada.

The company's focus on innovation lay in its belief that it is a strong strategic pillar and plays a significant role in meeting future ambitions, both on top line (revenue) and bottom line (profit).

TCPL said in the report, "We aspire to be a leading player in the FMCG industry by expanding our play in the existing categories and venturing into new spaces", adding that the company has taken both organic and inorganic routes to capitalise on industry trends and tap new

consumers and markets.

The company clocked a revenue of more than Rs 15,000 crore during the last fiscal. TCPL acquired Capital Foods and Organic India to address the needs of the diverse consumer spectrum.

In the last four years, TCPL's compounded annual growth rate of the tea business in India was nine per cent while revenue from coffee grew 29 per cent year-on-year.

The CAGR of salt during the last four years was 17 per cent, while that of packaged foods in India was 31 per cent.

Event on integration of AI in digital skills development a hit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Powered Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) Masterclass, held last week, showcased remarkable global participation, with notable engagement from South African countries.

Interestingly, a few from Pakistan and China also took part under India's flagship skilling platform SIDH.

This significant event on July 4, focusing on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital skills development, witnessed substantial turnout from various continents, reflecting growing international interest in AI and digital education.

Organised by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and UNESCO, the masterclass brought together



global experts and enthusiasts.

It was attended by key dignitaries including Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Dr Haja Ramatulai Wuri — Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Sierra Leone; Ruben Sargsyan, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Armenia; Atul Kumar Tiwari, Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship; Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO, NSDC and MD and others.

NBCC to execute incubation centre at NIT Patna

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

NBCC (India) Limited has been entrusted with the execution of construction and development of Incubation Centre at NIT Patna (Bihta Campus). The estimated cost for the same is approximately Rs 36 Crore.

The Incubation Centre, spanning in an area of 6,500 sqm, shall be a state-of-the-art facility. The facility is designed as basement + ground + 4 floors structure, accommodating various essential amenities and advanced infrastructure.

As per the scope of work, NBCC shall be responsible for the conceptual planning, detailed architectural & structural design, drafting, including the supervision of construction for buildings, electrical systems, furniture, IT networking, and more.

Two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue this fiscal: CareEdge Ratings

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The two-wheeler industry is expected to sustain a steady volume growth this fiscal driven by improved domestic sales and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles, a report said on Monday.

According to CareEdge Ratings, post-Covid, sales volume of two-wheelers had consistently declined during FY20, FY21 and FY22 before starting to recover from FY23, with sales momentum continuing in FY24 as well.

"CareEdge Ratings anticipates two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue in FY25 and it would be more driven by improved domestic sales, higher EV sales, launch of CNG powered two-wheelers and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles," said



Hardik Shah, Director at CareEdge Ratings.

The growth in the two-wheeler segment in FY25 is also expected to be aided by the likely interest rate cuts in the second half of FY25, strong demand for new model launches coupled with recovery in exports from its low base and favourable monsoon which is likely to

improve rural consumer sentiment and income levels, said Arti Roy, Associate Director at CareEdge Ratings.

In FY23, the Indian two-wheeler industry recorded sales of 19.51 million units, an 8 per cent growth compared to the previous fiscal year's 18.01 million units.

In FY24, the industry continued its upward trajectory, achieving 9.8 per cent growth with a total sales volume of 21.43 million units. However, this was still short of the peak sales volume recorded in FY19, when annual sales volume had reached 24.46 million units, it said.

During FY24, the domestic two-wheeler industry witnessed total sales volume of 17.97 million units, reflecting a growth rate of 13 per cent, while the exports volume experienced a decline of 5 per cent.

High prices of vegetables causing pain to consumers

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Retail prices for vegetables, eggs, and poultry meat remain high in Kolkata markets, causing suffering for the common man.

Tomato prices have soared to Rs 80-100 per kg from Rs 45-50 a month ago, while Brinjal is selling for Rs 110-140 per kg, a jump of nearly 150 per cent from early June, greengrocers in several markets in the city said.

Prices of several other vegetables such as bitter melon, green chilli and bottle gourd have also increased by an average of 50 per cent. Egg and poultry meat prices have risen by 20-30 per cent in local markets.

"Now tomatoes in Bengal are coming from other states. There is a short supply of tomatoes from Bangalore and Himachal Pradesh due to heat waves and heavy rain. The production was hit due to heat waves and disruptions in logistics due to heavy rain," a source in West Bengal Vendors Association told PTI.

Agriculture Minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay



said that people are facing price pain since the Centre reduced support for farmers in fertilisers and transport subsidies, while climatic conditions have also aggravated the situation.

"The West Bengal government continues to support our farmers who are facing a rise in input costs. On the other hand, the Centre is reducing various subsidies. Hence, both farmers and commoners are suffering," said Chattopadhyay, also a Trinamool Congress leader.

He said that the state government has a retail distribution network, 'Sufal

Bangla,' the outlets of which sell vegetables and food articles at reasonable prices.

