

OPINION 6
THE EVOLUTION OF
CRICKET AND UMPIRING

WORLD 8
NEPAL PM OLI WINS VOTE OF
CONFIDENCE IN PARLIAMENT

MONEY 10
SITHARAMAN SET TO MAKE HISTORY
WITH 7TH CONSECUTIVE BUDGET

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Monsoon showers await Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Monsoon Session which will also see presentation of the annual Budget of the first year of Narendra Modi's third tenure as the Prime Minister, is all set to begin at the backdrop of several contentious and controversial issues including Kanwar yatra order, an alleged compromised UPSC, NEET, train accidents concerning both the ruling as well as the Opposition which is now in a commanding strength in the Lok Sabha.

At the all-party meeting convened by the Centre on Sunday, the Opposition parties while insisting for the post of Deputy Speaker in the Lok Sabha also drew battle lines for the three weeks session to allow discussion on a range of issues.

Representatives from the JD (U), a BJP ally, the BJD and the YSR Congress Party demanded the most favoured States status for Bihar, Odisha and Andhra Pradesh, respectively, at the meeting of 44 parties, including some having only one MP. During the meeting, which was chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Opposition RJD and BJP ally LJP (Ram Vilas) echoed the demand for Bihar.

The Monsoon Budget session will have 19 sittings till August 12 when the



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijiju and Union Minister Jagat Prakash Nadda during the all-party meeting ahead of the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Sunday. Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Government is expected to present six Bills, including the one to replace the 90-year-old Aircraft Act, and also get Parliament's nod for the Budget of Jammu and Kashmir, which is under Central rule.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will table the Economic Survey in Parliament on Monday and present the Budget the next day.

The Government, which breaking from the recent practice invited a number of smaller parties for the meeting to signal its political outreach, conveyed its willingness to discuss all issues but Parliamentary

Bill to bar judges from joining politics post retirement listed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Private Members' Bills listed in Rajya Sabha for the upcoming Monsoon Session include one that seeks prohibition on holders of Constitutional posts like judges joining a political party post retirement, a few Bills on artificial intelligence and deepfake, as well as one on amending the citizenship law. In all, 23 Private Members' Bills have been

listed for introduction in the upcoming session in the Upper House. The Constitution (amendment) Bill, 2024 (amendment of articles 124, 148, 319 and 324 and insertion of new articles 220A and 309A), listed by RJD MP AD Singh, seeks to bar those retiring from Constitutional posts, like judges and former election commissioners from joining political parties post retirement, a source said.

Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju stressed that it should be in accordance with the rules. He called for cooperation from all parties for running Parliament smoothly, saying it is a collective responsibility. Congress flagged the issue related to alleged irregularities in the exams conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, whose chairperson resigned recently for reportedly personal reasons and host of other issues, including the spate in terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, the Manipur situation, train accidents, unemployment and price rise.

The stand of several Opposition parties, including the Congress, the DMK and the AAP, made it all but certain that the political heat sparked by the Uttar Pradesh government's order asking eateries and carts selling eatables to display their owners' names on the route of Kanwarias will reach Parliament when the session begins from Monday. Samajwadi Party's Ram Gopal Yadav alleged that the move is clearly targeted at Muslims and accused the ruling BJP in the state of pursuing communally divisive politics. The government on its part asked opposition parties to not disrupt Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha proceedings, seeking their cooperation in running Parliament smoothly.

'Biju Patnaik Sports Award' name to continue

Govt clarifies after CM Majhi's intervention

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

With Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi's intervention, the State Government on Sunday clarified that the name of the Biju Patnaik Sports Award would not be changed.

The Sports and Youth Services Department had on Friday issued guidelines for this year's award, renaming the award as 'Rajya Krida Samman'.

CM Majhi and Sports Minister Suryabanshi Suraj came up with the clarifications on

Sunday. The CM said his government has not taken any formal decision to drop Biju Patnaik's name from the award.

"My government respects the sons of the soil and, therefore, there will be no change in the title of the sports award named after Biju Patnaik," he said, noting that he came to know about the renaming from press reports.

Stating that Biju Patnaik's contributions towards the State and the country were memorable, Majhi said, "The Biju Patnaik Sports Award will continue as it is."

Similarly, the Sports Minister said he has all due respect for Biju Patnaik and his de-

partment is trying to give all respect to all legendary leaders of the State. As per the Chief Minister's statement, the name of Biju Patnaik Sports Award would not be changed, he clarified. The opposition BJD headed by Biju Patnaik's son Naveen Patnaik had criticised the BJP government for renaming the award.

Senior BJD MLA Arun Sahoo had said Biju Patnaik, a noted aviator and a former CM of the State, was not an individual but an institution. "He was a national asset and was honoured by three different countries. By removing his name from a sports award, what does the BJP government want to prove?" he had asked.

Odisha Cong unit dissolved in poll loss aftermath

Rama Kadam appointed CLP Leader

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The All India Congress Committee (AICC) on Sunday dissolved the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) with the State president and all other office-bearers being axed after the party's "not-so-impressive performance" during the last elections.

"The Congress president has approved the proposal of a complete dissolution of the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee, including PCC president and its executive committee," AICC general secretary KC Venugopal

informed. Now, all eyes are on who will take charge of the PCC. Senior party leaders Bhakta Das and Mohammad Moqim are said to be in the race for the PCC president. Speculation is also rife over the name of former PCC president Jayadev Jena. Venugopal's letter added that the current District Congress Committees' (DCC) presidents would function as acting presidents till new district presidents are appointed.

In another order, the AICC informed that Pottangi MLA Rama Chandra Kadam has been appointed as Congress Legislature Party (CLP) Leader and Basudevpur MLA Ashok Das as his deputy in the Odisha Assembly. Rajgangpur legislator CS Raazen Ekka has been ap-

pointed as the party's Chief Whip in the Assembly.

Though the Congress' mission of 'nine to 90' failed miserably in the State under PPC president Sarat Pattanayak, it saved itself from complete decimation by winning 14 Assembly seats and holding on to the lone Lok Sabha seat in Koraput in the 2024 twin elections. The vote share of the party, however, dropped from 16.12 per cent in 2019 when it had won nine Assembly seats to 13.32 per cent in this election. After the debacle in the 2019 Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, the then interim Congress President Sonia Gandhi had also dissolved the OPCC and all other State committees but retained the president and working presidents.

Congratulations to KIIT's Sports Achievers !



12 KIIT STUDENTS QUALIFY FOR PARIS OLYMPICS 2024



Mr. Amit Rohidas
Hockey Men's Team

Mr. Kishore Kumar Jena
Javelin Throw

Ms. Parul Chaudhary
3000m Steeplechase &
5000m Race

Ms. Priyanka
20Km Race Walk &
Marathon Race Walk Mixed Relay

Ms. Annu Rani
Javelin Throw

Ms. Jyothi Yarraji
100m Hurdles

Mr. Tajinderpal Singh Toor
Shot Put

Ms. MR Poovamma
Women's 4 X 400m Relay

*From KIIT to
the World Stage*



Ms. Prachi
4x400m Relay Team

Ms. Ankita
5000m Race

Mr. Paramjeet Singh Bisht
20KM. Race Walk

Mr. Suraj Panwar
Marathon Race Walk
Mixed Relay Team

KIIT holds the unique distinction of sending the highest number of athletes to the Paris Olympics 2024 among all institutions in India.

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- More than 250 students have represented India in international sports meets across 17 sports disciplines

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RECOGNITIONS & AWARDS

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"CII Sports Business Awards 2023" in the category of Best Sports Facility by Confederation of Indian Industry.

"FICCI India Sports Award 2022" by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce & Industry (FICCI).

"Sports Star Aces Award 2022" in the category of Best University for promotion of Sports in the Country by Hindu Group.

"Biju Patnaik Sports Award 2019" in the category of best Contribution for promotion of sports and games by Govt. of Odisha.

HOST TO HIGH-PROFILE SPORTS EVENTS

Due to its excellent sporting facilities in a single complex, KIIT & KISS have hosted hundreds of prestigious international and national sporting events in various sports disciplines. These include:

- First Khelo India University Games 2020
- First Janjatiya Khel Mahotsav 2023
- World Junior Chess Championship 2016

KIIT student, Dutee Chand won the first-ever Gold Medal for India in the World University Games, Italy in 2019



On Assembly session eve LoP Naveen, Cong skip all-party meet

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Despite a personal invite from Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi, Leader of Opposition (LoP) Naveen Patnaik skipped the all-party meeting convened on Sunday by Speaker Surama Padhi ahead of the Budget Session of the State Assembly beginning from Monday.

While Opposition (BJD) Whip Pramila Mallik attended the meeting, none from the Congress was present.

Speaking to media, the Speaker said suggestions of all present at the meeting were taken for smooth conduct of the proceedings. "The Assembly will begin at 11 am with



the Governor's speech tomorrow," she added.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling said the CM invited the LoP for the meeting and sought his cooperation in building a developed Odisha. "Since the Congress was yet to announce its legis-

lature party leader, I spoke to PCC president Sarat Pattanayak over phone. But they did attend the meeting. I had also spoken to Laxman Munda of CPI(M)," he said.

Mahaling said, "The Opposition Whip has assured support for smooth running of the

House," he added.

Congress legislator Tara Prasad Bahinapati termed the absence of its MLAs in the meeting as unfortunate. "Since there was no direction from the party leadership and since the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) was not appointed, it would not have been appropriate for me to attend the meeting. Perhaps, it was for the first time that none from the party attended an all-party meeting," he added.

Later, the Congress announced appointment of Pottangi MLA Rama Chandra Kadam as CLP Leader and Basudevpur MLA Ashok Das as his deputy in the Assembly.

Rs 40.68-cr Central grant for 83 fishery projects in State

SUDARSHAN CHHOTORAY ■ BHUBANESWAR
Union Minister of Fisheries, Animal Husband and Dairying Rajib Ranjan Singh sanctioned Rs 40.68 crore for 83 pending and ongoing projects towards fishery sector development in the State.

The sanctions were made under Pradhan Mantri Matsya Sampada Yojana.

According to State Fisheries and Animal Resources Development and MSME Minister Gokulananda Mallik, the Union Ministry was sympathetic towards fisheries development in the State.

He had discussed a range of issues and projects with the Union Minister on the sidelines of "Fisheries Summer Meet 2024" held recently in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, Mallik said.

The summit was held to recognise the contribution of fish farmers, aquapreneurs and fishermen in developing the sector and showcasing achievements of the Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Mallik also submitted proposals relating to development of fishing jetty in Arya Palli near Gopalpur in Ganjam with an estimated cost of Rs 350 crore, besides for

modernisation and upgradation of Astarang jetty in Puri with a cost of Rs 180 crore.

The State Government has proposed to make Aryapalli fish landing centre a smart fish producing unit and transforming Astaranga fish harbour as value added centre.

Apart from these, Mallik also drew attention of the Union Fisheries Minister to provide Rs 2 crore for capacity building of fishermen in the State and remaining amount of Rs 162 crore towards cluster development out of Rs 480 crore announced by the Union Government.

As of now only 31 cluster

development works have been taken up for implementation.

Mallik also had pointed out that Odisha has vast potential for fishery development with its 480 km long coastline and inland fishing opportunities in rivers and rivulets.

"Seeing the emerging opportunities for the sector the Union Government should set up a "Regional Fish Research Centre" in Odisha, stated Mallik.

Mallik also met and discussed with Ministers of State for Fisheries, Animal Husbandry and Dairying SP Singh Baghel and George Kurian during the meet.

Youth Cong protests NEET irregularities



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Members of the Pradesh Youth Congress led by its president Ranjit Patra held a protest at Master Canteen Square here on Sunday against the alleged irregularities in the 2024 NEET Examinations.

Patra said Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan made all efforts to suppress the corruption in the NEET Examinations and stated in the media that there was corruption in the examinations. After the intervention of the Supreme

Court, it came to light that there was massive corruption in the examinations. It has also been proved that the NTA is a corrupt organisation.

The NEET scam is a huge betrayal of the student community. There is proof that the question papers were leaked before the examinations. By this, the future of 24 lakh examinees has become dark, said Patra.

Among others, Pradesh Youth Congress in-charge Ajit Singh and many other members were present.

NGT jolt to Tampara tourism dev project

SUDARSHAN CHHOTORAY ■ BHUBANESWAR
The National Green Tribunal (NGT) Eastern Zone Bench, Kolkata in its hearing on Tuesday directed the Ganjam Collector to file his personal affidavit within four weeks latest by September 2, showing what action has been taken for removal of the concrete structures standing inside the Tampara lake waters and its conservation area near the district headquarters town of Chhatrapur.

On hearing a petition of the Wildlife Society of Orissa (WSO) versus State of Odisha No 88/2023/EZ and their supplementary affidavit of September 26 along with photographs showing concrete structures and constructions made within Tampara lake, judicial member Justice B Amit Sthalekar and expert member Dr Arun Kumar Verma questioned why have the constructions not been removed, mentioning that the photographs speak for themselves.

The affidavit of the Collector, Ganjam, recorded on September 26 states that further construction works have been stopped. The DM had consti-

tuted a committee and its members had visited the site on September 22 and the committee members opined that a detailed analysis on conservation and integrated management plan of Tampara lake for maintaining its water quality and ecology was required.

Counsel for the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change (MOEF&CC), Government of India Apurba Ghosh had stated citing a letter addressed by the scientist-F dated July 12, 2024, that the proposal for development of tourism infrastructure at Tampara lake has been granted approval by the Union Government's Ministry of Tourism under Swadesh Darshan (Central Scheme) on September 19, 2016.

Ghosh also put in record that a modified DPR (Detailed Project Report) of Coastal Circuit in Odisha under Swadesh Darshan scheme covering Gopalpur, Tampara, Barkul and Satapada was received by the MOEF&CC and the same was being placed before the National Wetland Committee for their inputs under provision to Rule 4(2) of Wetlands (Conservation and Management) Rules 2017. Ghosh had sought 12 weeks' time from the Tribunal and it was granted.

Earlier on August 11, 2023, the NGT had ordered for a high-level inquiry into allega-

tions of permanent constructions taking place inside Tampara in violation of all environmental norms. Then, the bench had issued a strict stricture to the district Collector to ensure that no illegal constructions will take place or any part of the lake would be encroached or allowed to be encroached.

The petitioner, WSO had mentioned that huge construction works were going on to develop hotels, cottages, resorts and restaurants by the Odisha Tourism Development Corporation (OTDC) within the water area and 50 meters inside the lake. Notably, the 300 hectares lake is a rich source of biodiversity in the area. Both the State Government and District Administration had planned to make it an Eco Tourism Hub in the region.

It is one of the largest freshwater lakes in Odisha, part of Wetland Atlas (2010) under the MOEF&CC and designated Ramsar Site (October 12, 2021). The lake forms part of the Rushikulya basin and just a few kms away from the second largest nesting site of endangered Olive Ridley turtles.

When asked, advocate Sankar Prasad Pani, who appeared for the petitioner, said that there were few permanent concrete structures which need to be removed at the earliest, as they were done purely in violation of laws.

Fraudster uses Usha Padhee's name for money

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
An unidentified fraudster allegedly attempted to cheat people and extort money by using the name of senior IAS officer Usha Padhee, who is the Principal Secretary in State Housing and Urban Development Department.

The bureaucrat shared this information on her X handle. The imposter is allegedly sending messages to her known contacts and asking for money.

Stating that she has already approached the authorities concerned for necessary steps, Padhee advised people to be cautious and not to get trapped by such cyber fraudsters.

She also shared a screen shot of the message showing the fraudster asking for Rs 50,000 from someone. The bank account number has also been shared for sending money. The fraud also promised to return the money later.

"It has been brought to my attention that



some imposter is sending messages to many known contacts and asking money. I have already taken steps to report to concerned authorities. May please be cautious and don't get into the trap of such cyber fraudsters," Padhee posted on X.

BJD reiterates Spl State tag demand for Odisha

SUDARSHAN CHHOTORAY ■ BHUBANESWAR
Ahead of the Budget session of Parliament starting from Monday, the BJD raised Special Category State Status for Odisha in the all-party meeting held on Sunday in New Delhi chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and attended by Health Minister JP Nadda and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju.

Speaking to the media after the meeting, BJD Parliamentary Party Leader Sasmit Patra said the BJD has been constantly demanding for the Special Category State status

for Odisha.

"As political parties from Andhra Pradesh and Bihar have raised the demand for Special Category State status for their States, the BJD joined the issue with them."

Patra also pointed out that the coal royalty has not been revised for Odisha since last 10 years. In terms of rural housing, over 20 lakh houses have not been provided to Odisha. More than 162 communities are deprived of the tribal list. The Coastal Highway is yet to be finalised.

He also said Odisha is neglected in connectivity of railways, highways, telecom, digi-

tal link and banking.

"One of the key areas for us is Federalism, the declining transfer of funds to the State which need to be worked out," Patra stated.

He also raised the issue of Governor's son's physical assault on a Raj Bhavan staffer. Despite an FIR being lodged, medical examination conducted, why no action has been taken, he questioned.

The BJD Parliamentary Party (BJDPP) meeting held on July 19 had unanimously elected party president Naveen Patnaik as the Chairperson of BJDPP.

Sponge City concept an answer to BBSR's monsoon woes

Though civilisations have historically flourished around water bodies, cities today are struggling to deal with water, its presence, absence, and excess. Traffic jams and overflowing roads are visible as problems that demand an immediate response, but they are also symptoms of a wider, interconnected set of issues confronted by our cities. Climate change compels cities to rethink their approach to deal with water in recent years.

The Fifth Assessment Report (2014) of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projected an increase in extreme weather events, which includes a decrease in the total number of rainy days and an increase in the amount of rainfall received per day. Similarly, urban flooding in Chennai in 2015 was exacerbated by the rampant construction along natural drainage courses such as the Pallikarai marshlands and the floodplains of the river Adyar, leading to the retention of water meant to be drained out.

In recent years Bhubaneswar received warnings of heavy rain many times, since the Indian Meteorological Department adopted the system decades ago. Since then Odisha State Disaster Management Authority installed a robust



PIYUSH RANJAN ROUT

decentralised institutional disaster mitigation system in ground to deal all kinds of response mechanism and moreover, the municipal officials are aware of the locations that are prone to waterlogging as they are required to act, to install pumps in these areas, clean up the choked drains, clear the obstruction over drains etc, as a pre-monsoon precaution. Then it raises questions: why does this information that is evidently available not translate into preparatory actions?

Extreme rainfall brings a host of problems, and urban residents have to contend not only with the impact of flooding, but the overlapping impacts of flooding and other natural disasters. There have been

shockingly frequent occurrences of water logging in recent years. A question that strikes the mind is why water logging which looks like flooding becomes such a common occurrence?

In recent years, urban flooding has increasingly become an issue of large cities, testing their flood prevention and drainage capabilities. Urban flooding often occurs when rainfall exceeds the city's own drainage capacity, leading to standing water that cannot be drained, causing flooding within the city. According to data, most cities and towns in Odisha suffer flooding each year, which not only costs lives and damages property, but takes a toll on the environment. The urban flooding problem has grown even more noticeable under the influence of climate change and local weather phenomenon.

As global warming intensifies, global ecosystems are changing, and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. At the same time, the heat island and rain island effects are becoming increasingly common as urban areas expand. In addition to external factors like frequent heavy rains, the characteristics of the concrete jungle in cities are also one of the main causes of urban flooding.

In pursuit of economic growth, city wetlands, reservoirs, rivers and lakes are filled in for construction, which weakens cities' capabilities to divert excess water. Moreover, urban construction often involves the use of hard surfaces like concrete while neglecting the construction of permeable surfaces, which makes it harder for the ground to absorb rainwater. This leads to increased runoff, inadequate drainage, and a far greater chance of flooding.

Specifically, cities like Bhubaneswar, Cuttack, Puri etc lack sufficient drainage channels and do not reserve enough space for rainfall runoff. Due to excessive use of hard surfaces and improper use of land, rainwater cannot be fully absorbed into the soil, causing a large amount of runoff that cannot be effectively drained, thereby producing surface water accumulation.

Further the fragmented management of water resources implemented in Bhubaneswar has not fully utilized the drainage network, resulting in low drainage efficiency. Different types of drainage facilities are managed by different entities, which can easily lead to unclear division of responsibilities and undefined boundaries in the drainage network.

In most cities the management of flood prevention and urban drainage belong to two different departments, one responsible for water resources and another for civic utility infrastructure. Both departments have different requirements and construction standards for urban drainage and flood prevention, which poses a challenge to actually preventing floods. Furthermore, mismatched construction and management of drainage and flood prevention facilities by various transportation departments, such as city roads, highways and railways, do pose challenges.

In addition, the unreasonable planning of urban green spaces also increases the chances of urban flooding. Many green spaces lack facilities to collect and dissipate rainwater from surrounding areas, and some green spaces are even higher than the surrounding ground, causing rainwater to often flow back into the municipal drainage network.

Bhubaneswar today must rethink its approach to water. How can old infrastructure adapt to serve today's needs? Are new technologies the key? Should cities rethink their approach to water financing by fostering public private partnerships? How can cities play a role in

reducing water waste turning blue oil into a sustainable opportunity? Bhubaneswar has always been at the forefront of innovation, in setting frameworks that will allow it to become leaders in this field.

Perhaps the idea of Sponge City could be an answer to the above questions. That would control and mitigate flooding, water pollution and water scarcity in urban spaces as water becomes the city's 'most critical resource.' The Sponge City development is new to urban planning in Bhubaneswar that offers a holistic strategy to hopefully improve the ongoing development and urbanisation processes by explicitly considering the urban water cycle.

