

OPINION 6 TACKLING NEW WAVE OF TERROR IN JAMMU

WORLD 8 MY AIM IS TO DEFEAT TRUMP: KAMALA

MONEY 10 SENSEX, NIFTY SETTLE LOWER AHEAD OF BUDGET

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INDIA WOMEN TEAM EYES SEMIS BERTH IN ASIA CUP 11 SPORTS

Economic Survey: India's GDP set to soar to seven per cent in 2024-25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI India's GDP is likely to grow at 6.5 to 7 per cent in the current fiscal year amid global challenges which may impact exports, said Economic Survey 2023-24 tabled in Parliament on Monday.

cent. Global agencies like IMF and ADB see India to grow at 7 per cent. "The Survey conservatively projects a real GDP growth of 6.5-7 per cent, with risks evenly balanced, cognizant of the fact that the market expectations are on the higher side," said the document tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament.

uncertain global economic performance. Improved balance sheets will help the private sector cater to strong investment demand. The Survey also added a note of caution saying "private capital formation after good growth in the last three years may turn slightly more cautious because of fears of cheaper imports from countries that have excess capacity".



Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran addresses a Press conference after tabling of the Economic Survey 2023-24 in Parliament by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in New Delhi, on Monday

economies, services exports are also likely to witness a further uptick. A normal rainfall forecast by the India Meteorological Department and the satisfactory spread of the southwest monsoon thus far are likely to improve the agriculture sector's performance and support the revival of rural demand, it said. However, the monsoon season still has some way to go, the Survey said.

of the economy and identifies areas for further growth and progress as "we move towards building a Viksit Bharat". Chief Economic Advisor V Anantha Nageswaran on Monday said a 7 per cent GDP growth rate, the upper end of the projection made in the Survey, is doable depending on monsoon and global financial risks.



Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla being greeted by TMC MP Shatrughan Sinha after the latter took oath as a member of the House during the first day of the Parliament Session, in New Delhi, on Monday

Ahead of Budget, PM Modi slams Opposition attempt to drown his voice

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day before his Government is to present its first Budget in the third term, Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined the agenda for this Session with an appeal to the Opposition to be constructive and a combative message saying some parties have practised "negative politics" and "misused" Parliament to hide their political failures.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi addresses the media on the first day of the Parliament Session, in New Delhi, on Monday

way. "I want to tell all MPs, they may be of any party, that from January onwards we fought a pitched electoral battle, we conveyed to the people what we wanted to convey, some showed the way while others misled, but that period is over now. The people have given their verdict," he said.

SC stays nameplate diktat on Kanwar Yatra path

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an interim order, the Supreme Court on Monday stayed the directives issued by the Governments of Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand directing eateries along the Kanwar Yatra route to display names of owners, the staff and other details "to ensure... no confusion among kanwariyas" but said they will be required to display the kind of food they are selling to the Kanwariyas.



Supreme Court Ranjan Dimri / Pioneer

Ujjain municipal body has issued a similar directive, on a batch of petitions challenging the Government directives. The order comes amid an escalating row over the

directives, as the Opposition has alleged that the orders were "communal and divisive" and intended to target Muslims and Scheduled Castes by forcing them to reveal their identity, but the BJP maintained that the step has been taken keeping in mind law and order issues and the religious sentiments of pilgrims.

Temperatures sizzle in LS over NEET

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The first day of the Monsoon Budget Session on Monday witnessed the ruling party and Opposition members face off over the NEET and NTA row with Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi demanding immediate resignation of Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan who in turn said he is on the post "at the mercy of his leader (Prime Minister Narendra Modi)" and that the Government is "collectively answerable".

understands the fundamentals of what is going on here," the Congress leader said. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said this Government will create new records in paper leaks. "Students across the country are protesting. Investigation is leading to revelations, arrests are being made. I have only one request, students will not get justice if this Minister continues," he said.

called rubbish. There cannot be a more unfortunate statement by the Leader of the Opposition. I condemn this," said Pradhan in the thick of storm ever since irregularities in the NEET followed by UGC-NET have been reported. A cornered Pradhan then took a "remote control" job—a swipe the BJP routinely uses to target the Manmohan Singh Government.