"In Sufal Bangla, tomatoes are priced at Rs 65 per kg against a minimum of Rs 80 in the retail market. Bitter melon is sold at Rs 72 per kg, and brinjal at Rs 102 per kg, which are 10-20 per cent cheaper. We are planning to increase the number of outlets from 484 now," Chattopadhyay said.

"Over the last three weeks, the prices of vegetables, eggs, and poultry have surged. Tomato prices have doubled, and onion prices are also inching higher. Inflation in essential items continues to cause us

pain in one way or another," Manashi Sanyal, a homemaker, said.

Food inflation likely intensified in June from the 8.7 per cent rate observed in April and May. According to Crisil's food plate cost tracker, the cost of a home-cooked vegetarian meal increased by 10 per cent year-on-year, reaching a six-month high, while the cost of non-vegetarian meals hit a seven-month peak.

The RBI has consistently expressed concerns over rising food prices. Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index moderated to a one-year low of 4.75 per cent in May. However, inflation in the food basket was 8.69 per cent, marginally down from 8.70 per cent in April.

However, fresh harvests from southern states are set to hit markets soon, which should ease prices within days, the consumer affairs ministry officials expect, adding that summer sowing of key vegetables is expanding robustly on the back of good rains.

Gold rises ₹100; silver rallies ₹870 amid strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 73,410 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with strong global trend, according to HDFC Securities. The precious metal closed at Rs 73,310 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Silver prices also rallied Rs 870 to Rs 94,270 per kg. It had settled at Rs 93,400 per kg in the previous session.

"In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are quoted at Rs 73,410 per 10 grams, up by Rs 100 from the Friday's afternoon price.

"Gold prices at Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) traded lower amid risk-averse sentiment and profit booking after surging in the week gone by," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was USD 2,373 per ounce, up USD 10 per ounce from the previous close.

Budget FY25 should focus on tax relief to boost consumption: India Inc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Budget FY25 should focus on offering relief to taxpayers, especially in the lower income brackets, to stimulate consumption, industry players suggested.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23 which will be the first major policy document of the new government.

The industry also urged the finance minister to lower corporate tax, phase out tax exemptions, and broaden tax base to boost economic growth.

"Rationalise and simplify the tax system to improve compliance and promote investment. Consider measures such as reducing corporate tax rates, phasing out tax exemptions, and broadening the tax base to make the tax regime more efficient and equitable," ASSOCHAM said.

Rating agency ICRA said the government is likely to set a fiscal deficit target at 4.9-5 per cent for FY25, as against 5.1 per cent estimated in the Interim Budget on February 1,

without compromising the capital expenditure target of Rs 11.1 lakh crore.

"While favourable developments on the revenue front portend positively for the fiscal dynamics in FY2025, ICRA believes that fiscal consolidation will turn quite challenging beyond the current fiscal," the rating agency said.

Mayank Gupta, co-founder and COO of Zopper Insurtech said the Budget is expected to focus on policies to promote economic growth and offer relief especially for the lower income brackets to stimulate consumption.

"From the point of view of insurance, we suggest amending section 80C of the Income Tax Act to permit a greater limit on insurance premium payments, thereby encouraging more individuals to buy insurance products. Additionally, there should also be an allowance of deduction for term life insurance under the new tax regime," he said.

Anish Mashruwala, partner, JSA Advocates and Solicitors said NBFC sector is expecting some ease of doing business considering the multitude of

regulatory compliances.

"Of course a balance needs to be struck in terms of oversight and hopefully this is something that the government ably considers," Mashruwala said.

Rumki Majumdar, economist, Deloitte India suggested that the government must expand the scope of PLI schemes, especially for sectors that can create more jobs, such as textiles, handicraft and leather.

The schemes must continue in sectors that have seen success, such as electronics, auto and semiconductors, Majumdar added.

On expectations from the finance minister, Vishal Goel, managing director, RX Promellant said the life sciences sector has immense potential and has been drawing global players to not only leverage the strength in contract manufacturing but also establishing global capability centres (GCCs).

"We are optimistic that the upcoming budget announcement will prioritise the life sciences sector, enhancing investment flows and fuelling innovation and success in India," Goel said.

High-scoring Spain faces Mbappé's France with spot in Euro 2024 final on line

AP ■ MUNICH
Spain and France meet in the semifinals of the European Championship on Tuesday. The match pits one of the highest-scoring teams at the tournament against one of the lowest as France's star forward Kylian Mbappé has struggled to get to grips with his mask. Kickoff is at 9 p.m. Local time (1900 GMT) in Munich. Here's what to know about the match:
Match facts: The winner will play England or the Netherlands in the final on Sunday in Berlin. Their semifinal is on Wednesday.
■ Spain and France's quarterfinals both went to extra time. Substitute Mikel Merino's game-winning goal in the last minute of extra time handed Spain a 2-1 victory over host nation Germany, while France needed penalties to see off Portugal after the match ended goalless.
■ No France player has scored from open play at Euro 2024. The French have only scored through two own goals and a penalty from Mbappé. Spain has netted 11 times.
■ Mbappé, who will be facing several of his new Real Madrid