The key features of the Sponge City concept is to be environmentally adaptive, systematic and comprehensive, and environment-friendly urban development as systems that absorb, store, infiltrate and purify rainwater. Sponge City aims to promote interactions between socio-economic systems within the cityscape and with the urban water cycle to enhance local urban resilience, particularly in the face of increasingly volatile water related disasters.

Sponge City developments are highly contextual as a result of lo-

cation and scale variations in water-related issues across Bhubaneswar varied landscapes and climate. Traditionally, Bhubaneswar's water management and urban planning are mostly engineering oriented. However, Bhubaneswar must re-focus urban planning through geography based developments. Then with Sponge City ideas, the capital city could aim to incorporate a range of green and grey infrastructure such as interconnected greenways and waterways, contiguous open green spaces, green roofs, porous design interventions and drainage systems, water savings and recycling initiatives.

In simple terms, the Sponge City idea would represent a shift in environmental governance and planning focusing on the increasingly evident impacts of years of resource exploitation and rapid urbanisation and seeking to mitigate the damaging implications from flooding. The concept is ahead of its time, and much research, policy changes, investment opportunities and progressive design solutions are needed to resolve the range of challenges for its necessary implementation.

(Dr Rout is an urban planner, who can be reached on X @piyushrout)

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In Deogarh Bank manager steals Rs 18L from customer's FD

**Arrested after
plaint lodged**
PNS ■ DEOGARH

Police on Sunday arrested the manager of a private bank for allegedly siphoning of Rs 18 lakh from the fixed deposit of a customer on the pretext of a loan.

The accused was identified Prabhesh Chandra Dash, who was working as an Operations Manager with the Axis Bank in Deogarh.

"We received a complaint

from Krushna Chandra Mahakul. In course of investigation, it was ascertained that the bank manager had defrauded the customer by developing good relations with him," Deogarh SDPO Soumya Ranjan Mallick said.

Dash was arrested from the Airfield area of Bhubaneswar and produced in a court, the SDPO added.

According to police, Mahakul, a retired WESCO employee, had two fixed deposits amounting to Rs 15 lakh and Rs 9 lakh in the bank.

When he wanted to withdraw the money for his daughter's wedding in November 2023, he realised that there was a loan of Rs 18 lakh in his name against these fixed deposits.

"We shared a good rapport and I had given him (bank manager) my mobile phone on a couple of occasions for banking transactions. It was during this period he used my phone to avail the loan. After realising of being duped, I filed a police complaint against the manager," Mahakul said.

In Kandhamal 8 tiger skins seized; 6 arrested

PNS ■ PHULBANI

Tikabali Range forest officials intercepted two persons travelling by a motorcycle and, during search, seized eight tiger skins from their possession in a forest near Behera village in Kandhamal district recently.

The arrested were identified as Dhaneshwar Naik (60) of Khajuripada Danju village and Sharat Mallik (25) of Gumuri Khol village. Later, based by the information provided by the duo during their interrogation, four more persons were arrested on Sunday.

Later, the arrested were forwarded to the G Udaygiri court under the relevant sections of



the Wildlife Act, said DFO Prashant Patel at a Press conference here.

Among others, ACF Maley Ranjan Kal, Phulbani Range Forest Officer Shivanand Lenka and Forester Saroj Mishra were present.

Sundargarh double murder Absconding jilted lover arrested

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH

Police have cracked the Sundargarh double murder case with the arrest of one Raju Nag, who had been absconding after stabbing one Lipsa Kerketa and her male friend Pratap Lakada last week.

Rajgangpur SDPO Abhishek Panigrahi on Sunday said the accused Raju, a driver by profession, was nabbed by a special team that was formed in connection with the double murder case.

"We have arrested the ac-

cused who was on the run. Our investigation is on. However, the accused has confessed to having committed the crime. The accused was into a one-sided affair with the victim," said Panigrahi.

Earlier, it was alleged that Raju had stabbed Lipsa and Pratap after locking her parents in a room on July 14. Following the incident, special teams were formed and raids were conducted at several places, including in neighbouring States, to nab the accused.

In Nabarangpur Armed men loot jewellery, cash from house

PNS ■ NABARANGPUR

Unidentified miscreants committed a robbery in a man's house brandishing guns and other lethal weapons at DNK Colony in Umakote in Nabarangpur district on Saturday evening.

According to reports, a person introduced himself as a delivery boy and went to the house of Susant Khara saying that some parcels for him had arrived. After Susant opened the door, three men wearing masks barged into the house. At that time, Susant's wife Anupama was working in the

kitchen. When Anupama came out of the kitchen after hearing loud screams, the assailants put a knife on her neck and asked her to hand over all valuables otherwise they would kill her. Then they snatched her Magalutra, six rings, seven pairs of earrings, two chains and some cash. Before the robbery, they took the mobile phones of the couple and tied Sushant.

Later, after Susant lodged a complaint, an Umakote police team reached the spot and began an investigation with the help of a forensic team.

Flood situation improves in Malkangiri

Rains to continue in State for 5 more days

PNS ■ MALKANGIRI / BHUBANESWAR

There was some improvement in the flood situation in Malkangiri, which witnessed extreme heavy rainfall under the influence of a depression over Odisha coast in the last 48 hours.

However, road communication was yet to be restored in some parts of the district and floodwater was still flowing over the Korukonda bridge.

Inter-State and intra-district traffics were severely disrupted after a 2-km stretch of NH-326 near Motu was submerged following incessant rainfall, disrupting communication between the district and the bordering States of Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Chhattisgarh.

Floodwater was also flowing over some bridges in low-lying areas

of Korukonda, MV-19 and MV-96 villages. Malkangiri town too witnessed waterlog-

ging due to which people had to be shifted to safer places.

Mudulipada and Andrahil panchayats under Khairaput block, home to Bondas, a Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group (PVTG), also remained cut off from the block headquarters due to landslides. Agricultural lands were also inundated.

Things improved as there was no rainfall in the district from Saturday night.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has forecast heavy rainfall (7 to 11cm) at one or two places in Balangir, Nuapada, Kandhamal, Deogarh, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur and Kendrapada during the next 24 hours. The depression has also weakened into a well-marked low-pressure area and now lies over interior Odisha and neighbourhood. It is likely to move northwards across Chhattisgarh and weaken gradually. However, the State might continue to experience heavy rain during the next five days.

'Strive for excellence, not just course completion'

IIM S'pur's 2024 PhD batches inaugurated

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

The IIM, Sambalpur inaugurated its 6th batch of PhD and 5th batch of Executive PhD programme 2024 in hybrid mode at its campus.

The ceremony included insightful discussions on research methodologies and journeys, featuring the participation of international and national academicians, authorities, and industry leaders. The objective of the discussions was to share the research experience and to guide the newly enrolled PhD students at IIM Sambalpur.

Director, IIM Sambalpur, Prof Mahadeo Jaiswal emphasized the importance of re-



search in driving innovation and solving real-world problems in his welcome address.

Assistant Dean of Industry Engagement, Ivy College of Business, Iowa State University, USA, Prof Raj Agnihotri said, "Think big, think like an innovator. It's time to move beyond merely validating existing theories and start finding solutions that create real impact on businesses, society, and communities."

Professor, University of Alabama, USA Prof Vishal Gupta said, "Embark on your PhD

journey with the mindset of a world champion -strive for excellence, not just completion."

During the keynote address, Economic Advisor (Health), Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, New Delhi, Dr KK Tripathy underscored the importance of passion in one's academic journey.

Vice President (HR), TRL Krosaki Refractories Ltd., Belpahar, Dr RK Singh said, "Research is not merely an academic pursuit but a journey of self-discovery and in-

novation. As we advance in automation and AI, we must embrace research as a tool to challenge existing paradigms and explore new frontiers."

The second day of the orientation programme featured a seminar by Prof VG Venkatesh, Vice-Dean and Professor, Supply Chain Management, EM Normandie Business School, France, on "Crafting an impactful PhD journey: A Primer." This was followed by a session on "Crafting Research Output" by Prof Jaiswal.

In Brahmapur City outskirts committee members meet MP

Demand inclusion of areas in BeMC

RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAPUR

A delegation of the City Outskirts Integration Committee met Brahmapur MP Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy on Friday to discuss inclusion of the areas adjacent to the city and nearby panchayats into the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC).

The committee members highlighted the severe inconveniences and lack of basic amenities faced by the residents of the city outskirts, including areas such as Brajanagar, Shakti Nagar, Srimanagar, Adishakti Nagar, Anusuya Nagar, Sanjeevaani Bihar, Rajiv Nagar, Sai Nagar, Narayan Nagar, Netaji Nagar, Kalua Nagar, Hanuman Nagar, Basudev Nagar, Amaravati Nagar, Govind Bihar, Basant



Bihar, Goutam Nagar, Kharavela Nagar, Babuji Nagar, Medical Bank Colony, Neelanchal Nagar, Alakapuri, Brahmapali and Nigamanagar.

The adjacent panchayats include Lochapada, Nimakhand, Jagdalpur, Ankuspur, Ratanpur, Ambagar, Dakshinapur, Lathi, Mohuda, Bhabinpur, Satakutuni, Gurunthi, Hugulapata, Dhakhinpur, Haladiapadar, Dura, Ganju, Phulta, Narendrapur,

Kushasthali, Aruaapalli, and many more GPs of Rangeilunda and Kukudakhandi blocks.

The committee stated that the residents of these areas are deprived of rights to avail essential facilities. The committee urged a swift resolution to their longstanding efforts and demanded for inclusion.

In response, Panigrahy acknowledged the existing barriers and the unresolved status of the file concerning this

matter. He assured the committee that after the current Parliamentary session, he would take necessary steps towards resolving this issue. He promised that the outskirts of Brahmapur would soon be integrated into the BeMC.

Sanjeev Kumar Pattnaik, Devi Prasad Das, T. Sudesh Kumar Patra, Shrikant Padhiari, VV Sagar, Digambar Samantray and Prashant Kumar Panda were the delegation members..

In Keonjhar Youth kidnapped for ransom, rescued

Suspected kidnappers detained

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

Police on Sunday rescued a youth, Sanatan Nayak, who had allegedly been kidnapped for ransom at Nandipada village in Keonjhar district on Saturday.

The cops have detained some persons for interrogation in connection with the incident.

As per reports, Sanatan and his father Narendra were returning from court when the incident occurred. The duo had gone to depose before the Hatadihi court. While returning, some youths intercepted them and kidnapped Sanatan after assaulting his father.

On getting information, family members and relatives rushed to the spot and took Narendra to the Anandapur hospital.

Later, Narendra's wife Padmabati lodged a complaint in connection with the incident at the Nandipada police station. In her complaint, Padmabati alleged to have received a phone call demanding Rs 5 lakh as ransom for the release of her son Sanatan.

Notably, Sanatan had borrowed money from several sources after financial loss in online games. As he could not repay the money, he was arrested after a case was registered against him.

Sanatan had gone to the court to appear in the case when the alleged kidnapping occurred while returning home.

In Astarang Meet this ex-Army man who planted 50K palm trees in 20 yrs

Considering their ecological importance

KAMAL LOCHAN DIXIT ■ KAKATPUR

Taal (palm fruit) is as sweet to eat as the tree is beneficial for the environment. It plays a key role in resisting lightning and conserving groundwater.

While Odisha is prone to natural disasters, the importance of palm trees is well known. But over the years, palm trees in large numbers have been cut to meet various purposes. As a result, the number of deaths due to lightning is on the rise. Similarly, fresh water becomes scarce in ma-



rine areas as water table is not maintained. The 1999 Super Cyclone had led to the uprooting of hundreds of palm trees from the coastal areas.

Krishnachandra Biswal, a retired army officer, witnessed the destruction of palm trees

do something for nature conservation. He concentrated on planting palm trees in coastal areas including his native Gundalaba. Due to his efforts, he has already planted more than 50,000 palm trees in different places including Gundalaba, Kanam, Jahania near Astarang.

Every morning, Krishnachandra goes around his village Gundalaba with a spade and two sticks in his arm to collect palm seeds. Palm seeds are usually collected in July and August, and planted by the end of September. In the last few days, Krishnachandra planted many palm seeds and sent more than 5,000 seeds from Astarang to Puri Baliput area for plantation by his colleagues.

in the cyclone. Biswal who belongs to Gundalaba village under Chhuryana Panchaya of Puri district's Astarang Block, has been engaged in collecting and planting palm seeds after his retirement in 2004. Krishnachandra decided to

BeMC meet: Pressing urban issues highlighted

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAPUR

The general body meeting of the Berhampur Municipal Corporation (BeMC) brought to light several pressing challenges facing the city on Friday.

Elected representatives and officials while discussing the issue emphasized the urgent need for effective solutions to improve urban living conditions.

Concerns over waste management and city cleanliness dominated the meeting. The representatives voiced frustration over the failure to implement previous plans, particularly during the monsoon season, leading to unhygienic conditions especially

near Aaahar Kendra, Bus stand, park, food courts, market places and hospitals.

The city's drainage system was another major point of contention. The meeting underscored the need for improved drainage to prevent waterlogging and flooding during rains. The slow progress in cleaning and maintaining existing drains was heavily criticised.

Poor road conditions and delays in ongoing infrastructure projects were highlighted. The need for timely completion of road repairs and construction was stressed to enhance mobility and reduce public inconvenience.

Health and sanitation concerns were also prominent. The condition and mainte-

nance of public toilets were discussed, with calls for renovations and ensuring their usability to meet public health standards.

Frustrations with bureaucratic inefficiencies were evident throughout the meeting. Elected representatives accused officials of delaying the implementation of council decisions and losing important files, hindering city development.

A notable decline in public trust towards BeMC was mentioned, attributed to perceived inaction and inefficiency. The meeting underscored the need for better communication and engagement with the community to restore confidence.

Regulation and mainte-

nance of city markets, especially the fish market in Mardaraj and Giri market vending zones, were discussed. The absence of responsible officers during critical times was pointed out as a major issue, affecting market operations.

Problems with vehicle parking and management of municipal vehicles were also addressed. Concerns were raised about unnecessary usage and wastage of resources on non-essential vehicles.

A lack of coordination among municipal departments was highlighted, leading to delays and inefficiencies in executing development projects. The need for a more coordinated approach to urban governance was emphasized.

BJP slams Jairam for live-tweeting issues raised at all-party meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP on Sunday criticised Congress chief spokesman and Rajya Sabha MP Jairam Ramesh for apparently "live-tweeting" some of the issues raised by different parties at an all-party meeting, and said the Opposition party should consider sending a "more seasoned hand" next time. Ramesh, who attended the meeting, posted on social media while the deliberations were going on, "In today's all-party meeting of floor leaders chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, the JD(U) leader demanded special category status for Bihar. The YSRCP leader demanded special category status for Andhra Pradesh. Strangely, the TDP leader kept quiet on the matter." BJP's IT department head Amit Malviya said there is a certain propriety and protocol one associates with these all-party meetings. "There is free and frank exchange of ideas followed by media briefing. But a



look at Jairam Ramesh's timeline and it appears he was live tweeting the proceedings. Next time, the Congress should consider sending a more seasoned hand for these meetings," Malviya said. Ramesh's post had a political angle as he highlighted the demands of the two regional parties JD(U) is a BJP ally as well which is a tricky issue for the central government. Officials have argued that Finance Commission's recommendation accepted by the

Government preclude such a possibility. The Congress leader also took a dig at the TDP, another BJP ally. In another post in between the meeting, Ramesh said, "How the political climate has changed! In the all-party meeting of floor leaders the BJD leader reminded the Defence Minister and BJP President JP Nadda that the BJP's manifesto for the 2014 assembly elections in Odisha had promised special category status to the state."

Ramesh also posted that there was a universal demand that the Central Hall should once again be opened up for MPs to mingle with each other and improve communications across the parties. "The historic Central Hall has sadly fallen into disuse after the opening of the new building of Parliament," Ramesh said. On its part Congress asserted that issues such as the NEET 'scam', Uttar Pradesh Government's order to eateries and internal security situation in Jammu and Manipur, be taken up for discussion during the Budget session of Parliament. According to Ramesh, Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi asserted that challenges on the borders with China and environmental concerns arising out of floods and natural disasters, deforestation and pollution, be discussed during the session. Congress also raised the issues relating to Centre-state relations and the economy, which it stated must be debated upon.

SC to resume hearing on NEET-UG 2024 petitions

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a batch of petitions related to the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam, NEET-UG 2024, which was held on May 5. The National Testing Agency (NTA) had on Saturday released city- and centre-wise results of the medical entrance exam, which is riddled with accusations of paper leak and inordinate inflation of marks. According to the cause list of July 22 uploaded on the apex court's website, a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra would hear more than 40 pleas, including those filed by the NTA seeking transfer of cases pending against it in various high courts on the NEET-UG row to the Supreme Court to avoid multiplicity of litigations. An analysis of data released by NTA indicated that the candidates who allegedly benefitted from the paper leak and other irregularities did not do well. Some centres, however showed high concentration of well-performing students, it

revealed. The voluminous data of over 32 lakh candidates from 4,750 centres was not released in a cumulative format but in a drop-down menu for each centre. The data was released on the direction of the Supreme Court which is hearing several petitions over the alleged irregularities as lakhs of aspirants await a final verdict on the fate of the exam. The performance of the candidates from the centres under the scanner -- such as Oasis School, Hazaribagh, Jharkhand, Hardayal Public School, Jhajjar, Haryana, Jay Jalaram International School in Godhra, Gujarat -- were comparatively much below par. On July 11, the top court had adjourned till July 18 the hearing on the pleas, including those seeking cancellation of the exam, re-test and probe into alleged malpractices in the conduct of NEET-UG 2024, as the responses of the Centre and the NTA were yet to be received by some parties. The bench had observed that it had received a status report from the Central Bureau of Investigation on the progress made in the probe.

In an additional affidavit filed in the apex court last week, the Centre said data analysis of the results of NEET-UG 2024 was conducted by IIT-Madras, which found there was no indication of "mass malpractice" or any localised set of candidates scoring abnormally high marks. While hearing the pleas on July 8, the top court had observed that the sanctity of the NEET-UG 2024 has been "breached". Saying that a re-test may be ordered if the entire process was affected, the bench had sought details from the NTA and the CBI, including the timing and manner of the alleged paper leak, besides the number of wrongdoers to understand the extent of irregularities claimed by the petitioners. More than 23.33 lakh students had taken the test on May 5 at 4,750 centres in 571 cities, including in 14 cities overseas. The Centre and the NTA, in their earlier affidavits filed in the apex court, had said that scrapping the exam would be "counterproductive" and "seriously jeopardise" lakhs of honest candidates in the absence of any proof of large-scale breach of confidentiality.

SC to hear PIL on electoral bonds

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday a public interest litigation seeking a court-monitored investigation into the electoral bonds scheme. A bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra is likely to hear the PILs filed by NGOs Common Cause and the Centre for Public Interest Litigation (CPIL). The PIL of the two NGOs alleges an "apparent quid pro quo" between political parties, corporations and investigative agencies. "Termining the electoral bonds scheme a 'scam', the plea sought a direction to authorities to investigate the source of funding of 'shell companies and loss-making companies which made donations to various political parties, as has been disclosed by the data released by the Election Commission (EC)'. The petition has also sought a direction to the authorities to recover the money donated by companies as part of 'quid pro quo arrangements where these are found to be proceeds of crime'. A five-judge Constitution bench had on February 15 scrapped the electoral bonds scheme of anonymous political funding introduced by the BJP Government. Following the top court's judgement, the State Bank of India, the authorised financial institution under the scheme, had shared the data with the EC, which later made it public. The electoral bonds scheme, which was notified by the Government on January 2, 2018, was pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties to bring in transparency in political funding. "The electoral bond scam has a money trail unlike the 2G scam or the coal scam, where allocations of spectrum and coal mining leases were arbitrarily made, but there was no evidence of a money trail. Yet this court ordered court-monitored investigations in both those cases, appointed special public prosecutors and formed special courts to deal with those cases," the plea said. It claimed that several firms which were under investigation by agencies have donated large sums of money to the ruling party, to potentially influence the outcome of probes.

Researchers flag tobacco industry's interactive vapes

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Researchers have red flagged the tobacco industry's bid to integrate new electronic cigarette products also known as vapes with interactive features such as touch screens, animated displays, and built-in games to make them appealing to youngsters particularly those tech-savvy. Published in the journal 'Tobacco Control', the study authored by scientists from the University of California, Riverside, warned that these features could potentially exacerbate nicotine addiction among youth by integrating vaping with gaming behaviors. The study in their study titled "Pac-Man on a vape: electronic cigarettes that target youth as handheld multimedia and gaming devices", identified several new electronic cigarette models, such as the Craftbox V-Play, which incorporate classic arcade games like Pac-Man and Tetris. These devices also feature animations that change with each puff, built-in Bluetooth for customisation, and celebrity endorsements with promotional trading cards. The study holds importance in the context of India too where despite being banned by the Government, vaping products are being found to be sneaked in the schools and colleges where students have been using them without any fear of law. In fact, in India, the menace has been all around which has prompted 'Mothers Against Vaping', a united front of concerned mothers combating the promotion of New-Age Tobacco Devices such as e-cigarettes, vapes, electronic nicotine delivery systems, heat-not-burn products, e-hookahs and similar devices among Indian children and youth to join hands with celebrities like Nandita Das, Baichung Bhutia, Deepa Malik, Dutee Chand, Neha Dhupia to take up the cause. In November 2023, a large consignment of e-cigarettes worth Rs 50 lakh coming from China



was nabbed on the Khutar-Puranpur highway in Shahjahanpur, Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, a seizure at Chennai airport in November last year involved the confiscation of 11,700 e-cigarettes worth Rs 3.5 crore coming from China. In the present study, researchers, including Man Wong and Professor Prue Talbot, expressed concern that these advanced features make electronic cigarettes more appealing to youth who may not have been interested in nicotine products previously. They emphasised that coupling nicotine with activities like gaming and screen time could potentially widen the market for smart vapes among young users. Drawing the attention of the health regulatory bodies, Talbot and Wong called for stringent regulation of these devices by Government agencies like the Food and Drug Administration (FDA). The researchers also proposed measures to restrict features that enhance attractiveness to youth, and even suggest considering a ban on disposable vapes due to their evolving features and potential for increased waste generation. The study also noted that these new smart vapes are affordable, priced around \$15-20, and offer enhanced functionalities compared to earlier models. However, the disposable nature of these vapes contributes significantly to environmental waste, exacerbated by the inclusion of screens, Bluetooth, and digital storage. Talbot underscored the importance of increasing awareness about the rapid evolution of vape designs and enhancing surveillance to promptly remove products targeting youth from the market.