Ratna Bhandar inspection by ASI soon: Min

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) would start its inspection work in the Shree mandir's Ratna Bhandar in a day or two, said Law Minister Prithviraj Harichandan on Monday.

is over. Already, all the articles and valuables from the Ratna Bhandar have been shifted to a temporary strong room. "Once the inspection begins, whatever problems are there inside the Ratna Bhandar from a structural point of view will be known. Subsequently, the government will approve the time sought by the ASI required for the repair works," said the Minister.

treasure trove of Lord Jagannath, was first opened on July 14 after 46 years. Later, all the valuables from the Ratna Bhandar were shifted to the temporary strong room inside the Shree mandir complex on July 18.

Heavy to very heavy rains predicted in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The low-pressure area over north Chhattisgarh and neighbourhood now lies over east Madhya Pradesh and adjoining Chhattisgarh: Several parts of Odisha would experience heavy rainfall in the next couple of days, predicted the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday.

On Wednesday, heavy to very heavy rainfall is likely to occur at one or two places in the districts of Bargarh, Boudh, Subarnapur and Sambalpur. Heavy rainfall (7 to 11cm) is very likely to occur at one or two places in the districts of Jharsuguda, Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Mayurbhanj, Deogarh, Nayagarh, Khordha, Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack and Kendrapada.

Assembly session begins on stormy note

BJD, Cong walk out protesting no action on Governor's son

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The first session of the newly-constituted 17th Odisha Legislative Assembly began on Monday on a stormy note as Opposition BJD and Congress walked out as soon as Governor Raghubar Das began addressing the House.



down in the State, Patnaik said, "When I was in government, ministers, MLAs, MPs and senior government servants, if they had broken the law, immediate action was being taken." The State government must act according to the law, he demanded.

"The Governor is yet to take action in this regard even though he was immediately informed. He had promised to take action against the culprit within seven days," he said.

Naveen rubbishes report on Pandian's 'plan' to split BJD

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR

BJD president Naveen Patnaik on Monday defended V Karthikeyan Pandian, rubbishing a report in a national newspaper that suggested that the latter was trying to destabilise the BJD.

ciency and integrity and he is known and respected for the same." On June 8, Naveen had also come to Pandian's defence when some of his party colleagues pointed fingers at him.

New mantra 'Reform, Perform, Transform'

Guv tells MLAs

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Addressing the first session of 17th State Assembly on Monday, Governor Raghuraj Das urged elected people's representatives of the newly-constituted legislature to discharge their responsibilities in a spirit of mutual cooperation so that the growth and development

is inclusive of all sections of people.

"I would like to remind them that it is their responsibility to ensure that all sections of the society are served in a fair and equitable manner," the Governor stated.

He asked all the members of the House to remain focussed on the next five years' journey towards a Samruddha



(prosperous), Sashakta (strong) and Viksit (developed) Odisha by 2036, the centenary year of formation of a separate State of Odisha.

The Governor also asserted that the motto of the government should be "Reform, Perform, and Transform", a mantra that can usher in a new era of inclusive, sustainable and rapid development.

2 Cong leaders skip legislature party meet

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Congress leaders Tara Prasad Bahinipati and Ramesh Jena stoked a controversy on Monday by remaining absent from the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) meeting convened by the newly-appointed CLP Leader Ramchandra Kadam.

The absence of the two senior leaders indicated that all is not well within the groupism-ridden Congress, which has been struggling to stay relevant in the Odisha



politics after being pushed to the third position in the State in the last elections.

However, speaking to reporters, Bahinipati feigned ignorance about the CLP meeting. "No one called me to inform. I do not know anything about it. Who all attended and who were absent," he questioned.

Apart from Bahinipati and Jena, rest of the 12 Congress MLAs attended the meeting to discuss the party's strategy for the Assembly session.