teammates, will again be wearing a protective mask after sustaining a broken nose in France's group opener against Austria.
■ Spain, which is chasing a record fourth European Championship title, has been perfect in Germany. It was the only team to win all its group stage matches, while France could only muster draws against Poland and the Netherlands after a narrow win over Austria.
Team news: Spain paid the price for its dramatic win over Germany and a number of players will miss the semifinal - and in some cases the final should La Roja get there - because of suspension or injury.
■ Midfielder Pedri had to come off in the eighth minute against Germany with a knee injury following a hefty challenge from Toni Kroos and has been ruled out of the rest of Euro 2024. He will again be replaced by Dani Olmo - who came on for the 21-year-old and went on to score the opener as well as set up Merino's winner.
■ Dani Carvajal was sent off late in extra time for a second yellow card and will be



suspended against France, as will fellow defender Robin le Normand after picking up another booking. Veteran Jesús Navas is likely to be tasked with marking Mbappé.
■ France coach Didier Deschamps has no injury problems as Marcus Thuram returned to training on Sunday, alleviating concerns he could miss the semifinal after taking a blow to his thigh at the end of the match against Portugal.
By the numbers: Spain and France have only conceded three goals between them. The only time France goalkeeper Mike Maignan had to pick the ball out of his net was Poland's retaken penalty in the group stage, while Spain conceded against Georgia and Germany.
■ The teams have met 36 times, with Spain winning 16 to France's 13 - including five of the past eight.
■ This is Spain's sixth European Championship semifinal. It has only once failed to advance to the trophy match, losing on penalties to eventual champion Italy at Euro 2020.
■ France has reached the semifinals on five previous occasions, winning three.

■ France has reached the final in three of last four major tournaments, losing 1-0 after extra time to Portugal at Euro 2016 and to Argentina on penalties in the 2022 World Cup, but beating Croatia to claim its second world title in 2018.
"What they're saying 'We're in the semifinals and it's something we shouldn't take for granted, even if we may be used to it recently. Now we go to win it.'" - France coach Didier Deschamps.
"Very few people gave us a chance and staying under the radar helped us start the tournament with confidence. Spain is a team to respect. I knew we had a great team and that's how it turned out." - Spain defender Marc Cucurella.
"It's natural for him. He has this gift of carrying the team, the group. He gives ideas, advice to the players. He was born for that. He was born to pull the group up." - France striker Randal Kolo Muani on Mbappé's captaincy.
"My players are insatiable. There's always room for improvement, of course, but we can't question their pride, quality and commitment."



India eyeing first win against Myanmar in international women's friendlies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India will aim for a first win against Myanmar when they renew their rivalry against their higher-ranked neighbours in two away women's football friendlies beginning at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon, Myanmar on Tuesday.
The 67th ranked Indians are winless in all five of their meetings with Myanmar (WR 54), losing four and drawing once.
But it's been five years since they faced Myanmar with the last one being a 3-3 in the AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers in Mandalay in 2019. Sandhiya Ranganathan, Sanju and Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi, all of them part of the current squad as well, scored in that fixture.
Prior to that, India suffered defeats on each of the four occasions at the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers (2013), AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers (2015, 2018) and the Gold Cup (2019).
"We've played against them before, so we have an idea about them. Myanmar are strong and physically tough. Their mobility and speed is also good," Indian captain Loitongbam Ashalata Devi said in an AIFF release.
However, it's been more than five years since India last faced Myanmar, and the captain believes these two games will mark a fresh start in this rivalry.
"Myanmar's game style has changed a lot since we last played them. In the Asian Games, we watched them play. They have brought in a lot of youngsters, who can generate

more energy on the pitch. Our team has the perfect mixture of senior and young players.
"I believe we can perform better and the Myanmar tour could be a successful one," said the 31-year-old Indian skipper. This will be India's second consecutive FIFA women's international match window facing a higher-ranked opponent.
India had previously faced 48th-ranked Uzbekistan in Tashkent on May 31 and June 4, losing 0-3 and drawing 0-0, respectively.
"Competing against better and higher-ranked opponents is always an advantage. It leaves us with the opportunity to learn more and change strategies according to different situations as we did against Uzbekistan. I'm sure we'll learn a lot from the Myanmar games too," Ashalata said.
Myanmar have been out of action since the Asian Games in China last September. They were knocked out of the group stage after losing to Korea Republic (0-3) and Philippines (0-3), and their only win came against Hong Kong (1-0).
Before that, Myanmar finished runners-up to Vietnam in the Southeast Asian Games. Head coach Langam Chaoba Devi feels India can match them.
"We closely observed Myanmar's style of play when they faced Korea Republic and Philippines," said Chaoba.
"Physically they are similar to us, with little difference in height and strength. However, they are technically very sound. But again, as I've said, we can surely match them," added the coach.