Centre OK's consideration of private member Bill on free internet access

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has cleared the consideration of a Private member's bill that seeks to grant every citizen the right to free internet access while ensuring equal access to people from backward and remote regions of the country. "No citizen shall be liable to pay any kind of fee or charges or expenses which may prevent him or her from accessing internet facilities," the bill has proposed. While the bill was introduced in the Rajya Sabha by CPI (M) member V Sivadasan in December 2023, according to a bulletin issued by the Upper House of Parliament, Telecom Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia has communicated to the Rajya Sabha Secretary-General that the President has recommended the consideration of the bill to the House. Private members' bills involving expenditure from the exchequer require the President's permission through the ministry concerned on whether such bills can be con-



sidered by the House. The Bill states that every citizen shall have the right to free internet access and the appropriate Government shall, while ensuring universal access to the internet to all citizens, take special measures to ensure that the citizens who belong to the backward and remote regions of the country are provided equal access to the internet. The Bill seeks to expand the scope of the constitutional right to freedom of speech and expression granted to all citizens of the country by making internet accessible to all for free. The Bill also envisages that the digital divide in the society will be bridged. It says the Constitution makes

the right to freedom of speech and expression a fundamental right for all citizens, therefore they should be able to access the internet in order to exercise and enjoy their right to freedom of expression and opinion and other fundamental human rights. It says the central Government should either directly provide internet access to all citizens or completely subsidise the services provided by any service provider so that internet access is ensured for all citizens. It also proposes that the Centre shall provide funds to the states as grants-in-aid of revenues to enable them to implement the provisions of the Act.

ICG executes medical evacuation mission from Gabon Republic

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a remarkable display of operational efficiency and courage, the Indian Coast Guard (ICG) executed a daring medical evacuation mission from the Motor Tanker Zeal of Gabon Republic, situated approximately 20 kilometers from the Mangrol coast in Gujarat. The incident unfolded when the ICG received distressing reports of a critically-ill Indian national aboard the Motor Tanker Zeal. The patient was reported to be experiencing a very low pulse and severe numbness in the lower body, necessitating immediate evacuation for urgent medical care. Despite facing adverse weather conditions characterised by high-intensity winds and heavy rainfall, the ICG Air Enclave based in Porbandar promptly launched an Advanced Light Helicopter. The helicopter navigated through the challenging weather to reach the Motor Tanker Zeal.



Upon arrival at the scene, the helicopter crew demonstrated precision and skill by positioning themselves directly over the tanker and deploying a rescue basket. The patient was carefully lifted aboard the helicopter and swiftly transported to Porbandar for further medical attention. A statement issued by the Union Defence Ministry highlighted the successful execution of the evacuation mission, emphasising the ICG's unwavering commitment to maritime safety and its preparedness to respond to emergencies under the most demanding circumstances. The evacuated individual is now under medical care in Porbandar, added the statement.

Thirteen Indians rescued from cyber-scamming centres in Laos

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Thirteen Indians, who were lured into certain cyber-scamming centres in Laos, have been rescued and sent back home, the Indian embassy in the Southeast Asian country said on Sunday. "In our continued work to ensure safety & well-being of Indians as top priority, Embassy successfully rescues 13 Indians from cyber-scamming centres in Laos & ensures their safe return to India," the mission posted on social media platforms. "So far, Embassy has rescued 518 Indians. We thank Lao authorities for their cooperation," it said. On May 7, the embassy came



out with an advisory cautioning Indians against fake job offers. "Instances have come to our notice recently wherein Indian nationals are being lured for employment through Thailand," it had said. "These fake jobs are for posts such as of 'Digital Sales and Marketing Executives' or

'Customer Support Service' by dubious companies involved in call-centre scams and cryptocurrency fraud in Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos," the embassy said in the advisory. It said agents in places such as Dubai, Bangkok, Singapore and India associated with these

firms are recruiting Indians by taking simple interviews and tests. "Victims are illegally taken across the border into Laos from Thailand and held captive to work in Golden Triangle Special Economic Zone in Laos under harsh and restrictive conditions," it said. "At times, they are taken hostages by criminal syndicates indulging in illegal activities and forced to work in strenuous conditions under constant physical and mental torture," the advisory said. The embassy had said there were instances of Indian workers being brought to Laos to work in other regions of Laos in low-cost jobs such as mining and wood factory.

EPFO adds record 19.50 lakh members in May

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Employees' Provident Fund Organisation (EPFO) has reported a record addition of 19.50 lakh net members in May 2024, marking the highest increase since the issuance of its first payroll data in April 2018. An official from the Ministry of Labour and Employment said that May 2024 saw a robust addition of 19.50 lakh net members, indicating a year-over-year growth of 19.62 per cent compared to May 2023. This surge is attributed to increased employment opportunities and enhanced awareness of employee benefits. The official also said that approximately 9.85 lakh new members joined EPFO in May 2024, marking a 10.96% increase from April 2024 and an 11.5 per cent increase from May 2023. Notably, the 18-25 age group constituted 58.37% of these new enrollments, reflecting a trend of youth entering the organised workforce. But at the same time, around 14.09 lakh members exited and re-joined EPFO-covered establishments in May 2024, demonstrating a year-over-year growth of 23.47 per cent compared to May 2023. This indicates a preference among members to transfer their EPF accumulations when switching jobs, ensuring continuity of social security benefits, the



official added. The payroll data also showed a significant increase in female membership, with around 2.48 lakh new female members joining in May 2024, marking a 12.15 per cent increase from May 2023. The net addition of female members stood at approximately 3.69 lakh, reflecting a 17.24 per cent year-over-year growth. State-wise breakdown showed that Maharashtra, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Gujarat, and Haryana emerged as the top states/UTs for net member additions, accounting for 58.24 per cent of the total additions. Maharashtra led with 18.87 per cent of net members added during the month. At the same time, industries such as expert services, building and construction, garments making, textiles, and engineering products witnessed significant growth in EPFO membership. Expert services alone contributed around 42.33 per cent to the total net membership addition.

Social sector urges Govt for more resources for holistic development

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the upcoming Union Budget, stakeholders from diverse sectors including health, social welfare, child rights activists, and senior care advocates come out with a bucket list, urging the Government to allocate resources strategically for holistic national development. The new Government's full Union Budget 2024 is set to be announced on July 23. Child rights activists, including Puja Marwaha from CRY - Child Rights and You, emphasized the critical need to prioritize children in the national development agenda. Marwaha highlighted that children constitute a significant



portion of India's population and called for increased investments in health, nutrition, and education programs. Specifically, she advocated for higher allocations towards initiatives like Saksham Anganwadi and Poshan 2.0, particularly benefiting children from Particularly

Vulnerable Tribal Groups (PVTGs). Marwaha also stressed the importance of enhancing public expenditure on education in alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. At the same time, Agewell Foundation Organisations like Agewell Foundation and

HelpAge India have outlined comprehensive proposals to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, highlighting the urgent requirement for enhanced financial support, healthcare and social security for the elderly. A significant demand is the revision of the central contribution to the old age pension under the National Social Assistance Program (NSAP). The NGOs advocate increasing the pension amount from the current Rs 200-500 to at least Rs 1,000 per month for those aged over 60 years and Rs 1,500 per month for those aged over 80 years, it said. Underscoring the demographic shift towards an aging population in India, Rajit Mehta, representing Antara Senior

Care too emphasized the urgent need for policies supporting senior care, including tax benefits, specialized health insurance, and infrastructure development incentives. Mehta highlighted the economic and social importance of addressing senior well-being as part of sustainable development efforts. Hanish Bansal, Chairman of MASSH Super Specialty Hospital in the national capital, expressed optimism about potential investments and policies aimed at strengthening healthcare infrastructure nationwide. Bansal also urged for increased focus on enhancing medical services, promoting advanced medical technologies, and expanding healthcare insurance coverage.

Bansal also emphasized the role of public-private partnerships in accelerating healthcare development and ensuring equitable access to quality healthcare across the country. At the same time, Rasmii Ranjan Ray from Suez India welcomed the Modi Government's interim Budget's commitment towards infrastructure development, particularly in sectors like housing, green energy, and urban development. He anticipated further boosts in capital expenditure in the upcoming full Budget announcement and emphasised the importance of addressing India's growing urban development needs, especially in water and waste management.

Nearly 120 students from Assam return from Bangladesh: Official

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Nearly 120 students hailing from Assam have returned from Bangladesh, which has been rocked by violent protests, over the last few days, a senior official said on Sunday.

Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Ajay Tewari told PTI that the Assam students have so far entered India through Integrated Check Posts at Sutarkandi in Karimganj district and Dawki in Meghalaya.

"In the Northeast, students and other people are entering through the ICPs in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. Till Saturday night, 76 students who hail from Assam entered from Dawki while another 41 students from Sutarkandi," he said. He also said that students from Barak Valley are mostly coming through Sutarkandi, while those belonging to the Brahmaputra Valley have entered through Dawki.

More students are expected to come in the next few days and



the Assam government has deputed a magistrate and senior police official at Sutarkandi to facilitate their entry into India, Tewari said. "Students from Nepal, Bihar and other states are also coming in. Most of the students belonging to Tripura

have returned through Akhaura post in that state," he added. Asked how many Assamese students were there in Bangladesh, Tewari said that the number is not available with the state government but it is with the Ministry of External Affairs.

"They have not given us the estimated number of Assamese students stuck in Bangladesh or I don't know if they have that breakup. We are monitoring anyone coming through the Sutarkandi post and facilitating their safe return to their respective homes," he said.

Karimganj District Commissioner Mridul Yadav on Saturday said that he and the SP had visited the ICP at Sutarkandi and interacted with the students.

The state government is also in touch with the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to ensure the safety of people from the state residing or visiting Bangladesh, he said. Stating that more students are likely to cross over, Yadav said, "The district administration is geared up to help them. A magistrate and deputy SP have been stationed 24 hours at the border till the situation eases." He also stated that no tension is anticipated at the border.

We lost seats not people's support, says Maha BJP chief

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra BJP president M Chandra Shekhar Bawankule on Sunday said his party maintained its support among people despite losing seats in the recent Lok Sabha polls.

He was addressing the party's state convention in Pune, which is being attended by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the party's state in charge and Union minister Bhupender Yadav, co-incharge Ashwini Vaishnav, among others.

"The BJP lost some seats in the Lok Sabha elections, but our voter base remains strong. There is no need to worry about it. In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the BJP secured 1,33,08,961 votes. The number increased in the subsequent assembly elections, with the BJP receiving 1,47,09,276 votes," Bawankule pointed out.

"In the 2019 general elections, the BJP obtained 1,49,12,139 votes. In the 2024 general elections, we got 1,49,13,914



votes. This clearly indicates the support for the BJP among the people remains unwavering. Nonetheless, we only secured nine seats in this Lok Sabha election," he added.

The BJP's tally at the national level came down from 303 seats to 240, while it went down from 23 to nine in Maharashtra in the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, results of which were announced on June 4. Bawankule said the party had put in all efforts but a fake narrative led to losses, an apparent reference to the opposition's charge that the BJP wanted 400 seats to change the Constitution and end reservations. Meanwhile, in a post on X, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari said he could not attend the convention due to illness.

Clear Tamil Nadu-specific projects in Union Budget, Stalin urges Centre



PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chief Minister M K Stalin on Sunday expressed hope that the Centre would fulfill the expectations of the people of the state by clearing Tamil Nadu-specific projects in the Union Budget 2024-25. For the past three years, the Centre has "not released funds" for the Chennai Metro Rail (Phase 2) project, Stalin said and listed other proposals including the pending sanction for the Tambaram-Chengalpattu elevated expressway corridor. In a post on social media platform X, the chief minister highlighted the people's expectations from the Union Budget, saying that for about 10 years, middle-class

families have been hoping that their income tax burden would be reduced and tax relief provided to them. Among the state's expectations, he listed the approval for Metro Rail projects in Coimbatore and Madurai, allocation of adequate funds for already announced railway projects in Tamil Nadu and increasing the expenditure limit under the Centre's rural and urban housing schemes (PM Awas Urban/Gramin schemes). "I believe that the union government will fulfill the expectations of the Tamil Nadu people," Stalin said in his post. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on July 23.

Maha sees 1,267 farmer suicides since Jan this year; Amravati division worst hit

PTI ■ MUMBAI

A total of 1,267 farmers have committed suicide in Maharashtra in the first six months of this year, with Amravati division in the state's Vidarbha region accounting for 557 deaths. As per January to June data in a state government report, Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar division was second with 430 deaths, followed by 137 in Nashik division, 130 in Nagpur division and 13 in Pune division. No death was reported in the coastal Konkan division.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, in 2022, Maharashtra led with 37.6 per cent of all farmer suicides in the country. The NCRB said 11,290 persons involved in the farming sector, comprising 5,207 farmers or cultivators and 6,083 agricultural labourers, ended their lives in

2022. This accounted for 6.6 per cent of all suicides in the country, which stood at 1,70,924.

In 2021, 10,881 persons involved in farming, comprising 5,318 farmers and 5,563 agricultural labourers, committed suicide, with Maharashtra accounting for 37.3 per cent of these deaths. As per NCRB data, a total of 1,64,033 persons committed suicide in 2021 and those connected to farming comprised 6.6 per cent. In 2020, a total of 10,677 individuals in the farming sector (5,579 farmers or cultivators and 5,098 agricultural labourers) died by suicide, which was 7 per cent of the 1,53,052 such deaths nationwide. Maharashtra accounted for 37.5 per cent of the deaths in 2020.

Incidentally, Maharashtra is also the highest contributor in the country's GDP.

Assam flood situation improves, 1.30 lakh still affected in State

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam improved on Sunday with the number of people reeling under the deluge decreasing to 1.30 lakh in 10 districts, officials said. Two major rivers, including the Brahmaputra, continued to flow above the danger level. A central team, comprising top officials from various ministries, visited the state to assess the damage caused by two waves of floods this year. Over 1.30 lakh people in 23 revenue circles and 423 villages across 10 districts remain affected in the state, the officials said.

The affected districts are Kamrup, Morigaon, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Golaghat, Nagaon, Dhemaj, Goalpara, Kamrup Metropolitan and Cachar. Nagaon is the worst-hit district with more than 72,000 people still reeling under the deluge. Till Friday, the number of



flood-hit people was 2.07 lakh in 10 districts.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide, lightning and storm stands at 113. More than 9,000 people are taking shelter in 46 camps, while another 18 relief distribution centres are serving over 21,000 citizens, the officials said. The Brahmaputra river was flowing above the danger level in Dhubri and the Disang in Nanglamuraghat. Damage to embankments,

houses, roads and other infrastructure across various districts has also been reported.

The eight-member inter-ministerial central team to assess damage due to the flood wrapped up their three-day visit on Saturday. The team, led by Ministry of Home Affairs Joint Secretary Mihir Kumar, visited several flood-affected areas and held discussions with senior state government officials.

Additional Chief Secretary Ajay Tiwari apprised the central team of the flood situation. He said cyclone Remal triggered the first wave of flood and the state was hit by two waves of the deluge. Assam State Disaster Management Authority CEO Gyandendra Dev Tripathi requested the central team to declare the two waves of flood as calamities of a severe nature and to recommend the release of Rs 500 crore on an interim basis.

IIT-Guwahati to study reasons for artificial flood in Dibrugarh: Sonowal

PTI ■ DIBRUGARH (ASSAM)

Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said on Saturday that services of IIT-Guwahati will be enlisted to study the cause of artificial flood in Assam's Dibrugarh city, and based on its findings, a master plan will be prepared to solve the problem.

He also stressed on the need for the civic bodies to address issues such as encroachment to help find a permanent solution for the water logging, an official statement said.

The city witnessed massive artificial floods this year, even as some parts of Dibrugarh continued to reel under waters. The minister visited Naliapool area of the city to inspect the drainage and sewerage system and called upon local authorities to hedge all efforts, resources and knowledge to chalk out a sustainable and pragmatic solution to the water logging problem. The minister for ports, shipping and waterways said IIT-Guwahati will study the causes of



artificial flood in the city, based on which a master plan will be prepared and corrective measures will be taken to fix the artificial flooding in the city. Sonowal, who is the MP from Dibrugarh, also called up Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma in this regard, the statement said. Speaking on the occasion, Sonowal said, "The artificial flood in Dibrugarh is a cause of concern and we must find a solution that is economically prudent, ecologically viable and environmentally sustainable. "The IIT Guwahati is going to study the causes, which have thrown the life of Dibrugarh

out of gear. Once identified, a team of experts will draw a master plan and present it to the government for execution. We will ensure that this is executed in letter and spirit," he said. He urged civic bodies to act against anyone found violating the laws. Following the inspection visit, the Union Minister instructed the officials to swiftly act to bring relief to the public. He stressed on the need of the civic bodies to "address issues like encroachment and expedite efforts towards finding a permanent solution, incorporating expert opinions and suggestions into its plans".

Bihar to conduct 'indoor air pollution' study

PTI ■ PATNA

The Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) has decided to conduct an "indoor air pollution" study in Patna to identify types of pollutants inside people's homes and their effects, besides suggesting corrective measures.

The study will be first conducted in the capital city and later it will be held in Gaya, Muzaffarpur and a few other cities of the state.

Talking to PTI, Devendra Kumar Shukla, Chairman of the BSPCB, said, "We have initiated talks with the IIT-Tirupati for conducting indoor air pollution study in Patna to identify types of indoor air pollutants, their effects and also suggest corrective measures to reduce it. Our talks with IIT-Tirupati are expected to be finalised very soon. Bihar is probably the first state in India which has decided to conduct an



indoor air pollution study, he said. "People must know about the pollution levels inside their homes. The study will be conducted by dividing the city into various zones. A few houses will be selected from each zone for the study using modern techniques," said the BSPCB head.

Air pollution is mostly considered an outdoor concern, but studies suggest that indoor air can be

polluted as well and might even be more so than the air outside, he said.

People are now spending more time indoors than before with the advent of online learning, entertainment, and shopping, Shukla said.

Since Patna has recently emerged as one of the most polluted cities in the country, the study will begin from there, he added. "The ill effects

of indoor air pollution are becoming a serious matter globally. The most affected groups are women and younger children, as they spend the maximum time at home. Indoor air pollutants can cause respiratory infections, chronic bronchitis and several other diseases, said Shukla.

Stating that the Indo-Gangetic plains are worst affected due to air pollution, mainly because of dust, he emphasized the need for long-term measures to curb air pollution.

"As for controlling vehicle emissions, there should be a proper traffic system in cities, including Patna, so that there are no bottlenecks that result in snarls which hike pollution," said the BSPCB Chairman.

The poor air quality, especially during winter, in various cities in Bihar has always remained a matter of concern for the authorities.

Revanth Reddy in Delhi to invite top Cong leaders for farm-loan waiver event

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy arrived in New Delhi on Sunday for a two-day visit to invite top Congress leaders for a public meeting in Warangal focused on farm-debt waiver programmes. Sources said Reddy is slated to meet Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and is also likely to seek time from former Congress chief Rahul Gandhi for the public meet.

The chief minister wants to inform the Congress leadership that since farm-loan waiver was announced in Warangal during the Assembly poll campaign, it would be fitting for the party to hold a public meeting there to highlight its implementation, the sources added. The Telangana government



initiated the first phase of the loan waiver scheme on July 18, with Rs 6,098 crore credited to farmers' bank accounts. This phase covers loans of up to Rs 1 lakh. The scheme will be rolled out in three phases, with the second phase targeting loans of up to Rs 1.5 lakh by July-end and the final phase covering loans of up to Rs 2 lakh in August. Reddy's Delhi visit comes on the heels of the launch of this flagship scheme, underscoring its importance on the Congress government's agenda. Farm loan waiver was a major promise that helped the party secure poll victory in the southern state.

Karnataka HC quashes POCSO case against a man after marriage to victim

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court has quashed criminal proceedings against a 23-year-old man from Mysuru, who had allegedly sexually assaulted a 18-year-old when she was a minor, following their marriage and production of their marriage certificate. Justice M Nagarasanna emphasised that the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) case could be revived if the accused abandons the girl and their child after the case's closure. The court had earlier granted interim bail to the accused to facilitate the marriage with the victim (after she attained the age of 18), requiring him to return to jail with the marriage certificate. The accused complied with it. The court has ruled that continuing the proceedings



would negatively impact the mother and child, leading to societal stigma. The incident occurred on February 2, 2023, when the accused took the school-going girl to an isolated location and allegedly sexually assaulted her. The girl subsequently gave birth to their child. Both parties' accused and the victim through their legal representatives submitted that they were in love, but faced parental opposition. They had sought closure of the proceedings, considering the accused's wish to marry the victim.

No shortage of coal for power sector: Minister Kishan Reddy

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Union Minister G Kishan Reddy said there is "no shortage" of coal for the power sector and the Centre will ensure adequate supply of the dry fuel to meet demand. The long-term demand will be met by increased productivity of Coal India and commercial mines, he said.