Notably, the Congress high

command dissolved the Odisha Pradesh Congress Committee and dismissed all State office-bearers, including OPCD president Sarat Pattanayak on Sunday, indicating a complete overhaul of the organisation in the aftermath of the recent poll debacle. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) appointed Kadam as the CLP Leader ignoring Bahinipati, a five-time-MLA, who had staked his claim by stating a few days back that he deserved the post of CLP Leader.

Embezzlement of Rs 1.05 cr Fisheries Dy Director's properties raided

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Vigilance police on Monday conducted simultaneous searches at five places linked to Fisheries (Brackish Water) Deputy Director Basanta Kumar Dash in connection with alleged embezzlement of government funds worth Rs 1.05 crore.

"The raids were carried out to unearth documents related to the misappropriation of the amount and investments made and assets acquired from it," the Vigilance said.

An investigation by the investigating agency had revealed that Dash, being the Drawing and Disbursing Officer, transferred Rs 1.05 crore from government account to his personal bank account at the State Bank of India, Puri,



during the financial year 2024-25 and later misappropriated the same.

The raids were carried out at Dash's rented residential house at Sasana Padia, Keutasahi in Old Town of Bhubaneswar, his house located at Tota Mahavir Lane in Puri, farmhouse at Pilipila near Goruala in Puri district, native village at Govindpu, Naikandih in Bhadrak district and his office chamber at Directorate of Fisheries in Cuttack.

NASI Odisha Chapter Conf Osteopontin role on various types of cancers discussed

PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR

The Post-Graduate Department of Biotechnology, Berhampur University and KIIT University, Bhubaneswar in association with National Science Academy, India (NASI) jointly organised a one-day NASI Odisha Chapter Conference here on the subject "Science to Society and Sustainability."

Chairman, PG Council of Berhampur University Prof Sukant K Tripathy in his address emphasized on conduct of more translational research in science. Prof George E Weber from University of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA elaborately discussed the role of Osteopontin on various types of cancers especially in Odisha.

Prof GC Kundu from KIIT University and secretary, NASI, in his deliberation pointed out various scopes and objectives of NASI along with different cancer treatment strategies. Prof Viswas Chavan from IISER, Berhampur spoke on the importance of science and linked science with spirituality. Dr Vivek Tiwari, IISER, focused on various tools used in brain tumour diagnosis. Prof J Panigrahi from Department of Biotechnology, Berhampur University, discussed elaborately regarding the importance of molecular tools in the development of crop plants towards food sustainability. Coordinator, NASI Venketesh Panda also discussed the role of Osteopontin biomarkers in cancers.

Surging road mishaps Illegal liquor sale along highways blamed

SC road safety norms flouted by Excise Dept

SAROJ MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

It is said, "The driver is safer when the roads are dry; the roads are safer when the driver is dry." But it seems the Odisha Government does not believe this and has no desire to curb drunk driving on the highways which is killing hundreds every year in the State.

Due to the Excise Department's negligent attitude, faulty decision making and rampant corruption by the field officials and illegal sale of foreign and country liquor, the road accident rate is surging, and so are fatalities. Though the Supreme Court's Road Safety Committee has issued guidelines regarding this to the State Government to follow, the road accidents are yet to be curbed as the guidelines are blatantly violated.



Every day eight to ten persons are killed in road accidents in the State, stated Orissa High Court senior advocate and road safety expert Subrat Kumar Nanda in a letter to the Chief Secretary, Excise Secretary and Transport Commissioner.

Taking advantage of the State Government's soft attitude, the number of on-shop foreign liquor shops has mushroomed in the last few years, though from 2012-13 no licence has been issued for off-shop liquor shops in the State.

In the bars, though the rules say only on-shop liquor can be served, due to the unscrupulous excise officials both on-shop and off-shop liquor sale is being done. As the State Government was giving permission to shop outlets (bars) to lift and sell liquor bottles of 90 ml, 180 ml and 375 ml quantities, this is revealed to be one of the main reasons for surging road accidents, stated Nanda.