Never give up, fight till last moment: Sreejesh's learning from Rohit's men

PTI ■ BENGALURU
Playing in his fourth and probably last Olympics, veteran India hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh has learnt a valuable lesson from the T20 World Cup-winning cricket team -- 'never give up and celebrate' early and this is something which will be embedded in his mind in the Paris Olympics.
The Indian cricket team rose from the ashes in the final of the T20 World Cup, snatching a seven-run victory over South Africa from the jaws of defeat to end an 11-year ICC title drought.
India's last major ICC title was the Champions Trophy in 2013 under Mahendra Singh Dhoni's leadership.
"I did watch the final. The biggest learning from this World Cup is that don't celebrate before the last ball. South Africa was almost winning till the 15th over but the Indian team did not give up hope and snatched the win from the jaws of defeat," Sreejesh, who has 328 India caps, told PTI Bhasha. "That's what not only us (hockey team) but every Olympic-bound athlete can learn from our cricket team is that never give up, just wait and fight till the last moment, you will achieve it. I will remember



this in the Olympics," he said. Regarded as 'The Wall of Indian hockey', Sreejesh still remembers that one advice he got from "The Wall of Indian cricket", Rahul Dravid. "I met Dravid bhaji long back. He told us about the importance of patience and waiting for your moment. That's what I did. I did not become one of the best goalkeepers in the world overnight. I waited for my opportunities. I have also learnt to remain humble from him," he said.
Sreejesh started playing hockey to get grace marks in the board exams but went on to win an Olympic medal -- bronze in Tokyo -- and also became the only goalkeeper

from the country to feature in four Olympics.
"It's a great honour, a proud moment but comes with a lot of responsibilities. You need to guide the youngsters, you need to keep the team together and help to achieve the common goal of winning a medal at the Olympics," said the former FIH player of the year.
"It's a dream journey. I just started playing this game for grace marks in board exams. I never thought that I would play hockey, wear an Indian jersey and participate in the Olympics. I just knew the legendary Dhanraj Pillay, who played 4 Olympics, 4 World Cups, Champions Trophy, Asian Games and today I am

the first goalkeeper going to play my fourth Olympics. It's hard to believe." Sreejesh was the hero of India's win over Germany in the bronze medal play-off match in Tokyo and he is very well aware of the expectations from him in Paris.
"Expectations come with achievements and we don't have to take it negatively. I believe that it will give us the boost to perform even better in Paris. I want to tell the youngsters in the team that expectations and criticism will be there but on the field you are the boss. Stick to your basics, execute your plans and enjoy the game," he said.
He also acts as a mentor for the youngsters of the team and

loves to throw challenges to get the best out of them.
"Mentoring is very important as you are the one who played this game, failed, succeeded and when you tell these things to the kids, they understand. I always challenge forwards, make fun of them if they don't score. They accept this and try to do better," he said.
"The Olympics are too much pressure. It's like a pressure cooker. You are closely followed by the media, there will be social media, coaches, people give you many ideas and these things distract you. I just tell them to play as a team without hearing these noises." India are placed in a tough Pool B in the Olympics along side Argentina, Australia, Belgium, New Zealand and Ireland.
"Argentina have good 3D skills, the Australians are very strong and Belgium have very experienced forward line but I feel that on that particular day, it's all about using your experience and knowledge against them," he said.
"For me visualization is the key. You play hockey for 365 days and in the Olympics we are also going to play the same but the ground, the audience and the atmosphere put you under pressure. Those who can play their best hockey under that pressure can win."



Majhi announces ₹15 lakh for two sportspersons from Odisha who will represent India in Olympics

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR
Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday announced an incentive of Rs 15 lakh each for hockey player Amit Rohidas and ace javelin thrower Kishore Jena who will be representing India in the Paris Olympics.
The CM expressed hope that the incentive will inspire the two sportspersons from Odisha to excel and bring glory to the country, an official statement said.
Majhi said Jena and Rohidas have made their native places as well as the entire state proud by qualifying for the Paris Olympics.
The effort, willpower, hard work, dedication and perseverance displayed by the two sportspersons will inspire young and budding talents in the state, he said.
"There is no dearth of sports talents in Odisha and the state government is committed to providing the required infrastructure, financial support and all other facilities at the grassroots level for the all-round development of such talents in every corner of the state," he added.
"The Indian men's hockey team won a Bronze in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics."