"We are supplying coal to all thermal power plants. We have requested plants based on imported coal to switch their technology to utilise domestic fuel. There is no shortage of coal in the country," Reddy, the minister for coal and mines, told PTI. Coal production usually faces hindrances during the

monsoon season. Some technical issues related to commercial mines were being addressed, he said without divulging the details. Speaking on the power ministry's advisory related to four per cent imported coal blending for domestic thermal plants, the minister said, Coal India is successfully ramping up production but the blending is advised to "mitigate the risk of blackout due to sudden rise in electricity demand".

Earlier this month, the Nominated Authority of the Coal Ministry held a meeting to review the status of both operational and non-operational captive and commercial coal mines. During the meeting, the



authority stressed on the need for operationalising coal blocks that are in advanced stages of development. The department appreciated efforts of all allottees in increasing coal production and urged them to achieve the committed output targets for the 2024-25 financial year

(FY25). The Ministry of Coal has allocated or auctioned 161 mines with a peak-rated capacity of 575 million tonnes. Of these, 58 have received mine opening permission, and 54 are operational. Last year, these mines

produced 147 million tonnes, constituting 15 per cent of the country's total coal production.

In a review meeting held in early June, Reddy stressed on exploration of more blocks for auctions.

The government had relaxed technical eligibility for coal block auctions to attract more participants. It has recently concluded the 10th round of coal block auctions.

The union minister had urged all stakeholders to work diligently to achieve at least 175 million tonnes of production from captive and commercial coal blocks this year, representing a 19 per cent growth. As of June 30, 54 captive and

commercial coal mines are under production, with 32 allocated to the power sector, 12 to the non-regulated sector and 10 for the sale of coal.

The current production from these mines stands at 39.53 million tonnes, registering a strong 35 per cent year-on-year growth. An additional 11 mines are expected to commence production in FY25.

Furthermore, 65 non-operational coal blocks are in various stages of obtaining regulatory clearances, distributed across nine states - Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha, and West Bengal, the ministry said.

Chhattisgarh Assembly session: Congress looks to target BJP Govt on law and order

PTI ■ RAIPUR

The monsoon session of the Chhattisgarh legislative assembly, scheduled to begin on Monday, is expected to be a stormy affair with the opposition Congress gearing up to corner the ruling BJP on the "deteriorating" law and order situation among other issues. The Congress said it will gherao the state assembly on July 24 to protest against the alleged deteriorating law and order situation, particularly the violence in Balodabazar city last month. Addressing a press conference here, state Congress chief Deepak Baij on Sunday said the last seven months of the Vishnu Deo Sai government saw four

incidents of firing in the state capital, and inter-state gangsters have been spreading tentacles in Chhattisgarh. Baij claimed 300 cases of rape, 80 incidents of gangrapes and more than 200 murders were reported in the state in seven months. "There have been countless incidents of stabbing, looting, robbery and chain-snatching. The BJP has failed to protect the common man," he claimed. While the previous Congress government strengthened the law and order situation in the state, the Sai government has destroyed it in just seven months, he said, accusing the state home minister of making empty statements.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Trouble in Bangladesh

Students rampage in Bangladesh protesting job quota for veterans' families; India calls it an 'internal matter'

Bangladesh is going through the worst phase in years as students have taken to the streets protesting the Government's 30 per cent quota for relatives of the veterans who fought its war of independence in 1971. A national curfew has been imposed and the army has been deployed after 105 people including two journalists died in the bloodiest protests for a decade. A 'shoot-on-sight' order is also in place giving security forces the authority to fire on mobs, showing the gravity of the situation. Slowly but surely the student protest is turning into an all-out protest against the government as student protesters stormed a prison and freed inmates. The students maintain that job reservation for families of veterans mostly benefits supporters of Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement. Students are struggling in a country where around 32 million young people are neither employed nor in education. Although job opportunities have



increased in certain areas of the private sector, many individuals prefer government jobs due to their perceived stability and better pay. The Government's crackdown on the protesting students has had little effect in controlling the violence. The protests, which began earlier this month, have led to widespread unrest and disruption across the country, leaving many foreign students in precarious situations.

About 15,000 Indians live in Bangladesh, of whom around 8,500 are students. Around 4,000 students are still awaiting their turn to be evacuated. The MEA spokesperson Arindam Bagchi has

confirmed that 1000 Indian students have been safely brought back home. The families are anxiously waiting for the return of stranded students. The Indian High Commission in Dhaka has set up a dedicated helpline to assist students and provide real-time updates on the repatriation process. Students have been advised to stay in touch with the mission and follow its guidance closely. A communication blackout has been in place since Thursday, including the suspension of mobile data and text message services. Besides, the Government's high-handedness in dealing with the protests has only escalated the tension and put the Hasina Government in a bad light. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government is facing one of the most severe challenges of her 15-year tenure. Indeed, it is one of the biggest challenges Sheikh Hasina has faced in years. The student protests are turning into general protests against the government. Sheikh Hasina has appealed to students to wait for the court verdict on the issue but to no avail. India meanwhile has termed the unrest in the neighbourhood as an 'internal matter of Bangladesh' but must be concerned as Sheikh Hasina's Government maintains good relations with India and any disruption may impact Indo-Bangladesh relations.

PICTALK



Devotees wait in queues to offer prayers at Vindhyavasini Temple on the occasion of Guru Purnima, in Mirzapur

The evolution of cricket and umpiring

Cricket has undergone significant transformations. The journey includes not only victories but also bloopers and game changing umpiring mistakes

The elusive cup reached home amidst thunderous applause and the rapturous welcome of the men in blue. As the euphoria settles and the cricketers (a lot richer) and fans (a lot happier) go home, it is time to look back and think about the evolution of the game and its future direction. As ardent followers of the game, it made us think how far we have come from the age of Maharaja Ranjitsinh ji to Kerry Packer to the glam world of the IPL. The history of cricket can only be complete with the history of bloopers, misjudgements and game-changing (quite literally) umpiring mistakes. The love-hate relationship between the Indian cricket team and umpire Steve Bucknor is well known, particularly in the famous monkey-gate test match. We still remember vividly the anger we felt when Sachin Tendulkar was given out LBW in a controversial decision by Bucknor when India toured down under in 2003. However, we have come a long way since then, thanks to the ever-increasing use of technology. The gentleman's game has a rich history of evolution in its rules and regulations, particularly in umpiring. Initially, cricket matches featured just one umpire, but as the game grew in complexity and intensity, it came the system of having two umpires. The second umpire, positioned at square leg, was introduced to assist with decisions that the main umpire at the bowler's end might miss, such as run-outs and stumping, thereby enhancing the accuracy and fairness of on-field decisions. In the 1990s, the third umpire system, enabled by technology, changed cricket umpiring. What the field umpires considered unjudgeable, they could now refer to the third umpire, who in turn can watch theoretically unlimited replays of what transpired before giving a verdict... The Decision Review System (DRS), introduced more recently, further revolutionised the game. It allows players to challenge on-field umpire decisions, with the third umpire reviewing the play using various



technological aids like ball-tracking and ultra-edge detection. This system has given more power to players and increased the accuracy of decisions. Statistics highlight that out of the 1,201 umpire decisions made during test matches between 2009 and 2014 that were challenged, 310 (25.81%) were overturned by a third umpire. Research that accounted for various match and team factors conducted logistic regressions to demonstrate the following: (1) Leg before wicket (LBW) and caught decisions that are initially deemed "out" by the on-field umpire are more prone to being overturned compared to decisions ruled "not out"; (2) When it comes to both LBW and caught decisions, there is an equal likelihood of the home and away teams winning a reversal by the 3rd umpire. Compared to cricket, sports like football demonstrate a compelling need for on-field officials due to the game's fast-paced nature. Football referees make instantaneous decisions on fouls,



THE ADVANCEMENT OF TECHNOLOGY IN CRICKET UMPIRING HAS UNDENIABLY ENHANCED THE ACCURACY OF DECISIONS AND THE INTEGRITY OF THE GAME. HOWEVER, TECHNOLOGY CANNOT REPLACE UMPIRES' HUMAN TOUCH

yellow and red cards, and off-side calls, which are critical for maintaining the flow and fairness of the game. While technology, such as the Video Assistant Referee (VAR), supports these decisions, the subjective nature of many calls—like tackles or hand-balls—requires the immediate and nuanced judgment of on-field referees. This dynamic is quite similar to cricket, where the on-field umpires' interpretation of situations, like appealing for a catch or judging a no-ball, often involves subjective judgment that technology alone cannot fully replicate. Despite the evident utility of on-field umpires, modern technology has permeated the game so much that the need for having on-field umpires is becoming questionable. The advancement of technology in cricket umpiring has undeniably enhanced the accuracy of decisions and the integrity of the game. However, technology cannot replace umpires' human touch throughout the game

by managing player interactions and upholding decorum. However, the current system of having two on-field umpires now brings an element of redundancy. One on-field umpire renamed as a referee, supported by comprehensive technological systems and a vigilant remote umpire, could suffice. While the remote umpire can pass decisions aided by technology, the referee could help smooth the conduct of the game and ensure that all the rules and spirit of the game are upheld. This would streamline the officiating process and speed up the game. This hybrid model that combines the strengths of human wisdom with technological aids could offer the best solution, ensuring the game's efficiency and integrity are upheld. After all, cricket is a gentlemen's game. It should remain a gentlemen's game. (Rahul Pachori is Director, GOI, and Divya Singh Rathore is Senior Policy Specialist, GOI. Views expressed are personal)



Bihar's business boom: A new era of development

As Bihar strengthens its infrastructure and undertakes reforms, it is poised to become a hub of economic activity and innovation



RAJESH KUMAR SINGH

A year ago, when the Adani Group decided to invest Rs. 8,700 crore in Bihar, it attracted the attention of investors from all over the country. The bureaucracy of Bihar, supporting the Nishit government, has made development and investment its campaign. Why can't entrepreneurs come here? The credit goes to the officers who returned from central deputation in Delhi. Additionally, Nitish Kumar, the head of the current NDA government in Bihar, strengthened his political connections. In Delhi, many JDU MPs became influential in the power corridors, such as Lallan Singh and Sanjay Jha, whose responsibilities increased. Bihar has successfully convinced the Center, resulting in several policy changes in energy and industry. As a result, Bihar is becoming self-sufficient in energy, a development appreciated in other BJP-ruled states. Similarly, the process of identifying and allocating land for industry has begun, and naturally, investors have started project reconnaissance. This seems to be a turning point. In



tourism, officials started working tirelessly to provide important information, and selfie points began to be established at tourist locations. Consequently, groups like Mayfair Hotel opened Bihar's first five-star hotel in Purnia. This new initiative led to proposals worth about Rs.10,000 crores in the field of food processing at the Bihar Investors Meet. However, Bihar's misfortune has been that although proposals came in, investors did not follow through in proportion. But now, the situation is changing. A cursory glance shows that Bihar is an agriculture-based state. The state's agriculture roadmap discusses processing units for various crops like fruits, vegetables, grains, and makhana. Especially, products of litchi, mango, guava, banana, makhana, potato, and toma-

to have been the main focus. Many investors showed interest, but most left projects incomplete. Currently, according to the Chamber, 15 companies are interested in food processing and have expressed a desire to invest about Rs10,304 crores. Companies like Godrej, Anmol Foods, and Bangladesh's Pride Food are also showing interest. Prime Minister Modi has appointed Bihar's young minister Chirag Paswan and experienced minister Giriraj Singh in these ministries with great expectations. Bhagalpur silk has now entered the international market for the textile industry in Bihar. Additionally, many units related to handloom and khadi clothes are working on a very small scale in Bihar. Until now, investors were unaware of Bihar's cottage industry potential. The responsibility for expanding this sector lies with senior leader and MSME Minister Jitan Ram Manjhi. The climate here is also suitable for the textile industry. The government has 44 old proposals regarding textile, leather, and food processing that need

to be brought to Bihar. In the past, many reasons hindered industrial growth in Bihar. Law and order problems were discouraging, but now better electricity and roads are attracting everyone. Today, India is the third-largest domestic civil aviation market in the world after China and America. Some states like Bihar lagged in aviation due to political differences, but the Bihar government is now gearing up for aviation infrastructure. In the proposed aviation plan for Bihar, apart from the Greenfield Airport in Bhagalpur and Rajgir, a Flying Training Academy in Begusarai, small cities of Bihar are also included. Existing airstrips in Saharsa, Munger, Birpur, Valmiki Nagar, Chhapra, Madhubani, Kishanganj, and Dalmianagar will be renovated and upgraded. In the Kosi area, many highway constructions are underway. The day is not far when, Bihar transforms into a developed state but it depends on preferential treatment the state gets in Union Budget. (The writer is senior journalist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NARCOTIC HELPLINE LAUNCHED

Madam — On 18th July, the Union Home Minister inaugurated the National Narcotics Helpline, 'MANAS' (Madak Padarth Nishedh Asuchna Kendra). The helpline, accessible through the toll-free number 1933, a web portal, and a mobile app, allows citizens to anonymously report drug trafficking activities. Although 'MANAS' collects personal information, it guarantees that the identity of the informant will be kept confidential.

This anonymous reporting system could be expanded to cover other types of crimes. 'Crime Stoppers', a collaborative effort between police and civil society, enables citizens to anonymously provide information about crimes or suspects via phone calls, online forms, or mobile apps. Many individuals, despite having critical information about crimes, are hesitant to speak directly with the police due to fears of testifying or concerns for their safety. Crime Stoppers ensures the anonymity of those reporting suspected criminal activities. Crime Stoppers helplines do not display caller numbers or trace calls.

Upon receiving a call or a completed anonymous online form, they compile a report that excludes any information that could identify the caller. This report is then forwarded to the relevant authority, such as the police, customs, or the NCB, for further investigation. Founded in the US in 1976 (1-800-222-TIPS), Crime Stoppers has since been adopted in the UK (0800 555 111), Australia (1800 333 000), and South Africa (08600 10111). Since its inception in the UK in 1995, Crime Stoppers has received over 2.2 million actionable calls, leading to the arrest and charging of more than 151,000 individuals and the seizure of illegal drugs worth over £367 million.

According to the recent National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) Report 2022, released in December 2023, 5,824,946 cognizable crimes were registered in

Learning from the Microsoft server outage



The recent global disaster caused by Microsoft's server outage highlights the need for preparedness against such failures and cyber-attacks. A glitch in the system can play havoc across the world.

The outage disrupted air traffic, banking, TV broadcasting, government and non-government operations, and even emergency services in America. It's ironic that this happened alongside the implementation of new cybersecurity measures, which themselves can jeopardize security. While technology is integral to modern life, the dominance of a few large tech companies poses risks.

These firms often impose arbitrary conditions on users and create different rules for different countries. To counteract this, governments must collaborate to curb the monopolies of private digital businesses. Whether major nations can unite against these internet giants is uncertain, but India could take steps in this direction.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

2022. This includes over 1,200 crimes against women and 445 crimes against children per day. The establishment of an Indian Crime Stoppers initiative is urgently needed.

Srinivas Madhav | Hyderabad

KARNATAKA'S JOB RESERVATION BILL

Madam — This is regarding the news that Karnataka CM is slowing down on the private sector job quota bill (July 19). Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's decision to delay the Job Reservation Bill for Kannadigas, amidst political opposition, is a step in right direction. The industry's concerns that such a bill could hinder innovation and competitiveness are valid. The government's lack of consultation with the Federation of Karnataka Chambers of Commerce and Industry suggests ulterior motives. Instead, the focus should be on improving skill development programs and educational environments to address local unemployment effectively.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad
ADDRESSING WEAVER SUICIDE

Madam — The frequent suicides of weavers due to financial problems and lack of buyers for expensive woven cloth are distressing. A practical solution would be to employ weavers in textile industries, as traditional weaving is becoming more of a hobby for the rich in the age of mechanized, inexpensive cloth. The high price of handwoven clothes cannot compete with industrial cloth.

The frequent suicides of weavers due to financial struggles and lack of buyers for expensive handwoven cloth are alarming. Employing weavers in textile industries could be a practical solution, as traditional weaving is becoming a luxury hobby. Handwoven clothes can't compete with cheaper industrial cloth, and high electricity costs make mechanized weaving expensive.

PV Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORKPLACE ETIQUETTE

It enhances individual career opportunities and builds a professional image



SAKSHI SETHI

Manners are essential in the workplace for several reasons, as they contribute significantly towards the overall functioning and atmosphere of the work environment. The transition from being a student to a working professional comes with its own set of challenges, including the need to adapt to workplace etiquette.

Much talked about, the term 'Workplace etiquette' is simply the anticipated behaviour and actions of a person in a workplace and society which includes being respectful to others and always keeping a well-mannered behaviour thereby creating a comfortable environment for everyone. It is a guide for actions in different situations and how to deal with those situations while being courteous to the employer and co-workers. It varies from one workplace to the other and serves as a map to every organization.

It is often said that first impressions are everlasting and in a professional setting, they can significantly influence perceptions and opportunities. Being punctual, wearing appropriate dress and polite greetings help create a positive first impression. When the employees exhibit these behaviours, they demonstrate respect for their colleagues and the organization thereby setting a tone of professionalism from the outset. This event fosters a cooperative environment where employees feel valued and are more likely to work together productively. For a few, this can even open doors to new opportunities, promotions and career advancements. Employers value individuals who contribute positively to the work environment and represent the company well. There is no denying the fact that respect and trust are the foundations of any successful professional relationship.

Adhering to workplace etiquette such as active listening, avoiding interrupting others and acknowledging contributions, fosters an environment of mutual respect. This respectful behavior builds trust among colleagues, facilitating smoother collaboration, and harmonious and efficient teamwork. An organisation that promotes and



expects proper etiquette is seen as more professional and reputable. This can attract top talent, clients as well as business partners who want to be associated with a respectful and well-mannered organization. It is often said that trust, once established, enhances communication and encourages open sharing of ideas, thereby leading to innovative solutions and better decision-making. Utilizing etiquette in the workplace can ensure that everyone feels comfortable while being productive.

Maintaining workplace etiquette goes a long way in ensuring that one commands the respect of co-workers and superiors and that the individual's professional image remains unblemished. Remember, an employee will be a much more valuable staff member if they stay alert, tune into conversations around them and contribute to the general discourse. Undoubtedly, in any workplace, conflicts are inevitable, but proper etiquette can help resolve them.

Approaching conflicts with a calm and respectful demeanour, listening to all perspectives and seeking mutually beneficial solutions prevent escalation and help in maintaining a positive work environment. Escalation should be the last resort but one shouldn't shy away if needed.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Harnessing ancient wisdom for economic prosperity



B K JHA

The time is ripe for Bharat to make use of its historical wisdom, embrace global opportunities, and drive towards a prosperous and inclusive future

As Bharat aspires to become the third largest economy in the world, it must not only focus on achieving this goal but also focus on sharing surplus to create a vibrant and inclusive society. The author of 'Arthashastra', Acharya Chanakya, says 'Dharmasya Moolam Arthah' (Economy is the Strength). Hence, the land of Chanakya needs a clear vision—Making Society Prosperous with a mission of creating and sharing surplus wealth. The ancient wisdom of the Vedas, "Sat Hasta Samahara, Sahastra Hasta Sankira," translates to "Create wealth with 100 hands and share it with 1,000 hands." Hindus contributed significantly to the world economy from the 1st to the 15th century CE, reflecting their understanding of wealth creation and distribution. Hindu civilization's prosperity is evident in the magnificent monuments of past and present such as Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, Lothal, Nalanda and Takshila University, Ayutthaya in Thailand, Angkor Wat in Cambodia, Prambanan and Borobudur in Indonesia, and the temples of Rameshwaram, Brihadeshwara, and Meenakshi in Bharat. However, this prosperity was lost during periods of Islamic invasion, colonial rule, and the Industrial Revolution.

The 21st-century economy is driven by knowledge and youth, and with a significant portion of the Hindu population being young, there is an inherent potential waiting to be unlocked. The current economic boom, coupled with the recession of major economies, has created turmoil worldwide. Traditional responses, such as cost-cutting and protectionism, are insufficient. What is needed is a new and creative approach to generating surplus wealth and rescuing the global economy from its current crisis. Today, while some economies face turbulence, emerging economies offer great opportunities. The challenge is how to leverage the global situation for collective growth. Hindus should cooperate and collaborate globally to facilitate market access across geographic zones and countries, from Auckland to Alaska and Oslo to Johannesburg. Similarly, there should be cooperation in capital availability and technological innovation, matching technically savvy Hindus with those who can turn innovation into business opportunities. The fundamental problems of hunger, poverty, and illiteracy cannot be solved merely through donations and charity.

A growing population has growing needs, which can be addressed only by creating surplus wealth and empowering the masses, especially those at the bottom of the pyramid. This approach aligns with the philosophy of creating "That, which sustains," and aims to eradicate hunger, poverty, and illiteracy. Historical evidence shows that the British plundered Bharat extensively. Economic historian, Utsa Patnaik's research suggests the British colonial regime looted almost USD 45 trillion from India from 1765 to 1938. This astronomical sum is fifteen times the annual GDP of the UK today. This wealth funded the Industrial Revolution in England, highlighting the significant economic contribution of Bharat. Nations and communities regain their

economic strength through cooperation and dedication. For instance, the Jews rebuilt themselves after the Holocaust through networking, community support, and self-organization. Similarly, Japan and Germany emerged as economic superpowers after World War II, and China has become the second-largest economy since 1950. The GDP of Bharat in 2015 was USD 2.07 Trillion. Now it is slightly over USD 3 trillion. In the next three years, the nation aims to achieve USD 5 trillion.