Even though from April 2024 the sale of small liquor bottles of 90 ml, 180 ml and 375 ml was banned by the gov-

ernment in on-shop outlets, due to an unholy nexus between dishonest excise officials and bar owners, the trade continues unabated. This is resulting in increasing road mishaps and loss of precious lives. The State Government should immediately take action on this and stop opening of bars along the National and State Highways. Besides, stringent action should be taken against the rule violators and the corrupt officials as the social costs are high despite the economics involved, urged Nanda.

Meet on Santali education, Mission Olchiki held

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A meeting focusing on the development of Santali education and success of Mission Olchiki-2025 was held here on Sunday. It was jointly organised by Jumid Kherwal, Puri, Bharat Jakat Majhi Pargana Mahal (BJMPM), Odisha Branch, and Santali Saonhed Akhda, Bhubaneswar.

The event started with honouring Guru Gomke Pandit Raghunath Murmu. The welcome address was delivered by Tahasildar Hansdah, Dishom Godet, BJMPM. The keynote address was given by Anup Majhi, secretary of Jumid Kherwal. Dhananjay Hembram outlined the future



plans for the Santali language movement.

Balokram Baskey discussed the current status of Santali education, including topics such as the Right to Education (RTE), the provision of Eighth-Schedule languages and the differences between linguistic minority status and second official language status.

Chaitnya Prasad Majhi, convener of Sahitya Akademi, highlighted the development of Santali language and literature and emphasised the success of Mission Olchiki-2025.

Representatives from different leading Santal organisations across the State submitted their feedbacks. Former MLA Kandra Soren discussed the government's

role in implementing Santali education.

A new Santali book titled "Mission Olchiki" written by Boyha Biswanath Tudu was unveiled by the guests.

The event underscored the collaborative efforts towards the advancement of Santali education and the preservation and promotion of the Santali language and culture.

Visually-impaired selected for int'l cricket feted



Sports Min motivates them as chief guests of event

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Under the guidance of chairman, Child and Women Development Society Maj Dr Kalpana Das, CWDS and CAVI held a felicitation programme for the visually-impaired cricket players at the

Kalinga Stadium here. Minister Sports and Youth Services Suryabanshi Suraj graced the occasion as chief guest and motivated them.

Nakula Badnayak, Sukharam Majhi, Debraj Behera and Pankaj Bhuye have been selected from Odisha for a tour to different cities like Boston, New York, New Jersey, Washington, Chicago, Dallas, Texas, Los Angeles, Seattle, Bay of the United

States of America to participate in the international cricket for the visually-impaired.

The Minister heard their grievances for the creation of a stadium for VI cricket players for their practice and also for creation of more visually-impaired cricket players in the State. He assured to solve the issues immediately by making slots for their practice at different cricket grounds. He also

considered their grievance for creation of a stadium for VI cricket players.

Rotary Club of Bhubaneswar Meadows supported the felicitation programme. President OAB Sanyasai Behera, president CAVI Iqbal Jafar, Rtn Rama Krushna Panda, PDG Aswini Kar, Rotary president Rtn Buddha Prakash Mohapatra, Rtn Suraj K Raj and Laxman Swain were present.

Plastic surgery evolves into a vital field in healthcare

AIIMS BBS holds Plastic Surgery Day

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Plastic surgery provides life-changing solutions for various conditions, including burns, cancer, lymphedema and cosmetic procedures. It has been addressing both functional and aesthetic needs of patients.

The AIIMS Bhubaneswar continues to reinforce the importance of advanced medical care in enhancing patients' lives. But more research and awareness over this sector is the need of the hour, said experts attending a special programme organised by the Department of Burns and Plastic Surgery at AIIMS to mark the World Plastic Surgery Day.

This year, under the auspices of the Association of Plastic Surgeons of India (APSI), a pio-



neering Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery Week was initiated. It featured a series of specialised days dedicated to various subspecialties within plastic surgery, each marked by the performance of relevant surgeries, all provided free of cost.