Thomas logs first Top-10 finish in his second start as pro

PTI ■ RABAT (MOROCCO)
India's Rayhan Thomas, playing only his second professional event, got a big boost in his career as he finished in Top-10 at the USD 2 million International Series Morocco golf tournament here.
The Indian golfer, who is based in Dubai but played college golf in the US, shot 69-73-69-72 to finish 9-under for the week and was tied eighth and the best Indian in the field. Of the 16 India who started only five made the cut. The next best Indian on the final leaderboard was Veer Ahlawat (73) who was T-29, while Olympic bound Gaganjeet Bhullar (79) was T-33 alongside Varun Chopra (74) and Rashid Khan (74) was T-37. Thomas, who played for India

six times at the prestigious Asia Pacific Amateurs with a best of second place, made his pro debut last month at the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Kansas Wichita Open, where he made the cut and finished T-68. Thomas, who got an invite this week to Morocco, will be hoping for another shot at the International Series in England at Foxhills in August and some more on Asian the Tour. Ben Campbell snatched a surprise victory from John Catlin right at the very end to win the title after a sensational finish

Thomas logs first Top-10 finish in his second start as pro

here on the Red Course at Royal Golf Dar Es Salam. New Zealand's Campbell holed a 20-foot birdie putt on the par-five 18th to win on the first hole of a sudden-death play-off, having been three behind playing partner Catlin with two holes to play. Campbell shot a two-under-par 71, helped by an eagle on the par-four 17th and a birdie on 18th in normal time to tie Catlin with a 72 on 15-under. American Caleb Surratt (71) and Eugenio Chacarra (73) from Spain were tied for third, three behind the top two.

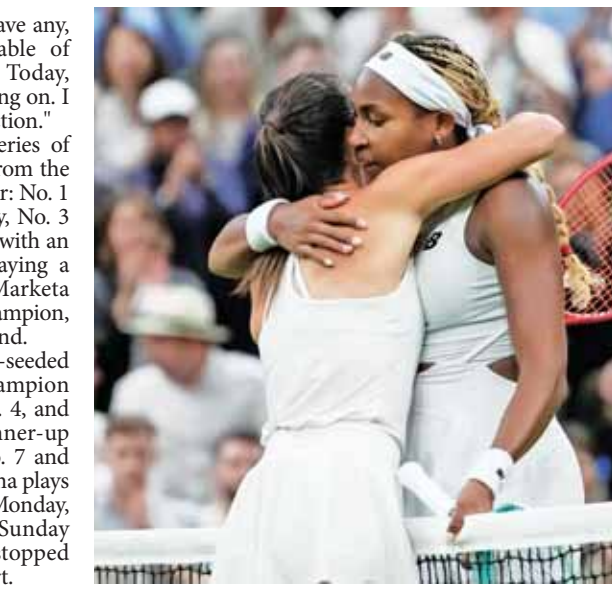


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Coco Gauff can't get a new game plan at Wimbledon and loses to Emma Navarro

AP ■ LONDON
Things were not going well for Coco Gauff against Emma Navarro at Centre Court, not well at all, and she kept looking at her guest box for help from her coaches. One, Brad Gilbert, would stand up and gesture, and they would talk back and forth, but a fix did not arrive.
Gauff has yet to make it past the fourth round at Wimbledon, and she exited at that stage again Sunday, eliminated by Navarro 6-4, 6-3 in an all-American matchup.
"We had a game plan going in, and I felt that it wasn't working. I don't always ask for advice from the box, but today was one of those rare moments where I felt I didn't have solutions," said Gauff, the reigning U.S. Open champion and seeded No. 2 at the All England Club. "I

don't want to say I didn't have any, because I think I'm capable of coming up with some. Today, mentally, there was a lot going on. I felt like I wanted more direction."
Hers was the latest in a series of departures by top women from the Wimbledon bracket this year: No. 1 Iga Swiatek lost on Saturday, No. 3 Aryna Sabalenka withdrew with an injured shoulder before playing a match and No. 6 Marketa Vondrousova, last year's champion, was defeated in the first round.
Only two of the 10 highest-seeded women remain: 2022 champion Elena Rybakina, who is No. 4, and recent French Open runner-up Jasmine Paolini, who is No. 7 and meets Navarro next. Rybakina plays her fourth-round match Monday, while Paolini advanced Sunday when Madison Keys stopped playing because she was hurt.



The 19th-seeded Navarro, who writes herself notes in her phone to prepare for matches, reached a major quarterfinal for the first time. She showed exactly the type of tennis she's capable of playing in the second round, when she got past four-time major champion Naomi Osaka.
"I'm believing that this is possible as it's happening. I'm starting to think, Why not me? Why not? Why can't I make a quarterfinal run? Why can't I go deep in Grand Slams?" said Navarro, 23, who grew up in South Carolina and won the 2021 NCAA championship in her first year at the University of Virginia.
On Sunday, she noticed the interactions between Gauff and Gilbert - and the player's growing displeasure with her performance. "I don't normally give the other side of the court too much energy. I keep

it on my side of the court. (But) I guess seeing her kind of frustrated and looking at her box, putting her arms up in the air - it's definitely a little bit of a confidence boost," Navarro said. "I guess it maybe gave me a little bit of momentum and just some energy that I needed."
In addition to Gauff's trophy from New York last September, the 20-year-old from Florida has been the runner-up at the French Open and reached the semifinals at the Australian Open.
And while her first big breakthrough came at the All England Club at age 15, when she became the youngest qualifier in tournament history and beat Venus Williams in the first round en route to getting to the fourth, Gauff never has bettered that result.
She also exited in the fourth round in her next appearance, in 2021,