THE CONCEPT OF LINKING HINDUISM WITH ECONOMIC GROWTH FIRST EMERGED IN FEBRUARY 1973, WHEN BPR VITHAL, WRITING UNDER THE PSEUDONYM NAJIN YANUPI, REFERRED TO THE RATE OF GROWTH OF INDIA'S PER CAPITA INCOME, SUGGESTING A RANGE OF 1% TO 3%

The concept of linking Hinduism with economic growth first emerged in February 1973, when BPR Vithal, writing under the pseudonym Najin Yanupi, referred to the rate of growth of India's per capita income, suggesting a range of 1% to 3%. This notion, termed the "Hindu rate of growth," was later popularized by economist Raj Krishna. Former Chief Economic Advisor Kaushik Basu defended this term in a 2007 paper, noting, "Hindu rate of growth" is the tongue-in-cheek expression coined by the Indian economist, the late Raj Krishna, to capture the frustrations India's planners faced with growth. No matter what they did, growth seemed, invariably, to revert back to 3.5%, almost as if this magic figure was written in the land's scriptures." Since then, many economists, including former Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission Montek Singh Ahluwalia (1995) and former Chief Economic Advisors Shankar Acharya (2002) and Arvind Virmani (2006), have

explored the theme of the Hindu rate of growth. The smooth legitimization of this phrase, despite its contemptuous undertones towards Hinduism in a predominantly Hindu country, highlights the tolerance and acceptance of those who practice this faith. Equating slow GDP growth with Hinduism and attributing economic stagnation to religion is being seen as a challenge now.

Credits go to an IIT alumnus Swami Vigyananand, the Founder, of the World Hindu Economic Forum (WHEF) who created a global forum with a mission to 'Making Society Prosperous.' The journey of economic resurgence for the Hindu community began in 2012 in Hong Kong and has since traversed global locations such as Bangkok, New Delhi, London, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Mumbai. Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the movement has continued to expand through digital business networks and local chapters.

Rooted in the philosophy of the Bhagwad Gita, the focus remains on forward-thinking and sustainability to generate surplus wealth and enhance societal well-being. This socio-economic non-governmental organization is set to host its highly anticipated event- WHEF 2024 in Mumbai. The mega business conference and exhibition will be organized from December 13th to 15th, 2024. With the theme "Think in Future, for the Future," this forum aims to cultivate forward-think-

ing and sustainable economic strategies. 'Viksit Bharat,' (Developed India), Industry 4.0, Skill Development, E-Commerce, Capital Market, and Regional Opportunities are expected to be in focus. Hindus now aim to gain at least 16% of the world's GDP in proportion to their population share.

By fostering cooperation and collaboration globally, facilitating market access, supporting financial ecosystems, and encouraging technological innovation, the community can drive economic empowerment and social development. By fostering and mentoring enterprise and entrepreneurship, the community can collectively drive economic growth and secure a prosperous future. Communities and nations regain their economic strength when they work with a spirit of cooperation and single-minded dedication. This collaborative approach can lead to significant contributions to the world GDP, visibility, acceptability, and respectability for the Hindu community. As Bharat marches towards becoming the third-largest economy, the focus needs to be on creating and sharing surplus wealth. By leveraging historical wisdom, fostering global cooperation, and embracing forward-thinking and future-ready strategies, the community can drive economic empowerment and social development, ultimately contributing to a prosperous and inclusive society.

(The author is a senior journalist and the views expressed are personal)

India's bold climate leadership amidst global heatwave concerns

India stands out as a beacon of hope, demonstrating unwavering commitment through innovative climate initiatives and sustainable practices

This year's record spell of an intense heatwave in Delhi, during which temperatures touched 50°C, highlighted concerns over the adverse effects of climate change globally. India remains a beacon of hope through its actions as part of the global efforts to stem climate change. Through myriad initiatives, the country has demonstrated its unwavering commitment to environmental sustainability. India's journey toward climate action began in 2009 when the country voluntarily pledged to reduce the emissions intensity of its GDP by 20-25% by 2020 compared to 2005 levels. Impressively, India achieved a 24% reduction within the stipulated timeframe. In alignment with the Paris Agreement, India submitted its



SOURYABRATA MOHAPATRA

Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the UNFCCC in 2015, setting forth eight ambitious targets for 2021-2030, further reinforcing its commitment to combating climate change. Tree plantation and forest conservation are at the heart of India's environmental efforts. Through programs like the National Mission for Green India and the Compensatory Afforestation Fund

Management and Planning Authority (CAMPA), India encourages the use of barren land for tree plantations. The country ranks third globally in net forest area gain, with 21.71% of its geographical area covered by forests. Initiatives like the Green Credit Program further incentivize tree plantation and forest restoration. India's commitment to wetland conservation is equally impressive, with 80 designated Ramsar sites. The Mangrove Initiative for Shoreline Habitats and Tangible Incomes (MISHTI) aims to promote and conserve mangroves, which are vital for carbon storage and marine biodiversity. The country has implemented the Plastic Waste Management Amendment Rules, 2021, ban-

ning the use of single-use plastics. Renewable energy is another area in which India excels. The National Green Hydrogen Mission, launched in January 2023, aims to position India as a leader in green hydrogen technology. The country ranks fourth globally in renewable energy capacity. India's environmental initiatives extend beyond its borders. The country plays a pivotal role in global platforms such as the Global Alliance for Circular Economy and Resource Efficiency. India has made notable strides in addressing climate change, earning a commendable 7th place in this year's Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), up one spot from last year, making it one of the highest performers globally.



India's high ranking in the GHG Emissions and Energy Use categories underscores the country's efforts to manage its environmental impact despite its large population. Notably, India's per capita emissions remain relatively low, aligning with global benchmarks aimed at limiting temperature rise to well below 2°C above the pre-industrial average.

However, the path forward is complex, and critical areas still require focused attention and accelerated action. India continues to rely heavily on coal, oil, and gas to meet its growing energy demands. This dependence is a major contributor to GHG emissions and severe air pollution, especially in urban areas. While there is a slight positive trend in the adoption of renewable energy, the pace of this transition is too slow to meet urgent climate goals.

Despite high marks in emissions and energy use, India receives a medium rating in Climate Policy and Renewable Energy. The country has clear long-term policies focusing on renewable energy, including the domestic manufacturing of renewable energy com-

ponents. Yet, the implementation of these policies needs to be more effective. The COP26 announcement by Prime Minister Modi, setting a net-zero emissions target for 2070, has been criticized by experts for lacking ambition. The call for a faster phase-out of coal, reduced reliance on gas, and a significant expansion of renewable energy is strong.

India's heavy reliance on coal presents a significant challenge. Despite high taxes on petrol and diesel, consumption has not decreased. Some experts view these taxes as effective, while others highlight the government's dependence on the revenue they generate. The rephrasing from 'phase-out' to 'phase-down' for fossil fuels, championed by India

and China at the last COP, was a setback for global climate commitments. Large-scale renewable energy projects in India have also faced criticism for negatively affecting local communities through land grabs and unequal resource distribution. Policies have been largely mitigative rather than transformative, often overlooking adaptation and disaster risk management. There is a growing call for policies that incorporate ecosystem-based solutions and prioritize equity, ensuring that climate actions benefit all segments of society. India needs a more bottom-up approach to policy implementation, incorporating the needs and demands of tribal and rural communities.

(The writer is a NCAER faculty; views are personal)

B'desh top court scales back govt jobs quota

Deadly unrest leaves scores dead

AP ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh's top court on Sunday scaled back a controversial quota system for government job applicants, in a partial victory for student protesters after days of nationwide unrest and deadly clashes between police and demonstrators that have killed scores of people.

Students, frustrated by shortages of good jobs, have been demanding an end to a quota that reserved 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The government previously halted it in 2018 following mass student protests, but in June, Bangladesh's High Court reinstated the quotas and set off a new round of protests.

Ruling on an appeal, the Supreme Court ordered that the veterans' quota be cut to 5%, with 93% of jobs to be allocated on merit. The remaining 2% will be set aside for members of ethnic minorities and transgender and disabled people. The protests have posed the most serious challenge to Bangladesh's government since Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina won a fourth consecutive term in January elections that were boycotted by the main opposition groups. Universities have been closed, the internet has been shut off and the government has ordered people to stay at home.

The protests turned deadly on Tuesday, a day after students at Dhaka University began clashing with police. Violence continued to escalate as police fired tear gas and rubber bullets and hurled smoke grenades to scatter stone-throwing protesters. Bangladesh authorities haven't shared any official numbers of those killed and injured, but the Daily Prothom Alo newspaper reported



An injured student is carried on a stretcher as students clash with police over the quota system in public service brought to a hospital, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Saturday, July 20

Saturday that at least 103 people have died so far. Sporadic clashes in some parts of Dhaka, the capital, were reported on Saturday but it was not immediately clear whether there were any fatalities.

Ahead of the Supreme Court hearing, soldiers patrolled cities across the South Asian country. Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan said the stay at home order will be relaxed from 3 pm to 5 pm on Sunday for people to run essential errands.

Meanwhile, the government has declared Sunday and Monday as public holidays, with only emergency services allowed to operate.

Protesters argue the quota system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, saying it should be replaced with a merit-based system. Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions in the war against Pakistan, regardless of their political affiliation.

Representatives from both sides met late Friday in an attempt to

reach a resolution and Law Minister Anisul Huq said the government was open to discussing their demands. Their demands included the reform of the current quota system, the reopening of student dormitories shut by the police following the clashes and for some university officials to step down after failing to protect campuses from the violence.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protests, vowing to organize its own demonstrations as many of its supporters have joined the student-led protests. However, BNP said in a statement its followers were not responsible for the violence and denied the ruling party's accusations of using the protests for political gains.

The Awami League and the BNP have often accused each other of fueling political chaos and violence, most recently ahead of the country's national election, which was marred by a crackdown on several opposition figures. Hasina's government had accused the opposition party of attempting to disrupt the vote.

US asks citizens not to travel to Bangladesh

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The United States has recommended that its citizens do not travel to Bangladesh and allowed the voluntary departure of its non-emergency government employees and family members in view of the ongoing civil unrest in the South Asian country.

The development comes just a day after the US issued a new travel advisory for Bangladesh, urging Americans to reconsider their travel to the strife-torn country.

Authorities in Bangladesh has imposed a strict curfew across the country and military personnel patrolled parts of the capital to quell further violence after days of clashes over the allocation of government jobs left more than 40 people dead and hundreds injured.

The US Department of State raised the Travel Advisory Level for Bangladesh to Level 4 — 'Do Not Travel'.

"Do not travel to Bangladesh due to civil unrest, crime, and terrorism," the State

Department said, adding, "The department allowed for the voluntary departure of non-emergency US government employees and family members."

"The Government of Bangladesh has declared a curfew throughout Bangladesh, ordering everyone to stay indoors. The Bangladeshi Army has been deployed throughout the country to reinforce the police. Telecommunications have been interrupted in Dhaka and across the country. Due to the security situation, there may be a delay in provision of routine consular services," the advisory stated.

The US State Department said crimes such as muggings, burglaries, assaults, and illegal drug trafficking constitute the majority of criminal activity in Bangladesh's major cities, but there are no indications foreigners are being targeted because of their nationality.

These crimes tend to be situational, based on time and location, it said.



In this image made from video released by Xinhua News Agency, rescue workers set up a temporary crossing in the aftermath of floods in Xinhua Village of Hanyuan County, Ya'an City, southwest China's Sichuan Province, July 20

Nepal PM Oli wins vote of confidence in Parliament

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli comfortably won a vote of confidence in Parliament on Sunday, nearly a week after he was sworn in to lead a coalition government in the Himalayan nation.

Oli secured 188 votes in favour of the Vote of Confidence motion tabled by him while 74 votes were cast against the motion. Out of a total of 263 members of the House of Representatives, who are present, one member abstained.

Oli, 72, required 138 votes out of a total of 275 votes to pass the floor test in the House of Representatives (HoR). Prime Minister Oli has won the vote of confidence in the Lower House, Speaker of the HoR Dev Raj Ghimire announced after the counting of votes. As the Parliament meeting started,

Prime Minister Oli tabled the motion seeking a vote of confidence from the House.

Speaker Ghimire gave around two hours for HoR members and representatives from ruling and Opposition parties to discuss the motion. He then allotted time for the Prime Minister to give his response to the issues raised by HoR members.

The voting process started after the Prime Minister concluded his deliberations.

Responding to issues raised by the HoR members Oli said, "I was not and will not get involved in corruption neither will tolerate if any one practices so." He said that the two larger parties "Nepali Congress and CPN-UML came together to maintain political stability, checking corruption and bring good governance."

"This coalition government will create a reliable eco-system for stability, development and

good governance," asserted Oli. House of Representatives members belonging to the ruling alliance Nepali Congress, CPN-UML, Lokatantrik Samajwadi Party and Janata Samajwadi Party Nepal were among those who voted in favour of Oli's Vote of Confidence motion.

Opposition parties CPN-Maoist Centre, CPN-Unified Socialist, Rashtriya Swatantra Party and Rastriya Prajatantra Party among others voted against Oli during the floor test. The veteran Communist leader was sworn in on Monday as the Himalayan nation's prime minister for the fourth time. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy along with 21 other members of the Cabinet. According to Nepal's Constitution, Oli needed to secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days of appointment.

SL workers in Bangladesh not affected by violence

Colombo (PTI): The Sri Lankan workers in Bangladesh have not been affected by the civil commotion in the country, authorities here said on Sunday. It is estimated that around 3,000 Sri Lankans are serving in Bangladesh currently. Their situation is being closely monitored by the Foreign Employment Bureau. Bangladesh has been reeling over 90 people have been killed in the clashes that began weeks ago, according to reports from Dhaka, though the exact number of deaths is not yet clear. Law enforcement authorities in Bangladesh have imposed a nationwide curfew as the clashes between protesters demanding withdrawal of a job quota system and police continued across the country. Meanwhile, the MFA has said that it is paying special attention to the safety of Sri Lankan students in Bangladesh universities, Newsfirst reported.

S Korea boosts border propaganda broadcasts

North Korea flies more trash balloons

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea said on Sunday it was bolstering its anti-Pyongyang propaganda broadcasts across the tense border with rival North Korea, after the North launched more trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea.

The Cold War-style psychological battle between the two Koreas is adding to already-high tensions on the Korean Peninsula, with the rivals threatening stronger steps against each other and warning of devastating consequences.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the North Korean balloons were flying Sunday morning north of Seoul, the South Korean capital, after crossing the border. It said later Sunday that the South Korean military was responding by expanding loudspeaker broadcasts at all major sections of the Korea's 248-kilometre-long border.

"The North Korean military's

tension-escalating acts can result in causing critical consequences for it," the South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement. "The responsibility for this situation is entirely on North Korea's government."

Details of the expansion of South Korea's loudspeaker operations were not immediately available. On Thursday, it resumed blasting frontline propaganda broadcasts for the first time in about 40 days in response to the North's previous balloon activities. But observers say South Korea hadn't been conducting the broadcasts around the clock and it also hadn't yet mobilised all of its loudspeakers.

The latest South Korean broadcasts included K-pop songs and news on BTS member Jim's torch-bearing ahead of the Paris Olympics and the recent defection of a senior North Korean diplomat. The broadcasts also called the mine-planting works by North Korea soldiers at the border

"hellish, slave-like lives," according to South Korean media.

Experts say South Korean propaganda broadcasts can demoralise frontline North Korean troops and residents, posing a blow to the North's efforts to limit access to outside news for its 26 million people.

South Korean officials have previously said broadcasts from their loudspeakers can travel about 10 kilometres during the day and 24 kilometres at night.

North Korea hasn't made an official response to the ongoing South Korean broadcasts. But in 2015, North Korea fired artillery rounds across the border in response to South Korea's first loudspeaker broadcasts in 11 years, prompting the South to return fire, according to South Korean officials. No casualties were reported.

The North's latest balloon-flying on Sunday is the ninth of its kind since late May. North Korea has floated more than

2,000 balloons to drop waste paper, scraps of cloth, cigarette butts, waste batteries and even manure on South Korea, though they have so far caused no major damage in South Korea.

North Korea has said the initial balloons were launched in response to South Korean activists sending political leaflets to the North via their own balloons.

Like South Korean frontline broadcasts, North Korea views the South's civilian leafletting activities as a major threat to its authoritarian government led by Kim Jong Un. In furious responses to past South Korean leafletting, North Korea destroyed an empty South Korean-built liaison office in its territory in 2020 and fired at incoming balloons in 2014.

In a statement last week, Kim's powerful younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, threatened new countermeasures against South Korean civilian leafletting as she warned that South Korean "scum" must be ready to pay "a

gruesome and dear price" over their actions. She said more South Korean leaflets had been found in North Korea.

That raised concerns North Korea could stage physical provocations, rather than balloon launches. South Korea's military said North Korea may fire at balloons or scatter mines downriver.

In early June, South Korea suspended a 2018 tension-reduction deal with North Korea, a step required for it to restart propaganda broadcasts and conduct live-fire military drills at border areas in response to the North's balloon campaigns.

Tensions on the Korean Peninsula have already been running high because of North Korea's provocative run of missile tests and the expansion of US-South Korean military drills that North Korea calls invasion rehearsals. Experts say North Korea's expanding ties with Russia could embolden Kim Jong Un to stage bigger provocations.

Pakistan condemns attack on consulate in German city Frankfurt

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Sunday condemned the attack on its consulate in the German city of Frankfurt along with the failure of German authorities to protect the diplomatic facility.

In the incident which occurred on Saturday, "the security of Pakistan's consulate in Frankfurt was breached, endangering the lives of its consular staff", the Foreign Office said without identifying the nationality of the attackers. "Pakistan strongly condemns yesterday's attack by a gang of extremists in its consulate in Frankfurt, Germany and the failure of the German authorities to protect the sanctity and security of the premises of its consular Mission," it said.

Under the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, 1963, it is the responsibility of the host government to protect the sanctity of the consular premises and ensure the security of diplomats, it said.

"We are conveying our strong protest to the German government. We urge the German government to take immediate measures to fulfill its responsibilities under the Vienna Conventions and ensure the security of the diplomatic missions and staff of Pakistan in Germany," it said.

Pakistan also asked the German authorities to take immediate measures to arrest and prosecute those involved in the incident and hold to account those responsible for the lapses in security. Media reports indicated that the attack occurred during a protest by Afghan citizens and videos circulating on social media show the protesters storming the consulate, throwing stones, and removing the Pakistani flag. The attackers also attempted to burn the flag. According to details, 8 to 10 Afghan nationals were involved in storming the Pakistani consulate and fled after taking down the Pakistani flag. So far, no arrest has been made.

Russia scrambled fighter jets to intercept US bomber planes over Barents Sea

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia said Sunday it scrambled fighter jets to intercept two US military long-range bomber aircraft that approached the Russian border over the Barents Sea in the Arctic. "The crews of the Russian fighters identified the aerial target as a pair of US Air Force B-52H strategic bombers," Moscow's defence ministry wrote on the social media platform Telegram, specifying that the planes scrambled were MiG-29 and MiG-31 fighters.

"As the Russian fighters approached, the US strategic bombers turned away from the State Border of the Russian Federation," the ministry said. The US routinely carries out flights over international waters. Moscow has recently responded more aggressively to the exercises, accusing the US

in June of using its reconnaissance drone flights over neutral waters in the Black Sea to help Ukraine strike Russian-occupied Crimea.

Last month, Moscow warned of a "direct confrontation" between Russia and NATO, and Russia's defence minister ordered officials to prepare a "response" to US drone flights over the Black Sea, in an apparent warning it may take forceful action to ward off the American reconnaissance aircraft.

Washington and Moscow have clashed before over the issue. In March 2023, a Russian Su-27 fighter jet damaged a US MQ-9 Reaper drone, causing it to crash into the Black Sea. It was the first direct clash between Russian and US forces since the Cold War.

A repeat of such a confrontation could further fuel tensions over the war in Ukraine.

Meditation can even worsen mental health problems

Coventry (England): Since mindfulness it's something you can practice at home for free, it often sounds like the perfect tonic for stress and mental health issues. Mindfulness is a type of Buddhist-based meditation in which you focus on being aware of what you're sensing, thinking and feeling in the present moment.

The first recorded evidence for this, found in India, is over 1,500 years old. The Dharmatrata Meditation Scripture, written by a community of Buddhists, describes various practices and includes reports of symptoms of depression and anxiety that can occur after meditation. It also details cognitive anomalies associated with episodes of psychosis, dissociation and depersonalisation (when people feel the world is "unreal").

In the past eight years there has been a surge of scientific research in this area. These studies show that adverse effects are not rare. A 2022 study, using a sample of 953 people in the

US who meditated regularly, showed that over 10% of participants experienced adverse effects which had a significant negative impact on their everyday life and lasted for at least one month.

According to a review of over 40 years of research that was published in 2020, the most common adverse effects are anxiety and depression. These are followed by psychotic or delusional symptoms, dissociation or depersonalisation, and fear or terror.

Research also found that adverse effects can happen to people without previous mental health problems, to those who have only had a moderate exposure to meditation and they can lead to long-lasting symptoms.

The western world has also had evidence about these adverse affects for a long time. In 1976, Arnold Lazarus, a key figure in the cognitive-behavioural science movement, said that meditation, when used indiscriminately, could induce "serious

psychiatric problems such as depression, agitation, and even schizophrenic decompensation". There is evidence that mindfulness can benefit people's well-being. The problem is that mindfulness coaches, videos, apps and books rarely warn people about the potential adverse effects.

Professor of management and ordained Buddhist teacher Ronald Purser wrote in his 2023 book *McMindfulness* that mindfulness has become a kind of "capitalist spirituality". In the US alone, meditation is worth US\$2.2 billion (£1.7 billion). And the senior figures in the mindfulness industry should be aware of the problems with meditation.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, a key figure behind the mindfulness movement, admitted in a 2017 interview with the Guardian that "90% of the research [into the positive impacts] is subpar".