The Department of Burns and Plastic Surgery conducted awareness programmes and facilitated burn and cancer survivors. Notable services included

free compression therapy for lymphedema patients and free VAC therapy for wound care.

The unit has consistently demonstrated excellence in providing top-notch care and performing complex surgeries, solidifying its reputation as a crucial component of the healthcare system, said AIIMS Bhubaneswar Executive Director Dr Ashutosh Biswas.

Head of the Department Dr

Sanjay Giri stated, "We have achieved significant milestones such as reducing huge lymphedema through compression therapy, exercising a massive synovial cell sarcoma of the scalp and utilising allografts from skin banks in Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata for patients with 50%, 60%, and 70% burns. We also successfully re-implanted forearms and fingers."

Protests as Khallikote College stripped of UGC tag

RAJEEV RATHAN
■ BRAHMAMAPUR

The All India Democratic Students' Organisation (AIDSO) staged a protest concerning the future of the students at the Khallikote College on Saturday.

They demanded restoration of UGC recognition and the appointment of permanent faculty and staff in the college. Additionally, they demanded the announcement of the student council election date and the provision of free bus service for students. They have submitted a memorandum to the Governor, Chief Minister, and Higher Education Minister through the Vice-Chancellor of the college.

It may be noted that the Khallikote College, one of the oldest educational institutions in south Odisha, situated in Brahmampur, is losing its reputation. Despite its long history, the college has been operating under the name Khallikote Autonomous College for several years. However, in recent years, it has lost its UGC recognition, leading to concerns about the future of the students studying there.

Established in 1887, the institution offers 18 regular and 5 self-financed postgraduate courses, and 17 undergraduate courses. However, it suffers from a severe shortage of faculty and staff. The student union election has not been held for the past seven years.

Parents are particularly concerned about the validity of the certificates without UGC recognition. Some parents



have even protested at the university's registrar and examination controller's office.

Currently, there are 112 teacher posts and 25 non-teaching staff positions lying vacant. The most concerning and regrettable issue is the complete absence of teachers in departments like Hindi, Economics, and Mathematics. The shortage of educators and staff is causing significant delays in completing courses, conducting exams, and publishing error-free results.

In addition, the democratic rights of students and their ability to voice their concerns have been severely curtailed. Initially, various restrictions were imposed through the Lyngdoh Commission, and for the past seven years, student union elections have been completely halted. This has effectively stripped the students of their right to present their demands to the authorities.

Thousands of students from poor and middle-class families across the State come to the university to pursue their education. They face numerous difficulties commuting by bus. Meanwhile, AIDSO national secretary Sibani Shankar Mishra said the university Registrar and Examination Controller have assured them of a timely solution.

AIDSO district president Nimain Charan Sahu, vice-president Papan Sahu, secretary Narayan Sahu, and other workers and many students participated in the agitation.

In Odisha

JSW Infra acquires port connectivity project

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The JSW Infrastructure Limited, a part of the JSW Group, has announced purchase of an "Under Development Slurry Pipeline Project".

The company's Board approved the takeover of 30-MTPA "Under Development Slurry Pipeline Project" from the JSW Utkal Steel Limited, a wholly-owned subsidiary of JSW Steel, and to enter into a 20-year-long-term take-or-pay agreement for using the pipeline to transport iron ore.

The project is for the 302-km slurry pipeline running from Nuagaon to Jagatsinghpur in Odisha and will connect directly to the upcoming Jatadhhar Port in the State. Work on 122 km of the project has already been completed. The project's development is scheduled for completion in early 2027 and commercial operations are expected to commence in April 2027.

An independent valuation expert firm has set the transfer price for the slurry pipeline currently being developed. The consideration is around ₹1,700 crore, which includes the fair value of expenses incurred up to May 31, 2024 and the costs anticipated after May 31, 2024 until the actual transfer date.

Take tainted RI to task, D'nal Tehsildar urged



By BJP leader Hota along with supporters

PNS ■ DHENKANAL

Supporters of BJP leader Er Debashisha Hota opposing rampant corruption by a revenue inspector (RI) gheraoed the Dhenkanal Tehsil Office after taking out a huge rally from Dakshinakali in the headquarters town here on July 20.