then lost in the third round in 2022 and the first round a year ago. On Sunday, Gauff kept making mistakes, finishing with more than twice as many unforced errors, 25, as winners, 12. Her biggest issue was the shot that opponents know is Gauff's weakness: the forehand. Navarro kept hitting to that side, and it worked.
"I really wanted to attack her forehand," Navarro said afterward. Gauff made 16 unforced errors with forehands, and another 16 forced errors, accounting for 32 of the 61 total points won by Navarro.
"I have the ability to raise my level when players play well, and I feel I didn't do that today," Gauff said. She explained that when she's sought a mid-match assist from her coaches in the past, "They usually gave me something," but added: "I don't think we were all in sync."

INDIA EYE IMPROVED BOWLING SHOW IN FINAL WOMEN'S T20I AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Desperate to level the three-match series after the second game was washed out, India would hope weather doesn't play spoilsport, besides eyeing a much-improved bowling effort in the final women's T20I against South Africa here on Tuesday.

India are trailing the three-match series 0-1 after losing the opener by 12 runs. Their problems compounded after the second game here on Sunday was washed out midway due to persistent drizzle.

And with 30 to 40 per cent of rain forecast for Tuesday, the Indians are left on the mercy of weather gods.

In both the matches, the Indian bowlers cut a sorry figure as South Africa amassed 189 for 9 and 177 for 6 respectively.

Barring Pooja Vastrakar, who picked up two wickets each in both the games, and spinner Deepti Sharma, most of the Indian bowlers failed to shine against the Proteas women.

Renuka Singh leaked runs in

the first game and was subsequently replaced by Sajeevan Sajana in the second T20I but the latter also didn't her cause.

Shreyanka Patil and Radha Yadav picked up a wicket each on Sunday but continued to leak runs.

India skipper Harmanpreet Kaur would want her bowlers to pull up their socks with the series at stake.

On the batting front, it has been a decent show by the Indians in the first game. The likes of Jemimah Rodrigues (53 not out), Smriti Mandhana (46), Harmanpreet (35), Shafali Verma (18) and Daylan Hemalatha (14) all making double digit scores.

Uma Chetry, who made her T20I debut on Sunday, is likely to persisted with as Harmanpreet and the team management would like to see her exploits with the bat.

South Africa, on the other hand, has been rock solid with the bat with Tazmin Brits, who hit consecutive half-centuries, leading the charge.

Besides Brits, skipper Laura Wolvaardt, Marizanne Kapp



and Anneke Bosch have contributed with the bat as well for the visitors.

South Africa's only concern is Chloe Tryon, who has scored identical 12 runs in the two games.

And with the upcoming T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in mind, Tryon will be desperate to prove her detractors wrong.

TEAMS (FROM):
India Women: Harmanpreet Kaur(c), Smriti Mandhana(vc), Uma Chetry(wk), Richa Ghosh(wk), Dayalan Hemalatha, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Sajeevan Sajana, Deepti Sharma, Asha Sobhana, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh, Shabnam Shakil, Pooja Vastrakar and Radha Yadav.
South Africa Women: Laura Wolvaardt(c), Tazmin Brits, Mieke de Ridder(wk), Sinalo Jafta(wk), Anneke Bosch, Nadine de Klerk, Annerie Dercksen, Marizanne Kapp, Sune Luus, Chloe Tryon, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Eliz-Mari Marx, Nonkululeko Mlaba and Tumi Sekhukhune.



Mentor Yuvraj was very happy when I got out for duck, he must be proud now: Abhishek Sharma

PTI ■ HARARE

India opener Abhishek Sharma has revealed that his mentor Yuvraj Singh was delighted when he got out for a duck on his T20I debut against Zimbabwe here as the swashbuckling former all-rounder, for reasons best known to him, felt it was a "good start".

Making his India debut, Abhishek was out on duck as the Men in Blue lost the first T20I against hosts Zimbabwe by 13 runs on Saturday. But the 23-year-old came back strongly to set the stage ablaze with a blistering maiden century (a 47-ball 100) to fashion India's 100-run win in the second game a day later.

"I spoke to him yesterday (Saturday) also, and I don't know why he was very happy when I got out on zero. He said that's a good start but he must be very happy and proud just like my family," Abhishek said in a video posted by BCCI.

He credited the hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph for not only helping him hone his skills on the cricket field but also supporting him in his life away from the field.

"It's all because of him as well, the hard work he has put in (shaping) me. (For) two-three years, he has worked really hard not only on my cricket but off the field (life) as well." After Sunday's game, Abhishek called Yuvraj, who couldn't be happier for the youngster.

"Well done very proud, you

deserve it. Many more (such innings) to come this is just the start," Yuvraj said.

Since there was no rest day in between the first two games, the visitors didn't get a lot of time to think about the opening loss and that worked in India's favour as they levelled the five-match series 1-1.