In his foreword to the 2015 UK Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Report, Jon Kabat-Zinn suggests that

mindfulness meditation can eventually transform "who we are as human beings and individual citizens, as communities and societies, as nations, and as a species".

This religious-like enthusiasm for the power of mindfulness to change not only individual people but the course of humanity is common among advocates. Even many atheists and agnostics who practice mindfulness believe that this practice has the power to increase peace and compassion in the world.

Media discussion of mindfulness has also been somewhat imbalanced. In 2015, my book with clinical psychologist Catherine Wikholm, *Buddha Pill*, included a chapter summarising the research on meditation adverse effects. It was widely disseminated by the media, including a New Scientist article, and a BBC Radio 4 documentary.

But there was little media coverage in 2022 of the most expensive study in the history

of meditation science (over US\$8 million funded by research charity the Wellcome Trust). The study tested more than 8,000 children (aged 11-14) across 84 schools in the UK from 2016 to 2018. Its results showed that mindfulness failed to improve the mental wellbeing of children compared to a control group, and may even have had detrimental effects on those who were at risk of mental health problems.

Is it ethical to sell mindfulness apps, teach people meditation classes, or even use mindfulness in clinical practice without mentioning its adverse effects? Given the evidence of how varied and common these effects are, the answer should be no.

However, many meditation and mindfulness instructors believe that these practices can only do good and don't know about the potential for adverse effects. The most common account I hear from people who have suffered adverse meditation effects is that the teachers don't believe

them. They're usually told to just keep meditating and it will go away.

Research about how to safely practice meditation has only recently begun, which means there isn't yet clear advice to give people. There is a wider problem in that meditation deals with unusual states of consciousness and we don't have psychological theories of mind to help us understand these states.

But there are resources people can use to learn about these adverse effects. These include websites produced by meditators who experienced serious adverse effects and academic handbooks with dedicated sections to this topic. In the US there is a clinical service dedicated to people who have experienced acute and long term problems, led by a mindfulness researcher. For now, if meditation is to be used as a wellbeing or therapeutic tool, the public needs to be informed about its potential for harm. (The Conversation)

Hezbollah fires dozens of rockets at Israeli kibbutz

AP ■ BEIRUT/ JERUSALEM

Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group said that its fighters fired dozens of rockets into northern Israel on Saturday, targeting a kibbutz for the first time in nine months in retaliation for an Israeli drone strike earlier in the day that wounded several people including children. Also Saturday, the militant Palestinian group Hamas said it fired rockets from Lebanon toward an Israeli army post in the northern Israeli village of Shomera in retaliation for the "Zionist massacres" in the Gaza Strip. Hamas has carried out such attacks from Lebanon over the past several months, but they have been rare. On Saturday night, an Israeli airstrike on the southern coastal village of Adloun hit an arms depot and it was followed by a series of explosions that hit nearby villages with shrapnel, said state-run National News Agency, or NNA. The agency said that three people were

slightly wounded in the nearby village of Kharayeb and hospitalized. The agency didn't give further details about the arms depot, but it was believed to belong to Hezbollah, which has a wide presence in the area. The explosions lasted more than an hour after the airstrike, NNA said. Hezbollah's attack earlier in the day with dozens of Katyusha rockets on the northern Israeli kibbutz of Dafna came few hours after an Israeli drone strike hit a car in the southern Lebanese village of Burj al-Muluk, and shrapnel from the missile wounded several people who were standing nearby. NNA said that the wounded civilians are Syrian citizens and they included children. The Israeli military said that about 45 projectiles were detected crossing from Lebanon into northern Israel in three separate barrages. It said that some were intercepted, while others fell in open areas, causing no injuries, but triggering several fires in the Golan

Heights. On Friday, Hezbollah said that it fired rockets at three villages in northern Israel for the first time in retaliation for a strike that killed several people the night before. Hezbollah began firing rockets shortly after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, saying it aimed to ease pressure on Gaza. The exchange of fire and airstrikes, which has been limited to a few kilometers or miles on each side of the border, has displaced tens of thousands of people in both countries. On Wednesday, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned that his group would retaliate against Israeli strikes in Lebanon that inflict civilian casualties "by firing rockets and targeting new villages that were not targeted in the past." Since early October, Israeli airstrikes in Lebanon have killed more than 450 people, mostly Hezbollah members, but also around 90 civilians and noncombatants. On the Israeli side, 21 soldiers and 13 civilians

have been killed.

ISRAEL SHOOTS DOWN YEMEN MISSILE

The Israeli military said it intercepted a missile fired from Yemen early Sunday, hours after Israeli warplanes struck several Houthi targets in the Arabian peninsula country. The Israeli airstrikes — in response to a deadly Houthi drone strike on Tel Aviv — were the first time Israel is known to have responded to repeated Houthi attacks throughout its nine-month war against Hamas. The burst of violence between the distant enemies has threatened to open a new front as Israel battles a series of Iranian proxies across the region. The Israeli army late Saturday confirmed the airstrikes in the western Yemeni port city of Hodeidah, a Houthi stronghold. It said the strikes, carried out by U.S.-made F-15 and F-35 warplanes, were a response to

hundreds of Houthi attacks. Israel, along with the U.S., Britain and other Western allies with forces in the region, have intercepted almost all of the Houthi missiles and drones. But early Friday, a Houthi drone penetrated Israel's air defenses and crashed into Tel Aviv, Israel's commercial and cultural capital, killing one person. The Israeli military said Saturday's strike, some 1,700 kilometers (over 1,000 miles) from Israel, was among the most complicated and longest-distance operations by its air force. It said it hit the port because the area is used to deliver Iranian arms to Yemen. The Ministry of Health in Sanaa said that 80 people were wounded in a preliminary toll of the strikes in Hodeidah, most of them with severe burns. The Israeli attack unleashed a massive fire in the city's port. "The fire that is burning now in Hodeidah, is seen across the Middle East and the significance is clear," said

Israel's defense minister, Yoav Gallant. He vowed to carry out similar strikes "in any place where it may be required." The Houthis are among several Iranian-backed groups to have attacked Israel in solidarity with Hamas since the Oct. 7 attack by the Palestinian militant group triggered the ongoing Israeli offensive in Gaza. In addition to fighting Hamas, the Israeli military has been engaged in daily clashes with the Hezbollah militant group in Lebanon. These clashes have raised concerns that the fighting could spill over into a full-blown war with Lebanon and beyond. The Hodeidah port is also a gateway for supplies to enter Yemen, which has been engulfed in civil war since 2014, when the Houthis seized much of northern Yemen and forced the internationally recognized government to flee from Sanaa. A Saudi-led coalition intervened the following year in support of government forces, and in time the conflict

turned into a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters. Houthi spokesman Mohammed Abdulsalam posted on X that the "blatant Israeli aggression" targeted fuel storage facilities and the province's power station. He said the attacks aim "to increase the suffering of the people and to pressure Yemen to stop supporting Gaza." Abdulsalam said the attacks will only make Yemen's people and armed forces more determined to support Gaza. "There will be impactful strikes," Mohamed Ali al-Houthi of the Supreme Political Council in Yemen wrote on X. The Israeli military said the surface-to-surface missile fired Sunday was intercepted before reaching Israeli territory. Since January, U.S. and U.K. forces have been striking targets in Yemen, in response to

the Houthis' attacks on commercial shipping that the rebels have described as retaliation for Israel's actions in the war in Gaza. However, many of the ships targeted weren't linked to Israel. On Sunday, officials said the Houthis repeatedly targeted a Liberia-flagged container vessel transiting the Red Sea, the latest assault by the group on the crucial maritime trade route. The captain of the ship reported attacks from three small Houthi vessels, an uncrewed Houthi aerial vehicle, and a missile fire off the coast of Mocha, Yemen, resulting in "minor damage" to the ship, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. The Joint Maritime Information Center, a coalition overseen by the U.S. Navy, identified the ship as the Pumba and reported "all crew on board safe." Early Sunday, the Houthis claimed responsibility for the attack on the Pumba.

Secret Service admits denying Trump campaign's security requests

Rehoboth Beach (US) (AP) : The Secret Service now acknowledges it denied some requests by Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's campaign for increased security at his events in the years before the assassination attempt on him at a recent rally. In the immediate aftermath of the July 13 attack, the law enforcement agency had denied rejecting such requests. But the Secret Service acknowledged late Saturday, a week after the attempt on Trump's life, that it had turned back some requests to increase security around the former president. The reversal is likely to be a key focus of a congressional hearing on Monday where Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle is expected to appear before lawmakers who have been expressing anger over security lapses that allowed a 20-year-old gunman to climb atop the roof of a nearby building at Trump's rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, and fire his weapon. Trump was wounded in the right ear, one rallygoer was killed and two others were injured. "The Secret Service has a vast, dynamic, and intricate mission. Every day we work in a dynamic threat environment to ensure our protectees are safe and secure across multiple events, travel, and other challenging environments," the agency's chief spokesperson, Anthony Guglielmi, said in a statement released late Saturday to The Washington Post. The newspaper was first to report on the agency's reversal, which it said was based on detailed questions submitted to the agency. "We execute a comprehensive and layered strategy to balance personnel, technology, and specialized operational needs," Guglielmi said. He said the agency will rely on state and local law enforcement departments in some cases where specialized Secret Service units are unavailable. "In some instances where specific Secret Service specialized units or resources were not provided, the agency made modifications to ensure the security of the protectee," Guglielmi said.

Secret Service Chief faces resignation calls post Trump rally

AP ■ WASHINGTON

When Kimberly Cheatle led the Secret Service's operations to safeguard the American president and other dignitaries, she said she would talk to agents in training about the "awesome responsibility" of their job. This agency and the Secret Service has a zero fail mission," Cheatle, who is now director of the agency, said in 2021 during a Secret Service podcast called "Standing Post." "They have to come in every day prepared and ready with their game face on." Now, the Secret Service and its director are under intense scrutiny over that "zero fail" mission following an assassination attempt on former President Donald Trump during a July 13 rally in Pennsylvania that wounded his ear. Lawmakers and others across the political spectrum are questioning how a gunman could get so close to the Republican presidential nominee when he was supposed to be carefully guarded. Cheatle, who will testify before lawmakers Monday after congressional committees and the Biden administration launched a series of investiga-



tions, told ABC News that the shooting was "unacceptable." When asked who bears the most responsibility, she said ultimately it is the Secret Service that protects the former president. "The buck stops with me," Cheatle said. "I am the director of the Secret Service." She said she has no plans to resign, and so far she has the administration's backing. Democratic President Joe Biden appointed Cheatle in August 2022 to take over an agency with a history of scandals, and she worked to bolster diverse hiring, especially of women in the male-dominated service. The second woman to lead the Secret Service, Cheatle worked her way up for 27 years before leaving in

2021 for a job as a security executive at PepsiCo. Biden brought her back. Now, she faces her most serious challenge: figuring out what went wrong with the agency's core responsibility to protect presidents and whether she can maintain the support — or the job itself — to make changes. Details are still unfolding about signs of trouble the day of the assassination attempt, including the steps taken by the Secret Service and local authorities to secure a building that the shooter, Thomas Matthew Crooks, climbed within an estimated 147 yards (135 metres) of where Trump was speaking. A ex-fire chief at the rally, Corey Comperatore, was killed and two others were wounded. The Biden administration has directed an independent review of security at the rally. The Homeland Security Department's inspector general has opened three investigations and congressional committees have launched others as calls mount for Cheatle to resign. Two Republican senators demanding answers followed her as she walked through the Republican

National Convention this past week. "The nation deserves answers and accountability," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., posted on the social media platform X. "New leadership at the Secret Service would be an important step in that direction." In the House, Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said on X that Biden should fire Cheatle immediately, noting Comperatore's death and saying that "we ... were millimeters away from losing President Trump. It is inexcusable." Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., said in a statement Saturday that "the evidence coming to light has shown unacceptable operational failures" and he would have no confidence in Cheatle's leadership if she were to stay in the job. The House Oversight and Accountability Committee subpoenaed Cheatle to appear Monday, and she is expected to be there. After the shooting, Cheatle and the female Secret Service agents who protected Trump have faced scathing criticism and questions about whether Cheatle lowered hiring stan-

dards. Supporters are adamant that has not happened. "It is disrespectful to the women of the Secret Service of the Department of Homeland Security and to women law enforcement officers around the nation to imply that their gender disqualifies them from service to the nation and their communities," said Kristie Canegallo, Homeland Security's acting deputy secretary. Like many law enforcement agencies, the Secret Service has been wrestling with how to attract and retain agents and officers. Women account for about 24 per cent of the agency's staff, according to the agency's website. In a May 2023 interview with CBS News, Cheatle said she was conscious of the "need to attract diverse candidates and ensure that we are developing and giving opportunities to everybody in our workforce, and particularly women." Two years ago, Cheatle took over the agency of 7,800 special agents, uniformed officers and other staffers whose main purpose is protecting presidents, vice presidents, their families, former presidents and others. In announcing her appointment, Biden said

Cheatle had served on his vice presidential detail and called her a "distinguished law enforcement professional with exceptional leadership skills" who had his "complete trust." Cheatle took the reins from James M. Murray as multiple congressional committees and an internal watchdog investigated missing text messages from when Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. The Secret Service says they were purged during a technology transition. Going back further, there have been other problems at the Secret Service, including a prostitution scandal before President Barack Obama's trip to Colombia in 2012 and a man who jumped over the White House fence in 2014 and made it into the building. The Homeland Security Department did not make Cheatle available for an interview, but Canegallo defended her work. Canegallo said Cheatle advocated for a law passed this year that authorized overtime pay for Secret Service agents and successfully oversaw nine high-profile events such as political conventions.

Pope Francis calls for Olympic truce, prays for peace

Vatican City (AP): Pope Francis on Sunday voiced his hope that the Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games will provide an opportunity for countries at war to respect an ancient Greek tradition and establish a truce for the duration of the Games. "According to ancient tradition, may the Olympics be an opportunity to establish a truce in wars, demonstrating a sincere will for peace," Francis said during his Angelus prayer in St. Peter's Square. The Pope stressed that sport also has "a great social power, capable of peacefully uniting people from different cultures." The opening ceremony of the 33rd Olympic Games will be held in Paris on July 26 with the participation of 205 delegations of athletes, who will parade on more than 80 boats on the Seine. "I hope that this event can be a sign of the inclusive world we want to build and that the athletes, with their sporting testimony, may be messengers of peace and valuable models for the young," Francis added.

UK new treasury chief pledges 'iron discipline' amid pay raise demands

PTI ■ LONDON

Britain's new Treasury chief said Sunday she will run the economy with "iron discipline," but suggested she'll give public sector workers an above-inflation pay raise to help end a wave of strikes and strife. The Labour Party government is under pressure from supporters and trade unions to spend more on salaries and welfare benefits, two weeks after it was elected on promises not to hike personal taxes or increase public borrowing. "I think people know that things are a mess," Treasury chief Rachel Reeves told the BBC, arguing the previous Conservative government had left "public services on their knees, a tax burden at a 70-year high, debt almost the same size as our entire economy." "I'm going to level with people



about the scale of the challenge and then begin to fix the foundations," she said. "I am going to run our economy with iron discipline, bringing stability back." The center-left Labour Party won a landslide election victory on July 4 on a promise to get the U.K.'s sluggish economy growing, unleash a wave of house-building and green energy projects and patch the country's frayed public services. It

faces a wary, weary electorate eager for relief from a cost-of-living squeeze that saw interest rates top 11% in late 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the tax-cutting plans of briefly serving Conservative Prime Minister Liz Truss. Inflation has fallen back to 2%, and Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government wants to settle strikes by thousands of hospital doctors that have put more strain on the creaking state-funded National Health Service. Nurses, teachers, railway staff and other public-sector workers have also held walkouts over the past year to demand higher pay. The Times of London reported that the independent bodies that advise on public sector pay had recommended a 5.5% raise for teachers and around 1.3 million NHS employees. Paul Johnson, director of the

Institute for Fiscal Studies think-tank, said that could cost the government 3 billion pounds (\$3.9 billion) more than it had budgeted for. Reeves, the country's first female chancellor of the exchequer, said the government was looking at the recommendations and would find a way to give workers a raise and "make the sums add up." "There is a cost to not settling, a cost of further industrial action, a cost in terms of the challenge that we face in recruiting, retaining doctors, nurses and teachers," she said. The government is also under pressure from anti-poverty groups and many Labour lawmakers to scrap a policy introduced by the Conservatives that limits a widely-paid welfare benefit and tax credit to a family's first two children.

Colombia pres pushes for health as he opens new session of congress

AP ■ BOGOTA

Colombia's government will propose legislation aimed at overhauling the health sector and will pursue changes to labour laws, President Gustavo Petro said Saturday as he inaugurated a new session of congress. Petro, Colombia's first left-wing president, has pushed an ambitious set of economic changes that includes changing the pension system, raising the minimum wage and redistributing land to farmers affected by Colombia's armed conflict. He managed to get the minimum wage boosted last year and his pension plan approved by congress earlier this year, but he has struggled to persuade legislators to adopt his ideas on labour laws and the health system.



The coalition of political parties that joined Petro's government at the beginning of his term has broken up due to ideological differences. Meanwhile, numerous corruption scandals involving government ministers and the president's eldest son have decreased Petro's popularity. Leftist parties loyal to the president have their highest number of legislative seats in

Colombia's history, but they lack the 50% majority needed to pass legislation on their own and have been forced to bargain with parties on the centre and the right. For healthcare, Petro wants a government agency to be in charge of collecting billions of dollars in insurance fees from Colombians, sidelining the private insurance companies that currently manage much of the health system. For the labour sector, he wants to make it harder for companies to hire workers on temporary contracts and also require employers to pay workers full wages on rest days. He also proposed Saturday that legislators reduce the work week from 47 hours to 40, arguing that could increase employment and spur productivity.

Indian-origin man shot dead in US in suspected road rage incident

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A 29-year-old newly wedded Indian-origin man was shot dead in front of his wife in a suspected road rage incident in the US state of Indiana, police and media reports said. The incident happened when Gavin Dasaur was on his way home with his Mexican wife. Indianapolis Police Department (IMPD) Officer Amanda Hibschan said officers responded to a report of a person shot just after 8 pm on Tuesday last week at an intersection on Indy city's southeast side. Arriving officers said they found a man on the ground in the middle of the road suffering from at least one gunshot wound. The man's wife identified the



shooting victim. "I held him as he bled out and I was waiting for the ambulance," the victim's widow, Viviana ZaMora told The Indianapolis Star. Dasaur, reported to be hailing from Agra, and Viviana ZaMora, had just got married on June 29, a little over two weeks before his death. Witnesses told police the shoot-

ing occurred over a road-rage incident between the Chevy driver and Dasaur, who was driving a black Honda, local WTHR reports. The suspected shooter, Hibschan said, was detained at the scene. "Upon further investigation and after consultation with Marion County Prosecutor's Office, that indi-

vidual was released," the police spokesperson said, indicating the shooter may have acted in self-defence. The IMPD said the investigation over the shooting and alleged road-rage incident is ongoing. Dasaur's wife condemned the shooting as she grieved her husband's death. "He was a hardworking man that always went out of his way to help anyone and wanted to give the world to me and his family," she told the local outlet. Cell phone video recorded by another driver at the scene shows Dasaur getting out of his car at the intersection. Dasaur appears irate and is yelling at the driver of the pickup truck, Fox News reported. A handgun can clearly be seen in Dasaur's right hand.

Trump holds first rally after assassination attempt

Grand Rapids (US)(AP): Donald Trump is holding his first campaign rally since he survived an attempted assassination, returning to the battleground state of Michigan alongside his new running mate. "It was exactly one week ago, even to the hour, even to the minute," Trump said, reflecting on the July 13 shooting in Pennsylvania that left him with a bloodied ear, killed one supporter in the crowd and left two others injured. "I stand before you only by the grace of almighty God," he said, the white gauze on his ear now replaced by a skin-coloured bandage. "I shouldn't be here right now," he went on. "Something very special happened." Trump was joined by Ohio Sen. JD Vance at the pair's first event together since they became the GOP's nominees at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. "I find it hard to believe that a week ago, an assassin tried to take Donald Trump's life, and now we have got a hell of a crowd in Michigan to welcome him back on the campaign trail," Vance said, speaking before Trump's arrival.

Michigan is one of the handful of crucial swing states expected to determine the outcome of November's presidential election. Trump narrowly won the state by just over 10,000 votes in 2016, but Democrat Joe Biden flipped it back in 2020, winning by a margin of 154,000 votes on his way to the presidency. At the rally, Trump talked about the shooting, acting out how he turned his head toward a chart of southern border crossings projected on a giant screen, narrowly dodging the bullet that hit his ear. "I owe immigration my life," he said. "It's true." Hours before he took the stage, Trump's supporters crowded the streets of downtown Grand Rapids in anticipation of the former president's remarks. Supporters began lining up Friday morning, and by Saturday afternoon, the line stretched close to a mile from the venue's entrance. Close to an hour before he was set to take the stage, supporters had filled nearly every seat in the 12,000-person Van Andel Arena. Many were seen wearing shirts featuring the image of Trump, on stage, after he was

shot, pumping his fist in the air after surviving the shooting, along with the usual "Make America Great Again" hats. Mike Gaydos, who travelled from Indiana with his three sons to attend the rally, said he didn't consider himself a "huge" Trump supporter in the past but wanted to show support for him following the attempted assassination. Numerous streets, closed as an additional security precaution, were dotted with vendors selling food and apparel. Downtown Grand Rapids also saw a significant police presence, with officers stationed on nearly every block, while others patrolled on horseback and bicycles. The heightened security outside the venue created a tense environment, with some attendees mentioning that drones overhead had made them nervous. Attendees were required to pass through a metal detector upon entering the downtown Grand Rapids indoor arena, yet the presence of security inside appeared consistent with previous events. "This is the tightest I've ever seen the security," said Renee White, who said that she's been to 33 of Trump's rallies.