The agitators demanded a written assurance from the administration to take strict action against the accused RI.

Notably, the accused RI had demanded a bribe for a field verification report from a person. On July 11, Er Hota lodged a complaint with Tehsildar Litusmita Mishra to take strict action against the RI, but in vain. Then on July 18, he again tried to meet the Tehsildar over the issue but the latter did not give time. Consequently, Hota along with his 2,000 supporters held a demo before the Tehsil Office.

In Nabarangpur

The living and the dead in 'troubled waters'



MONOHAR MOHANTY
■ NABARANGPUR

The perils of traversing through the rising waters of Kukurjhor Nal (channel) near Mohora village in Chandahandi block of Nabarangpur district once again put the villagers from Boriguda at risk as they had to carry a body for burial in chest-deep water on Saturday.

Though there has been a longstanding demand for a bridge over channel, no effort has been taken in the direction. As a result, villagers continue to wade through deep water to cross the river for important works, including cremations.

Residents of Mohora and members of the Sunni Muslim Committee have repeatedly applied to public representative and officials for remedial measures.

The bridge is crucial not only for Mohora but also for nearby villages like Salebidi and Baburia as well as for accessing the cemetery used by both Muslim and Hindu communities.

With a new government in the State, villagers are hopeful for change but remain uncertain if their request will be addressed. However, they have renewed their demand for a concrete bridge from the administration and newly-elected representatives.

Forum pushes for full-fledged airport in B'pur

Meets Union Civil Aviation Min Naidu

PNS ■ BRAHMAMAPUR

The members of the Odisha Development Forum met Union Minister of Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu at Ichchapuram in Andhra Pradesh on Saturday and submitted a memorandum for the establishment of a full-fledged airport in Brahmampur.

Notably, after a two-decade-long demand by the forum for the establishment of a daily green-field airport in Brahmampur, significant steps are being taken to address the aviation needs of the region. Despite the commencement

of a non-scheduled flight from Rangeilunda Airport to Bhubaneswar twice a week since March 2023, the general public continues to face various inconveniences due to the lack of daily flight services, absence of online ticket booking, and insufficient direct flight connections to major cities.

The lack of a minimum 72-seater aircraft service and the absence of daily flights have resulted in considerable inconvenience for the general public. The forum noted that there is no visible progress on the State's efforts to expand Rangeilunda Airport and start ATR-72 or larger aircraft until a green-field airport is built in Brahmampur.

Lakhs of tourists from neighbouring West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, and Telangana visit Maa Tara Tarini Shaktipeeth, Gopalpur beach, Tampara, Chilika, Daringbadi, Mohana and Jiranga. Additionally, thousands of businessmen and common people from Brahmampur and southern Odisha depend on Visakhapatnam, Kolkata, and Hyderabad daily, making daily air service to these areas essential for the region's success. The forum in its memorandum requested the provision of daily flight services to cities like Hyderabad, Kolkata, Visakhapatnam, and Bangalore as soon as possible.

Additionally, the forum emphasized the need to set up online ticket sales and to run scheduled flights from Brahmampur to Bhubaneswar. Given the high demand for tickets, the forum suggested operating flights twice daily and reducing ticket prices from Rs 2,500 to the previous rate of Rs 1,200. The members also highlighted the importance of providing ancillary facilities at Rangeilunda Airport.

The meeting was attended by V Someswar Rao, Pritish Panigrahi, Manash Ranjan Patro, Prabin Patnaik, Santosh Sahu, Kiran Kumar Panda, Ramesh Chandra Sahu, N Nilamadhav Patro, Srinibas Rao, and Prakash Bhijani.