"We lost yesterday but I felt, today is my day and I should take the match to the end, the positive was that we didn't have much time to think about the next game," he pointed out.

Abhishek combined with Rituraj Gaikwad (77 not out off 47 ball) for a match-winning 137-run stand for the second wicket. "I was in a flow, and just wanted to express myself. I spoke to Ritu as well, he said the same thing that 'don't think much about the balls and hit what you think you can'," he said.

He once again thanked India skipper on the tour and his Punjab teammate Shubman Gill for lending him his bat.

"Special thanks to Shubman who timely gave me his bat, this was a much-needed innings for me and the team.

"This has been going on from U-14 times. Whenever I play with his bat I have done well, today also, the same happened. "I played with his bat only, which I got after a lot of difficulty, he doesn't give it easily. That is like my last option when I feel I have to play with his bat for a comeback," he quipped.

Have been living a dream for past few days, filled with gratitude: Bumrah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday said he has been "living a dream" for the past few days as he expressed gratitude for the stupendous reception that he and the rest of his teammates got for winning the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

The 30-year-old, who picked up 15 wickets in the mega-event that concluded on June 29 in Barbados, was a key figure in India's second overall and first in 17 years world trophy in the shortest format. He was adjudged Player of the Tournament for his performance.

"I am so thankful for the last few



days. I've been living a dream and it has filled me with happiness and gratitude," Bumrah posted on X, along with a video of him enjoying the rapturous homecoming that included a breakfast meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a victory parade attended by lakhs of fans in Mumbai.

The 42-second clip featured the audio of Virat Kohli's speech during the felicitation function after the parade last Thursday where the champion batter had lauded Bumrah's contribution.

The fast bowler had combined with all-rounder Hardik Pandya to turn it around wonderfully for India in the final.

The two were brought in for their second spell in the match at a time

when South Africa needed 30 off 30 balls. They wreaked havoc to ensure that the Proteas eventually fell short by seven runs.

Kohli had called Bumrah a "once in a generation" player during the speech at the Wankhede Stadium, prompting the assembled crowd to chant the bowler's name in appreciation.

"What I would like everyone to do is to applaud a guy who brought us back into games again, and again, and again. It was phenomenal. He is a once in a generation bowler. I am so glad he plays for us," Kohli, who retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup, had said.

Bumrah was welcomed with flower petals after arriving at his Ahmedabad home recently.



Jayasuriya named Sri Lanka's interim coach ahead of limited-overs series against India

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former captain Sanath Jayasuriya was on Monday named the interim head coach of Sri Lanka's cricket team ahead of this month's white-ball home series against India with the country's board saying that he is "well-positioned" to guide the side till a "permanent solution" is found in the next few months.

The Indian team will be touring Sri Lanka for three T20 Internationals and as many ODIs, starting July 27.

Jayasuriya, who has also served as a chief selector in the past, will continue in the post till Sri Lanka's Test tour to England in August-September, comprising three games.

"Sri Lanka Cricket wishes to announce the appointment of Mr. Sanath Jayasuriya as the 'Interim Head Coach' of the national team. He will function in the position until the completion of Sri Lanka's tour of England in September 2024," the SLC said in a statement.

The 55-year-old, a swashbuckling opener in his prime, was named for the interim post after Englishman Chris Silverwood resigned last week as Sri Lanka head coach.

Silverwood stepped down in the wake of the country's disastrous T20 World Cup campaign, during which it was ousted from the league stage itself.

One of the most attacking batters of his time, Jayasuriya had recently been a consultant for the team during this year's T20 World Cup in the USA and Caribbean.

"Jayasuriya is currently serving as the full-time 'Cricket Consultant' of Sri Lanka Cricket. His new appointment comes into immediate effect."

"Sanath with his wealth of international cricketing experience is well positioned to guide the national team, until we find a permanent solution," said SLC CEO Ashley De Silva.

Jayasuriya featured in 110 Tests between 1991 and 2007, scoring 6973 runs at an average of 40.07, with the help of 14 centuries and 31 fifties.

In the 445 ODIs he played, the left-hander struck 13,430 runs at an average of 32.36, with 28 hundreds and 68 half centuries.

He was a key member of the Sri Lankan team that won 1996 ODI World Cup. He also served as Member of Parliament from 2010-15.

Maldives' tourism body invites T20 world champ Indian team to celebrate trophy there

PTI ■ MALE

The recently-crowned T20 world champion Indian cricket team has been invited to celebrate its triumph in Maldives by the country's tourism association and its marketing and public relations corporation.

The Rohit Sharma-led Indian team won the trophy in Barbados after beating South Africa by seven runs in the final on June 29.

"Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC/ Visit Maldives) in collaboration with the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) have jointly extended a special and open invitation to the Indian National Cricket Team," the two bodies said in a joint statement.

Ibrahim Shiuree, the CEO and Managing Director of MMPRC, and Ahmed Nazeer, Secretary General of MATI, said they look forward to



hosting the team, which returned to India on Thursday last week.