Sitharaman set to make history with 7th consecutive Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to create history when she presents her seventh straight Budget on Tuesday for the fiscal 2024-25, surpassing the record of former prime minister Morarji Desai. Sitharaman, who will turn 65 next month, was in 2019 appointed as India's first full-time woman finance minister when Prime Minister Narendra Modi won a decisive second term. Since then, she has presented six straight budgets, including an interim one in February this year. The full Budget for the 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025) will be her seventh straight. She will better Desai's record, who presented consecutive five full budgets and one interim budget between 1959 to 1964.

This year will witness two budgets - an interim one in February and a full one this month. This is because an incumbent government cannot present a full Budget just before general elections. The presentation on July 23 will be the first Budget by the BJP-led NDA government since it was re-elected last month. Here are some facts related to Budget presentation in Independent India: **FIRST BUDGET:** The first-ever Union Budget of independent India was presented on November 26, 1947, by the nation's first finance minister RK Shanmukham Chetty. **MOST NUMBER OF BUDGETS:** Former Prime Minister Morarji Desai holds the record for presenting the most budgets. He has presented a total of 10 budgets during his tenure as finance minister under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru



and later under Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. He presented his first budget on February 28, 1959, and presented full budgets in the following two years before presenting an interim one in 1962. This was followed by two full budgets. After four years, he presented another interim budget in 1967, followed by three full budgets in 1967, 1968, and 1969, presenting a total of 10 budgets. **SECOND HIGHEST NUMBER OF BUDGET:** Former finance minister P

Chidambaram presented the budget on nine occasions. He first presented the Budget on March 19, 1996, during the United Front government led by Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda. He presented another budget under the same government next year and returned to the hot seat when the Congress-led UPA came to power in 2004. He presented five budgets between 2004 and 2008. After a stint as Union Home Minister, he was back in the finance ministry and presented budgets in 2013 and 2014. **THIRD HIGHEST NUMBER OF BUDGETS:** Pranab Mukherjee presented eight budgets during his tenure as finance minister. He presented budgets in 1982, 1983 and 1984 and five straight ones between February 2009 and March 2012 in the Congress-led UPA government.

MANMOHAN SINGH: Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presented five straight budgets between 1991 and 1995 when he was finance minister in the P V Narasimha Rao government. **LONGEST BUDGET SPEECH:** Sitharaman holds the record for the longest budget speech when her presentation on February 1, 2020, lasted two hours and 40 minutes. At the time, she cut short her speech with two pages still remaining. **SHORTEST BUDGET SPEECH:** Hirubhai Mulljibhai Patel's interim Budget speech in 1977 is so far the shortest at just 800 words. **TIMING:** The Budget was traditionally presented on the last day of February at 5 pm. The timing followed a colonial era practice when the announcements could be made in London and India at the same time. India is 4 hours and 30 minutes ahead

of the British Summer Time, and so presenting the budget at 5 pm in India ensured that it was happening in the daytime in the United Kingdom. The timing was changed in 1999 when the then finance minister Yashwant Singh in the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government presented the budget at 11 am. Since then budgets are presented at 11 am. **DATE:** The Budget presentation date was in 2017 changed to the 1st of February to allow the government to complete the Parliamentary approval process by March-end and allow implementation of the Budget from the start of the fiscal on April 1. Presenting the Budget on February 29 meant that the implementation could not start before May/June after accounting for 2-3 months of the parliamentary approval process.

Assocham: Affordable housing, infra growth, boost to manufacturing likely to be Budget focus

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Greater focus on green mobility, affordable housing, holistic infrastructure development and a big push to manufacturing, along with boosting consumption demand, are expected to find prominence in the forthcoming Union Budget, said an Assocham-Primus paper. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget on Tuesday in Parliament. Highlighting that the first Budget of the Narendra Modi 3.0 government will also include a long-term blueprint for making India a developed nation by 2047, the paper listed areas that would require the government's greater attention and priorities for realising the national goals. "While the Budget would attend to the immediate requirements of boosting consumption, investment and augmenting the supply side of the economy, it is also expected to lay a roadmap for the bigger goal of scaling up national income to a level of developed nations," said



Assocham President Sanjay Nayar. He further said the government has the fiscal space to spend on capex but recycling the funds from monetisable operating assets would be strategically a better strategy to manage it even better. The Assocham-Primus paper said the wheels of the Indian economy will increasingly run on green fuel. The directional shift is gathering pace across different levels. It expects the launch of PMAY 2.0, incorporating components like Affordable

Housing in Partnership (AHP) and Beneficiary Led Construction (BLC) to tailor housing solutions to financial capabilities of large sections of the population. "India Inc is expecting a major thrust in the forthcoming Budget on consumer demand, especially among the middle-class people, while reforms-friendly policies will continue more vigorously with several investment-oriented and Ease of Doing Business measures," said Assocham Secretary General Deepak Sood. Nilaya Varma, co-founder

and CEO, Primus Partners said to achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat, the government needs to prioritise and enable a shift from agriculture to manufacturing to provide a pathway for employment. "Support for core engineering-led manufacturing (that would provide jobs), supporting clusters for strengthening MSMEs and supporting/creating new clusters like EV, electronics and aircraft manufacturing is critical. This needs to be done while advancing towards net-zero energy," he said. The paper also stressed the need for a national agriculture infrastructure mission with a focus on improving logistics like cold storage, processing units, and packaging facilities to reduce post-harvest losses and ensure better price realisation for farmers. Promotion of sustainable and climate resilient agriculture will be a road map for de-carbonisation in agriculture for the next 10 years and help India meet its net-zero commitment by 2070, the paper said.

Hero MotoCorp plans to roll out affordable EVs this fiscal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Eyeing leadership in the electric two-wheeler segment, Hero MotoCorp is looking to roll out affordable models in the current fiscal, according to CEO Niranjan Gupta. The country's largest two-wheeler maker is also hopeful of the debut of its electric range in the international markets. Addressing shareholders in the company's Annual Report for 2023-24, Gupta said the two-wheeler major has a roadmap to scale its electric vehicle business rapidly. "We want to build leadership in EV, and in order to do that, we will be creating a very powerful EV product portfolio, augmenting the VIDA V1 Pro that we have today," he noted. The company will be launching products in the mid-and affordable segments this fiscal, Gupta said. Hero MotoCorp's VIDA electric scooter range is priced between Rs 1-1.5 lakh, including state subsidies. Hero MotoCorp Executive Chairman Pawan Munjal said



together with Ather Energy, VIDA has established India's largest public-charging infrastructure for two-wheeler EVs. Additionally, the partnership with Zero Motorcycle will facilitate the development of new EV motorcycles targeted at a distinct customer segment, thereby expanding the overall market size, he added. "I am particularly pleased to witness VIDA V1's rise as one of the leading electric scooters in India, and I anticipate its future launch in global markets, where it is poised to become a significant player as well," Munjal noted. Hero MotoCorp has already expanded the presence of its EV scooter VIDA from three to over 100 cities.

"There is path-breaking innovation underway at our state-of-the-art R&D Centres at CIT Jaipur and Tech Centre Germany to create a winning portfolio in all segments," Gupta informed shareholders. The company also plans to drive more premium products and scale up the international, accessories and merchandise businesses, he stated. Gupta noted that while the company has a huge scale in the domestic market, it has also embarked on a similar journey to scale up its global business with a single-minded focus on the top ten PTmarkets. "Additionally, we are tapping into opportunities to scale up our accessories and

merchandise business," Gupta stated. On premium products, he noted that last year the company launched a series of premium products, boosting the portfolio. "We will continue to launch more premium products in the coming years," he said, outlining the company's focus on speed, scale, synergy, and simplification. "Our premium portfolio across ICE and EV will grow exponentially, with a line-up that is committed to innovation," Gupta said. He noted that the company enjoys a significant scale advantage. With a customer base of 116 million, over 7,500 distribution points, a supply chain capacity of 10 million units, a presence in around 50 global markets, and a workforce of more than 25,000 employees, the two-wheeler major's scale is unparalleled, he said. "Leveraging this scale is key to success in everything that we do. We are adopting this scale Mantra in every decision we make; our strategy is to put our might behind products and projects that can be scaled up faster," Gupta said.

Airbus shortlists 8 sites for H125 helicopter final Assembly line in India

PTI ■ MARIIGNANE (FRANCE)

European major Airbus has shortlisted eight sites in India for setting up its final assembly line for H125 helicopters and the ground-breaking ceremony for the facility is expected later this year. The facility, which will be the fourth Final Assembly Line (FAL) for the single engine H125, will initially produce up to 10 helicopters annually and the capacity will be ramped up depending on the market demand, Airbus officials said. "India is the market of the future for helicopters... At present, the market is extremely embryonic, it is very small compared to what the potential could be," Olivier Michalon, Executive Vice President Global Business of Airbus Helicopters, said. The ground breaking ceremony for the FAL is expected in October or November this year and the facility will be operational in



2026 and the delivery is anticipated to start towards the end of 2026. "We have identified eight sites which we are currently assessing. We are still in the final assessment stage. We should be in a position to announce it shortly. "We want to be attractive and in an ecosystem that is best suited for industrial activities, logistics, employees and of course, regulations," Michalon said at a briefing at Marignane earlier this week. Marignane is the headquarters of Airbus Helicopters. For Airbus, H125 is the most-

sold helicopter in India as well as the South Asia region. Airbus has projected the demand for H125 helicopters in India and neighbouring countries at 500 over the next 20 years. "We are targeting 10 helicopters per year and as the demand picks up we can ramp up," Head of Airbus Helicopters in India and South Asia Sunny Guglani said at the briefing. Michalon stressed that 10 might not sound like a lot and it could be 20, 30, or 50 in some years, depending on the market demand.

Robust policy needed for sustainable growth in oilseed cultivation: NITI Ayog member

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Emphasising the potential of fallow lands in Eastern India for oilseed cultivation, despite challenges such as the GM mustard case and fluctuating global prices, NITI Aayog member Prof. Ramesh Chand has favoured a robust policy framework to support sustainable sectoral growth. He was sharing his views at the IVPA Global Round Table Conference @3.0 on Theme "Veg Oils Vision 2030: Opportunity and Challenges". The event witnessed the participation of about 500 delegates from across the globe serves as an important forum for addressing the complex challenges and exploring the vast opportunities within the vegetable oil industry by providing a platform for an open exchange of ideas.



Among those who attended the conference were Minister of Plantation and Commodities, Malaysia, Dr. Ir. Kasan, MM, the Head of Trade Policy Agency of the Ministry of Trade Republic of Indonesia, Kevin Roepke, Regional Director South Asia, USSEC and Mariano Beheran, Agriculture Attache of Argentina. Minister of Plantation & Commodities, Malaysia, Datuk Seri Johari bin Abdul Ghani reiterated his country's commitment to sustainable palm oil production and its role in fostering economic ties with India beyond palm oil. This commitment aligns with environmental responsibility and meeting global demands, he said.

GCPL invests over ₹1,000 crore on advertising in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

FMCG major Godrej Consumer's advertising investment shot up by 47 per cent to Rs 1,011 crore in FY24 in the domestic market, even as it has reduced SKUs by around 30 per cent through a rationalisation process. Godrej Consumer Products Ltd (GCPL), which aims for double-digit volume growth, is spending more on brands, automation and SKU rationalisation with a "keen focus on simplification", according to the latest annual report of the company. "In line with our strategy of category development, we have made significant investments in advertising. We were the fifth largest advertiser in India in 2023, from being number 17 in 2021. We are adding to this with investments in distribution." GCPL Managing Director and CEO Sudhir Sitapati said. GCPL's spending on "Advertising and Publicity" was Rs 1,011 crore for the financial year ended March 2024. This was 47 per cent higher than Rs 687.34 crore a year before. In India, we are now spending over Rs 1,000 crore in advertising, from Rs 350-400 crore a few years ago, a significant increase. We realised that our categories were being run differently across the world, advertising agencies were different, production was being done differently," he said. The company owns popular brands like Cinthol, Godrej No 1, HITS and Good Knight. "From multiple agencies, we moved to a single agency, which is our in-house agency, the LightBox," Sitapati said, adding that "from multiple



executions, we are moving to a single execution, shooting differently in the same location with different models for different countries". This is a "very efficient process" in the context of advertising increase and resulted in savings of 40 bps, he noted. On a consolidated basis, including foreign markets like Indonesia, Africa, the US, and some other markets, GCPL spent Rs 1,336.12 crore on advertising and publicity. Besides, Sitapati said, "We have reduced our SKUs overall by roughly 30 per cent". Raymond Consumer Care, which it acquired in April last year from the Singhania family with brands like Park Avenue and KamaSutra, has reduced 550 SKUs to just 100, he said. "On people, we also reduced the number of managers overall by creating larger, richer roles and introducing more modern tools. So, we have actually physically reduced in size despite our growth," he said. GCPL, as per the strategy, has prioritised resource optimisation and operational efficiency through a stock-keeping unit (SKU) rationalisation strategy across

its product lines, focusing particularly on high-performing products, according to the latest annual report. "This approach has streamlined our portfolio, resulting in notable improvements in manufacturing efficiency and waste reduction," it said. This optimisation initiative has also resulted in reducing overall inventory levels from 93 days to 67 days, it added. "SKU rationalisation has aligned our inventory more closely with actual demand, making our supply chain more efficient by reducing excess inventory and lowering the risk of overstocking and associated costs," it said, adding that it has "also improved the accuracy of demand forecasts and refined planning processes". According to the company, "While new brand development remains pivotal for value creation, we plan to phase out smaller brands where it aligns with our broader value realisation strategy". These initiatives will help it enhance its competitiveness in the market and promote sustainability throughout our value chain, it added.

AMD leverages AI to shape next-gen computing experience

PTI ■ LOS ANGELES

Chip maker AMD is looking to position itself as a key player in AI-enhanced personal computers (AIPCs) through strategic innovations on the hardware side to cater to powerful new-age applications, a top company official said. It is taking a holistic approach by integrating technology across CPUs, GPUs, and NPUs, creating a strong ecosystem that supports the development of powerful AI

applications. This broad approach allows AMD to serve various markets, from high-performance gaming systems to lightweight laptops, all enhanced with AI capabilities, said John Anguiano, Senior Director, Product Marketing at AMD. The California-based company has unveiled its latest lineup of Ryzen Series of mobile and desktop processors, strengthening its play in computing and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology at its Tech Day

event here. AMD, which competes with heavyweights like Intel, Apple, and Qualcomm, is trying to establish itself as a key player in the growing field of AI-enhanced personal computers (AIPCs) for laptops and desktops. "The promise of AI generally, and across AMD, holistically, is bigger than just a technology story. It is about improving how we live and work, making us more productive and helping everyone focus on their

strengths," said Anguiano. By optimising these processors for AI, AMD is not only enhancing performance but also ensuring that its devices can handle future technological demands, he added. "AMD is integrating technology across CPUs, GPUs, and NPUs, creating a strong ecosystem that supports the development of powerful AI applications. This broad approach allows AMD to serve various markets, from high-performance gaming

systems to lightweight laptops, all enhanced with AI capabilities," Anguiano said. When asked about the impact of AI PC, he replied that it will help in productivity improvements by helping people and emerging economies, such as India, which are "trying to magnify strength". This focus is crucial for places like India, where fast adoption of new technologies can significantly boost economic growth and improve quality of life, Anguiano noted.

THE TUNING FORK



CV Srikanth

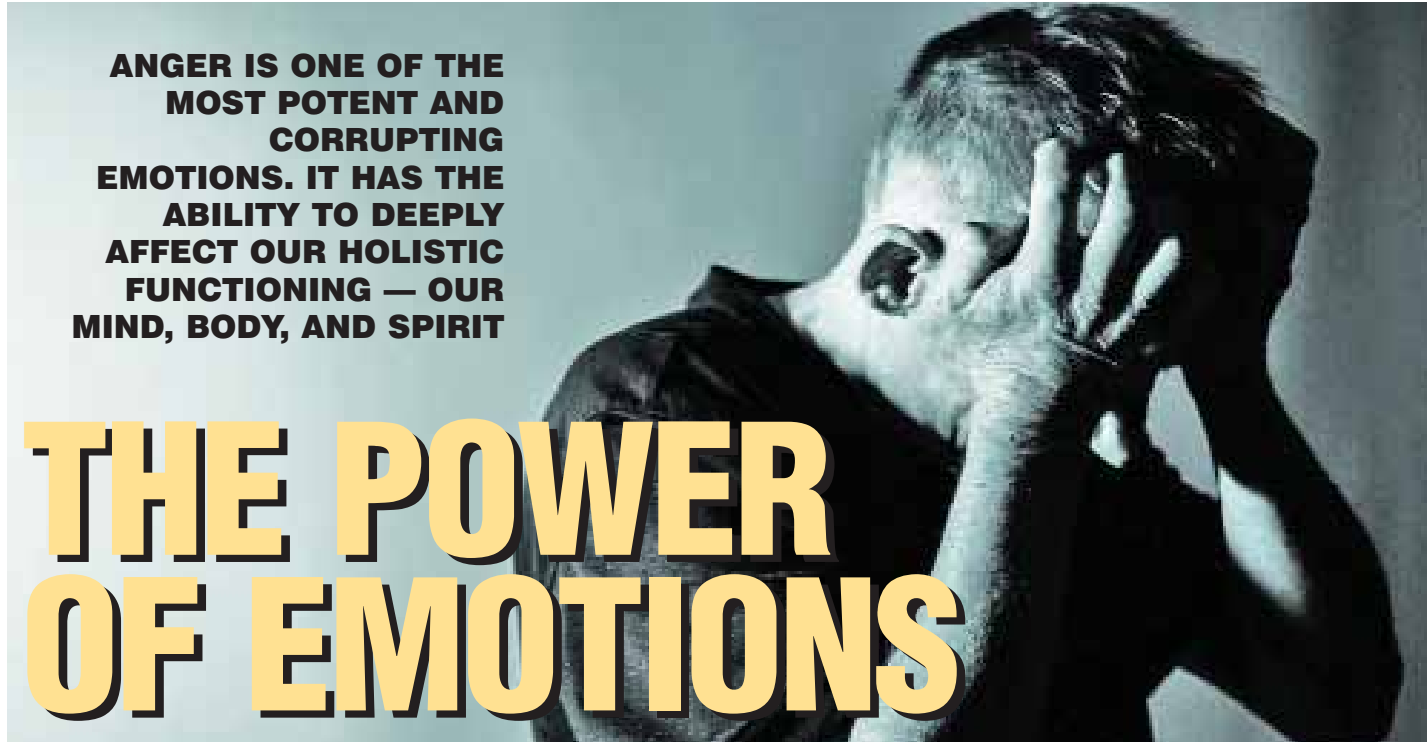
Anger, as a natural emotion, has both constructive and destructive potential. When managed effectively, it can be a source of creativity and energy. However, when it controls us, it becomes a force of destruction, undermining our inner peace and well-being

On a cool, calm morning, I was driving peacefully until the incessant honking of horns intruded upon my tranquility. Initially, I tried to ignore it, but as the noise persisted, it began to unsettle me. Before long, my serenity was disrupted, and I found myself braking sharply. In that moment, I compromised my senses and my peace.

In contrast, had I shifted my focus to the music playing in my car and allowed myself to let go of the irritation, my experience would have been different. By choosing to concentrate on something positive, I could have maintained control over my emotions and preserved my peace of mind. This shift in focus illustrates how our unconscious consent to allow our emotions to affect us can either corrupt or preserve our sense of well-being.

Anger is one of the most potent and corrupting emotions. It has the ability to deeply affect our holistic functioning — our mind, body, and spirit. This emotion often arises from various triggers and can develop over time if left unattended. Although the onset of anger might seem sudden, it is rarely a binary phenomenon; there are numerous nuances involved.

Broadly speaking, anger can arise from various primary causes. Personal loss or a feeling of being shortchanged often triggers it, as does a perceived lack of control. Sometimes, anger stems from a disconnect from reality or denial, while inflexibility and a lack of acceptance can also contribute. Expectations and issues of



reciprocity, along with a sense of entitlement, play a role as well. Fear or insecurity, ingratitude, and a distorted view of needs further fuel anger. Additionally, ego and genetic predispositions can influence how and why we experience this powerful emotion. Interestingly, anger is frequently a byproduct of fear, uncertainty, and a desire for control—elements perceived by our mind as obstacles to fulfilling our desires. Most instances of anger arise from inappropriate attitudes and a lack of acceptance.

The neurological response to anger lasts only a few seconds. However, the real issue lies in holding on to this anger, which

disrupts the natural flow of the universe and corrupts our sensory and cognitive faculties. This prolonged anger can distort our self-perception and the way we view situations, ultimately making us vulnerable.

THE PROGRESSION OF ANGER CAN BE DESCRIBED IN FOUR STAGES:

UTTAMA: The initial feeling experienced in moments.

MADHAYAMA: When the feeling is held onto and becomes an emotion, lasting minutes.

ADHAMA: When this emotion develops into a condition, persisting for hours.

PAPI: The condition can evolve into what medical science terms

as "Intermittent Explosive Disorder," resulting in long-term psychological distortions requiring intervention.

Repeated episodes of anger alter the brain's cell structure, leading to irreversible changes. This transformation begins with thoughts, actions, and attitudes and eventually creates a new, distorted version of oneself. The real "you" is inherently compassionate, kind, and accepting, but anger veils this true nature.

The Bhagavad Gita succinctly captures this process: desire and attachment lead to anger, which clouds judgment, impairs discernment, and disrupts

thought processes. Similarly, the Mahabharata's "Yaksha Prashna" highlights anger as an invincible enemy and emphasizes the importance of renouncing greed, anger, and falsehood to attain peace.

Anger can have cascading effects across various aspects of life, akin to the "Chaos Theory" or "Butterfly Effect," where small disturbances can lead to significant, uncontrollable outcomes. This demonstrates the critical need to manage rather than control emotions.

Managing anger effectively involves embracing a flexible approach to life. This means letting go of rigid control and

recognizing the limits of what you can and cannot control. Trusting that things happen for a reason and responding with gratitude can help maintain a positive perspective. It's important to recognize that you are shaped by your actions, thoughts, and the company you keep, and to observe your anger without becoming entangled in it. Embracing the universe's inherent imperfections and understanding that everyone is unique helps avoid setting unrealistic standards for others. Cultivating respect and dignity for yourself first, then extending these qualities to others, is crucial. Being mindful, choosing your battles wisely, and focusing on what is pleasant and fulfilling can lead to better emotional management. Additionally, keeping expectations realistic and focusing on self-improvement rather than trying to correct the world are key to managing anger effectively.

Anger, as a natural emotion, has both constructive and destructive potential. When managed effectively, it can be a source of creativity and energy. However, when it controls us, it becomes a force of destruction, undermining our inner peace and well-being.

— The writer is a versatile professional, he excels in several roles including Mentor Life Coach, Corporate Coach, and Spiritual Intelligence Coach. He also specializes in CXO coaching, spiritual counseling, and motivational speaking. He holds certification from the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and is a graduate of Dale Carnegie's T3 program

HOW TO TWEAK LIQUOR OUTLETS' CLOSING TIME TO CURB BINGE DRINKING?

This article aims to explore a relationship between the closing time of liquor outlets and binge drinking behavior, hints at how the relationship functions as a socially sanctioned dark pattern, and suggests a design intervention to reduce the effect.



MOHAMMED SHAHID ABDULLA



MANOSHU BANERJEE

Binge drinking, a preventable public health problem by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), refers to the consumption of an excessive amount of alcohol in a short time. The US National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism quantifies the pattern as four and five or more drinks - each standard drink is defined as containing 14 grams of pure alcohol - in about two hours for women and men, respectively. Though binge drinkers are not dependent on alcohol, the practice is harmful in its being associated with outcomes like vehicle crashes, intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, besides heart and liver disease, among others. The newest recommendations from Canada's healthcare regulator permit no more than two drinks per week - thus ruling out the office worker's weekly binge drink. In 2019, the economic burden of alcohol, on India, due to illness and productivity loss was estimated at 1.5% of GDP per year, right until 2050. As per India's National Family Health Survey 5 (NFHS-5) conducted between 2019 and 2021, alcohol consumption of men aged between 15-54 years declined by 6.1% compared to NFHS-4 in 2015-16, and that of women in the same age bracket stayed put. However, the sales of alcoholic beverages in India have grown sharply, leading many to believe that

problem and binge drinkers are consuming more than ever. Even in states like Bihar, where alcohol is prohibited by law, drinking is rampant. Gujarat, a state that has been dry since its establishment in 1960, recently granted liquor licenses in GIFT City to attract financial sector establishments. Several agencies, like the WHO and the US CDC, recommend regulating the days and hours of retail alcohol sales to reduce the harmful use of alcohol. The relationship between the closing time of liquor outlets and alcohol use, or its consequences, has been observed and documented across geographies. In Norway, an increase of an hour in bar closing was seen to increase violent crime by 16%. Alcohol bought from packaged liquor outlets during the COVID-19 lockdowns is now suspected to be the reason behind a fifth of the UK population staring at the risk of alcohol dependency. But, it is also the case that restrictions do not necessarily work. In Russia, truncated trading hours led to decreased consumption of factory-made vodka and its partial substitution by samagon (homemade vodka) by the people most exposed to the curbs. In India, the motives behind changing liquor sales hours can be quite unrelated to the risk of crime or alcohol dependence. Governments in Delhi or Uttar Pradesh, among others, have often extended sale timings for reasons ranging from helping retailers make up for



business lost during COVID-19 to entertaining foreign tourists. We take a look at liquor store closing times through a behavioral lens and see how they can be tweaked (as opposed to imposed) more successfully. To simplify the problem, we will confine the discussion to a) liquor outlets selling alcohol to binge drinkers and b) only for takeaway. Liquor outlets usually get a rush of buyers very near closing time. Perhaps the most notable example of this pattern of alcohol consumption, dubbed the 'Six o'clock Swill', is from the early 20th century when New Zealand and Australia shut their bars at 6 pm causing drinkers who finished work at 5 pm to rush and get drunk in the remaining hour. This influence has been linked intergenerationally to high per-capita alcohol consumption in these countries even to this day. The same phenomenon manifests on an extended time scale too, notice buyers in India rushing to liquor outlets before a spell of dry

days, or before the 1st of a month, to stockpile booze. We propose here that a drinking-hoarding-decisioning triad builds up to the closing time. A key motivation for bingeing is to reduce stress. Over multiple episodes of drinking, more quantities of alcohol are needed to produce the same amount of relief from stress. This is the reason why an otherwise light or moderate drinker might also graduate to binge drinking, as a recent study found. Binge and problem drinkers tend to underestimate their perceived level of inebriation too. Hence the propensity to hoard in order to drink to the point of sufficiency, as self-assessed under the effect of inebriation. Note here that sustained binge drinking is known to cause AUD and that alcohol affects right-brain functions, like emotions, highly. The legal blood alcohol content (BAC) limit varies with jurisdiction and type of activity. Persons with BAC in the range of 0.03-0.05% (in India) or 0.03-0.08% (in

most of the US) can drive to a liquor store, even though above the minimum-measurable 0.03% they are considered inebriated and would therefore 'buy under the influence'. For illustration, if a 70 kg man has two drinks over an hour, say 9.30 PM-10.30 PM, he is likely to have a BAC of 0.04%, which still permits him to drive and make liquor purchases while inebriated, to reach the binge-drinking limit eventually. Under this reduced cognitive capacity, not all information can be attended to, hence a drinker makes decisions using only the most salient cues in their environment - a condition called alcohol myopia. We contend that the closing time of a liquor outlet is a powerful salient cue. Salient cues may either be inhibiting (There's little chance I'll get alcohol since it is nearing 11 pm - but I'll reach the store if I drive fast) or impelling (It's only 10 pm now. I can comfortably reach the store by 11 pm). It would be desirable if impelling cues outweighed

inhibiting ones, persuading the drinker to drive to the store well in advance. On the contrary, recent research shows that riskier behavior is observed when choices are framed as losses (as in one possible outcome of the inhibiting cue above) as compared to gains in personal safety (as in the impelling cue above). This is called a framing effect and is enhanced by any time constraints that may be part of the cue (here it is 11 pm). Research also finds that binge drinkers prioritize alcohol-related cues or stimuli over others, demonstrating attention bias while making decisions due to a high level of craving. This brings up another facet through which the current, typical, 11 pm closing time should be viewed. In November 2023, the Indian government issued guidelines for preventing and regulating dark patterns, mostly in the e-commerce sector. Dark patterns are defined as practices "designed to mislead or trick users to do

something they originally did not intend or want to do, by subverting or impairing consumer autonomy, decision making or choice." There is an unsettling similarity between an e-commerce website nudging a user to buy a phone by "falsely creating a time-bound pressure" (quote from the guidelines) by calling the sale exclusive and the sale of alcohol to an inebriated consumer triggered by a closing time. The latter is thus tantamount to a dark pattern sanctioned by the regulator. Hence we consider the possibility of 'sludging' the consumer away from stockpiling liquor while he is inebriated. A sludge (as opposed to a nudge) is a way to introduce friction in a user's experience to make them opt out of a process or pattern i.e. buying a high amount of alcohol just prior to closing time. We propose sludging in two variations. Firstly, since the closing time acts as a cue, making it arbitrary - and thereby less salient and floating - may

reduce hoarding behavior among binge drinkers over an extended period. Assuming the current closing time is 11 pm, liquor outlets can be shut in a staggered manner i.e. 40% of outlets close at 10 pm, another 40% at 11 pm, and the last 20% at 12 midnight. The day's closing time for each outlet is decided by a daily lottery and revealed to dealers by Excise authorities only fifteen minutes before closing i.e. at 9:45 pm, 10:45 pm, and 11:45 pm, respectively. A randomization will ensure that no particular store would complain of lower revenue. The second sludging method would be to ration the alcohol that can be sold to last-minute consumers (who assemble even at these arbitrary closing times) to just a 'quarter' i.e. 180 ml, to discourage binge-drinking behavior.

As India formalizes its business and digitizes all its transactions, especially in urbanized pockets, it will also find ways to monitor all liquor sales in real time, including sales of packages beyond certain sizes. In any case, liquor sales contribute significantly to state governments' revenue and therefore the capacity to regulate them (via such sludge interventions) does exist. State Governments may also save in the long-term as their bills of healthcare burden from alcoholism, law enforcement, and the social costs of problem drinking get dialed down. As is true for most interventions, ours may also be circumvented. But, given the menace alcoholism poses to society, such an intervention may be worthwhile if only for experimentation's sake and to keep a fraction of the population from drinking itself to harm.

Mohammed Shahid Abdulla, faculty member, IIM Kozhikode and Manoshu Banerjee, independent behavioral researcher

INDIA TRIUMPH OVER UAE BY 78 RUNS

HARMANPREET, RICHA GHOSH GUIDE INDIA WIN IN WOMEN'S ASIA CUP T20

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

Contrasting fifties from skipper Harmanpreet Kaur and Richa Ghosh were complemented nicely by the bowlers as India notched up a massive 78-run win over UAE in their second match of the ongoing women's Asia Cup T20 tournament here on Sunday. Invited to bat, Kaur played the anchor's role to perfection with a 47-ball 66, while Ghosh produced late charge with an unbeaten 29-ball-64 to power defending champions India to 201 for five, their first-ever 200-plus score in T20s. The bowlers, led by Deepti Sharma (2/23), then produced a clinical show to limit UAE to 123 for 7 as India put one foot in the semifinals. With two wins in as many games, India occupy the top spot in group A with four points and have a Net Run Rate of +3.298. India will play their third and final group game against Nepal on Tuesday. Chasing the daunting total, opener Esha Rohit Oza scored a 36-ball 38 (5x4, 1x6) but UAE never were in the chase as they kept losing wickets at regular intervals.



Pace duo of Renuka Singh (1/30) and Pooja Vastrakar (1/27) dismissed Theertha

Satish (4) and Rinitha Rajith (7) as UAE slipped to 24 for 2 in 5.2 overs.

Deepti then struck in her third ball, removing Samaira Dharnidharka (5) but Oza

and Kavisha Egodage (40 not out) played some entertaining shots to score

20 runs in next three overs. However, Tanuja Kanwar (1/14), who had replaced an

injured Shreyanka Patil in the playing XI, had Oza stumped, while Radha Yadav (1/29) got rid of Khushi Sharma (10) as UAE fell to 95 for five in the 16th over. Heena Hotchandani then became Deepti's second victim and Rithika was run out in the last ball as UAE finished far away from India's total. Earlier, while the 35-year-old Harmanpreet blasted seven fours and a six during her innings, Ghosh slammed as many as 12 boundaries and a maximum, including five consecutive hits to the fence in the final over of the innings bowled by Hotchandani. Kaur stitched two crucial partnerships, adding 54 off 39 balls with Jemimah Rodrigues and 75 off 45 balls with Ghosh to put India in a commanding position. Opener Smriti Mandhana (13) blasted a six and a four to give India a good start but an overambitious shot saw her being holed out at mid-off off spinner Egodage in the third over. Shafali Verma then produced some sensational shots, carting the bowlers for five fours and a six en route an 18-ball 37. But she committed the mistake of

edging a short and wide ball from seamer Dharnidharka as the keeper did the rest. Hotchandani then cleaned up Dayalan Hemalatha (2) in the first delivery of the next over as India slipped to 52 for 3 inside the powerplay. Harmanpreet and Rodrigues (14) then joined hands and kept the scoreboard ticking while the former doing the heavy lifting in the 39-ball 54-run stand, which put India across the 100-mark in the 11th over. Once Rodrigues was dismissed by Egodage in the 12th over, Ghosh displayed her boundary-hitting prowess, using her cover drive to perfection to rack up 18 runs off Oza's over with four boundaries. Harmanpreet reached her fifty in the 18th over and then clobbered two fours and a six off Samaira as India crossed the 180-run mark. While Harmanpreet was run out in the first ball of the 19th over, Ghosh slammed five fours in the remaining five balls to reach her fifty, her first in the shortest format. Ghosh reached her fifty in just 26 balls, and in the last over alone she milked 20 runs.



Neeraj Chopra's adductor is fine, he is doing intense training now: Coach Bartonietz Singh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The adductor niggle that has troubled Neeraj Chopra in the past couple of months "is fine" now and the reigning Olympic champion has entered the high intensity phase of his Paris preparations, his German coach Klaus Bartonietz told PTI, dismissing concerns surrounding the Indian star's fitness.

The 26-year-old Chopra, who scripted history by winning the javelin throw gold at the Tokyo Olympics, is once again the country's best bet for a top podium finish in the Paris Games beginning on July 26. But his season has been far from perfect in terms of fitness. Bartonietz, however, insisted that things are back on track.

"Everything is according to plan. At the moment, no issue with that (adductor niggle), it's fine, it looks good, hoping to remain like that till the Olympics," the coach, who has been with Chopra for close to five years, told PTI in an exclusive interview from Antalya, Turkey where they are currently based for training.

"It's just over two weeks left in the Olympics, so the intensity of training is high. He is having full throwing sessions." Chopra withdrew from Ostrava Golden Spike on May 28 as a precautionary measure after he felt "something" in his adductor (group of muscles located on inner thighs). He made a strong comeback by winning gold at the Paavo Nurmi Games in Finland on June 18 with a throw of 85.97m.

He opted out of the Paris Diamond League on July 7, insisting that the event was never a part of his



competition calendar this year.

Chopra's competition day is just two weeks away with the qualification round scheduled on August 6.

Asked about the training routine of Chopra, Bartonietz said, "We have sessions of sprinting, jumping or throwing or weightlifting alternately for activation in the morning. Two sessions, one in morning and one in evening, two to two-and-a-half-hour long each. Bartonietz said the approach is nearly the same as the one adopted before the Tokyo Olympics.

Chopra has maintained that he is focusing more on training than competitions this time. He is working on strengthening his blocking leg to mitigate pressure on his groin.

"Yes. Generally, javelin throw is all about it (having fast runway and blocking well). It's very hard to throw far with a poor runway. More the energy you bring with that, the better it is," said the German biomechanics expert.

"Three events before Olympics not disadvantage" Chopra competed in five events before Tokyo but in

only three ahead of the Paris Games. His coach does not see anything wrong in cutting down competitions.

"You can compete in many events or not, it's tough to say what is enough (number of events). It depends on the situation. Jan Zelezny (Czech legend and world record holder) says he does not compete in too many events (just two before 1992 Olympics where he won gold)."

"Competitions sometimes disrupt preparation and you start all over again. Competing in high class events can become risky also. Travelling too much with logistics, with javelins around the world, is also not good. "So, it's fine, he has prepared and trained well."

Asked about Chopra opting out of the Paris Diamond League on July 7, Bartonietz said, "There were some minor issues, not worth risking by going there."

"The venue (of Paris Diamond League) was also not the Olympic stadium (where Chopra will compete on August 6 and 8) anyway, so we decided not to take chances."

Not safe to predict medal None of the top javelin

throwers have performed exceptionally well this season and Bartonietz suggested that the competition could be wide open in the Olympics. As usual, he would not even predict Chopra's chances. "Olympics is a high-stakes and high-pressure situation and anything can happen. Guessing a medal on the basis of statistics is difficult. "All the top throwers are training their best, they want to give their best in Paris and win a medal. Just like them, we can also claim that Neeraj can win. These claims (of medal chances) can be biased and can bungle up also," he pointed out.

German teenager Mex Dehning is the only one to have thrown more than 90m this year, and Bartonietz said it all boils down to momentum.

India's Kush Maini wins his first-ever F2 Sprint race

PTI ■ BUDAPEST

India's Kush Maini won his maiden Formula 2 Sprint Race at the Hungarian Grand Prix after initial winner Richard Verschoor was disqualified due to a technical infringement.

Following the top of podium finish, the 23-year-old Invicta racing driver added 10 points to his season tally.

With the win at the at Hungaroring on Saturday, Maini surpassed Mercedes junior driver Kimi Antonelli in the Formula 2 Drivers Standings to P8 with 66 points under his belt.

Placed ninth on the starting grid in round 9 of the F2 Championship, Maini had his work cut out after a tough start on the hard compound tyre, which saw him lose a position on the opening lap to the

Prema racing driver Antonelli.

Despite the setback in the opening lap, Maini kept his composure and steadily closed the gap on his rivals, finally bearing fruit on lap 17, when he showcased his acumen and ability to perform under pressure, regaining P2.

The final 11 laps saw him not only fiercely defending his position, but also constantly challenging Verschoor -- demonstrating his prowess in handling the demanding Hungaroring circuit.

The sole Indian driver on the 2024 F2 grid is currently enjoying his career-best season with five podiums, including a race win under his belt.

"The team and I, we keep coming back and we keep fighting. I have a great team around me and thank you so much to them for today," Maini said.

Leander Paes, Vijay Amritraj inducted into Tennis Hall of Fame

PTI ■ NEWPORT (USA)

Legendary Indian tennis players, Leander Paes and Vijay Amritraj, the heroes of many a historic triumph transcending generations, on Sunday became the first two exponents of the sport from Asia to be inducted into the International Hall of Fame. Paes, 51, whose list of achievements include the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games men's singles bronze, eight men's doubles and 10 mixed doubles grand slam crowns besides several famed Davis Cup victories, was given the rare honour in the 'Player Category'.

Vijay Amritraj, 70, reached the men's singles quarterfinals at the Wimbledon and US Open twice each besides guiding India to the Davis Cup finals twice -- in 1974 and 1987. At his peak, he was ranked No.18 in the world in singles and No. 23 in doubles.

He along with Richard Evans was inducted into the Hall of fame in the 'Contributor Category'.

"Paes was inducted in the Player Category, while Amritraj and Evans were recognised as a part of the Contributor Category: honoring visionary leaders,

pioneers, or individuals who have made a consummate impact on the sport. The three inductees brings the total to 267 legends from 28 nations represented in the Hall of Fame," said the International Tennis Hall of Fame statement.

Paes spent 37 weeks at No. 1 in the world rankings in doubles, and won 54 doubles titles on tour.

He is one of only three men in tennis history to capture a career Grand Slam in both disciplines. Paes, who hails from Kolkata, competed in seven straight Olympic Games between Barcelona, 1992 to Rio, 2016, the most in tennis history.

Reflecting on his journey, Paes said, "A few of us are very blessed to be born into legacy. Today, sitting here at the International Tennis Hall of Fame, I wouldn't have ever dreamt it, playing street cricket and street football barefoot back in Calcutta.

"I am so excited to share this with all of you, representing every young boy and girl around the planet who has a dream in their mind, passion in their hearts and fire in their belly," said Paes, who partnered Mahesh Bhopathi in men's doubles and took Indian tennis to great heights before their acrimonious split.

Mandeep's obsession with hockey has grown over the years: Sister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian hockey forward Mandeep Singh might not have acquired a cult figure like his skipper Harmanpreet Singh or former captain Manpreet Singh but when he is on the prowl upfront, rival defenders dare not take him lightly.

With the 29-year-old prolific goal-getter set to be a vital cog in India's campaign at the Paris Olympics, after being a part of the team that won bronze at the Tokyo Games, his sister Bhupinderjeet Kaur says Mandeep's obsession with hockey has only grown over the years, so much so that if he stays away from the national camp for even a few days, he becomes restless.

"He was so crazy about playing hockey that he would come home from school, skip



meals, and head straight to practice. As Mandeep grew older, his commitment only deepened.

"Even now, whenever I talk to him during a break, he says he has fun at home but starts missing the camp after 15 days," Kaur said in an episode of 'Hockey Te Charcha', highlighting her brother's

passion for the sport. Mandeep's blinder against Belgium in the semifinal at the Tokyo Olympics and his speed left the rivals confused but the Red Lions regrouped to beat India 5-2 to end their hopes of a gold medal.

India, though, returned with a bronze, making every player a national hero. But

Kaur says, Mandeep just doesn't want to be in the limelight.

"He prefers to be seen as a simple boy rather than a star," said Kaur.

Recalling the celebrations at home when India won the bronze medal in Tokyo beating Germany, Kaur said it filled everyone with pride. "We were all watching it on TV. Mandeep looked up with tears in his eyes, having a silent moment to himself. At home, everyone was praying, fingers crossed, hoping for victory. When we finally won, it felt like we had achieved something monumental. The atmosphere at home was electric with joy and pride," she said.

Mandeep's prolific goal-scoring has seen him being a part of several successful campaigns, including the

Junior World Cup title triumph in Lucknow in 2016, Asia Cup gold in 2017, Asian Champions Trophy titles in 2018 and 2023, Commonwealth Games silver in 2022 Birmingham and the Hangzhou Asian Games gold in 2023, which helped India qualify automatically for Paris.

Kaur herself has forged a bond with the entire India team and she says all the players respect her and she wants them to return from Paris a successful bunch.

"Once Harmanpreet asked where his rakhhi was, and from then on, I started sending it to all of them (players). They call me their sister, and I feel the same way."

She is confident India will come back with a gold medal from Paris.

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