It was welcomed by frenzied fans in both Delhi and Mumbai, which also played host to a victory parade featuring lakhs of supporters.

"We would be honoured to host you and ensure that your stay is filled with memorable moments, relaxation, and bespoke experiences," Shiuree and Nazeer said in the joint statement.

They said the invitation also highlights the strong and long-standing cultural and sporting ties between the Maldives and India.

"It would be an immense honour for the Maldives to welcome the Indian Cricket Team and share in the joy of their triumph," Shiuree further said.

"We eagerly await the opportunity to host them, offering the perfect setting for them to create lasting memories of their victory celebration," he added.

The team is currently on a break. Its next international assignment is a six-match limited-overs series against Sri Lanka beginning July 27. The series comprises three ODIs and as many T20 Internationals.

Cricketers Ashwin buys team in Global Chess League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become a co-owner of the American Gambits, a new team which will feature in the second edition of the Global Chess League, a joint venture between Tech Mahindra and the International Chess Federation.

The League on Monday unveiled the six franchises for the second edition to be played in London from October 3 to 12.

American Gambits, owned by prominent business leaders Prachura PP, Venkat K Narayana and Ashwin, will replace Chingari Gulf Titans.

"We're thrilled to introduce the American Gambits to the chess world. With a blend of strategic brilliance and unwavering determination, our team aims to redefine the game. As co-owner, I'm excited to witness their journey and contribute to their success," Ashwin was

quoted as saying in a media release.

The five other franchise -- Alpine SG Pipers, PBG Alaskan Knights, Ganges Grandmasters, defending champions Triveni Continental Kings and Mumbai Masters will return for a second season.

Sameer Pathak, CEO, Global Chess League, said, "We are thrilled to welcome the teams for the second season of the Global Chess League. We have found the right partners to strengthen the league's global reach and look forward to bringing an exciting season of chess to fans worldwide."

"The teams made season one a huge success and we believe that their impact and popularity will continue to expand in the world of chess." The players will compete in a unique joint team format consisting of six players, including two top women chess players and a prodigy player per team.

Adding to the excitement and anticipation among fans, this innovative format will be aired on major OTT and broadcast platforms worldwide.

In the tournament, each team will play a total of 10 matches in a double round-robin format, with the winner of each match being decided in a best-of-six board scoring system.

Each team will play 10 matches across black and white pieces. The sides will play five matches, with all six players in each team initially playing with the white or black pieces against their opponents, followed by a reverse round in which the entire team will play five matches with the reversed colour pieces against the same opponent.

The winning team for every match will be determined by the points aggregated from wins and draws across all six games played in the match. The top two sides will advance to the final round.

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian women's cricket team fielding coach Munish Bali lauded Uma Chetry for her fielding skills, and said the young wicket-keeper is a "truly hard-working cricketer".

Chetry, 21, made her T20 International debut against South Africa in the abandoned second game of the three-match series here on Sunday, and inflicted a stumping off Deepti Sharma's bowling to get rid of a well-settled Tanzim Brits.

This was after Chetry had earlier missed a similar chance against Brits as she collected the ball ahead of the stumps.

But Bali backed the youngster and recalled how she had bravely fielded at the short-leg during the Test match against South Africa last week.

"I was happy when she was handed her debut cap. During the Test, she fielded for around 70-80 overs -- she is a brave girl," he said during the post-match press conference.

"Standing at the short-leg is not easy. She got hit by the ball, but she stood there in pain. She has great attitude and is a truly hard-

Chetry is a truly hard-working cricketer: Indian women's fielding coach Bali

working cricketer. I was so happy for her to have stumped Brits." Rain washed out the second T20I between India and South Africa with the tourists setting the hosts a target of 178 to level the series.

Despite some slip-ups on the field, Bali was overall content with the team's effort. "It's difficult to grip the ball when it's drizzling. But still, we fielded very well.

We are working on it (fielding) and it's in progress as we keep getting better slowly. "No one drops catches intentionally. The players have been practising hard during our (training) sessions, giving their best. At times, things click, and sometimes, it doesn't. Errors happen during matches. So, we keep telling them to keep giving their best and results will follow," he said.

Bali also praised the bowling effort of spinner Deepti Sharma, who returned with with figures



of 2 for 20.

"She (Deepti) is an experienced bowler. Having played all three formats, she knows where her strength lies, and she keeps backing herself. Also, her expe-

rience of bowling at the death is immense, which makes her a truly good bowler."

I TRY TO BE PRESENT IN THE GAME AND DO THE BEST I CAN: ANNEKE

BOSCH: Meanwhile, South Africa all-rounder Anneke Bosch is not bothered about her selection for the T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in October. "... But, you still cannot be sure if you will get a chance or not and it's never guaranteed," said

Bosch, who scored a 32-ball 40 on and shared a 38-run stand with Brits on Sunday. "So, it helps, but I don't focus on that too much. I try to be present in the game and try to do the best I can at that moment. Whatever is meant to be, it will be."

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