In Mayurbhanj

Workshop held for FPOs on vegetables export

Organised by NABARD, State Agriculture Dept, APEDA

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The NABARD, in partnership with the State Agriculture and Farmers' Empowerment Department, Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA) and Palladium organised a strategy workshop in Mayurbhanj for Farmer Producer Organizations (FPOs) on exporting fresh vegetables from Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, and Baleswar districts in north zone of the State. Facilitated by Palladium as Technical Support Unit (TSU) to the Directorate of Horticulture, Odisha, the event aimed to enhance the export potential of fresh vegetables from the region.

The workshop focused on educating FPOs about the processes and opportunities in the export market, with a specific goal of exporting okra, bitter melon, and long beans to Dubai within the next six months, as per the demand. In the last three months, for the first time, eight FPOs exported over 86 quintals of mangoes and fresh vegetables to seven countries in the Middle East and Europe - United Kingdom, Italy, Ireland, Poland, Qatar and UAE.



Many esteemed speakers, including exporters, representatives from NABARD, APEDA, State and district officials from the department and Palladium graced the event. The inaugural session included opening remarks and special addresses from dignitaries, followed by informative sessions led by Dr Sudhanshu KK Mishra (CGM NABARD), APEDA's Regional Head, Sitakanta Mandal, Palladium's Associate Director, Biswajit

Behera and representatives from export houses. The workshop saw an active interaction of representatives from FPOs with other stakeholders. The Mahila Pragati Farmer Producer Company Limited, a successful FPO from Rayagada, presented its success story and the plan for diversifying into other commodities for export. The all-woman FPO with over 1,900 members has recently been exporting mangoes and fresh vegetables.

RSP-Centurion Univ partnership 2,200 get free eye checkups, 1,975 get power glasses

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Mobile Vision Care project, a CSR initiative by SAIL Rourkela Steel Plant (RSP) in collaboration with Centurion University, has successfully provided essential vision care services to communities in the Bisra and Lathikata blocks, resettlement colonies and model villages during the year 2023-24.

Under the initiative, a total of 2,200 individuals received free vision checkups, with 1,975 people benefiting from complimentary power glasses to address their vision needs. The project covered several key areas including Jolda, Swidhi, Santoshpur, Kapatmunda, HA English School, Dareikela, Dalki, Salangbahar, Dumejhore, Usra, Padmapur, and Kuarmunda, reaching out to underserved populations in the regions.

RSP demonstrated its commitment to social responsibility by providing Rs 10 lakh for the project, while Centurion University served as the executing partner. The entire project was carried out by the CSR department under the guidance of GM (CSR) Munmun Mitra and coordinated by AGM (CSR) TB Toppo and Manager (CSR) Richa Sudhiram.

In Sundargarh

3 footballers killed as truck hits bike

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH

Three budding football players died in a road accident on National Highway-520 under the Koida police station in Sundargarh on Sunday.

The deceased were identified as Debendra Dehury (35), Anadi Nayak (32) and Anil Dehury (26) of Toda slum under the Koida police station.

The mishap occurred when the trio was returning home after a football match at a nearby village in the evening. On their way back, a speeding truck hit their bike near a

bridge killing them on the spot.

The Koida police registered a case in this connection and began an investigation. Tension was sparked in the area following the incident with locals complaining that a stretch on the NH in Koida has turned into a deathtrap.

Earlier in July, three members of a family had been killed and another two critically injured after an SUV they were travelling in rammed into a stationary truck on the NH-520 at Rengalbeda within the Koida PS.

49 LI projects defunct in Jharsuguda; 3K farmers hit

RAJKUMAR SHARMA
■ JHARSUGUDA

In Jharsuguda district, 49 Lift Irrigation (LI) points have been non-operational for years due to lack of funds. The Pani Panchayat Committees, responsible for maintaining these points, have been unable to repair them, leading to theft of water motors and electric cables. The situation has left around 3,000 farmers without water for agriculture.

The Pani Panchayat Act, introduced in 2003, aimed to empower farmers by forming committees in each panchayat to manage the LI points. These committees, led by elected presidents, were responsible for collecting charges from farmers, depositing funds with the Electricity Department, and handling necessary repairs. Each LI point served over 50 farmers, who were required to pay Rs 2,000 per month for water used for two acres of agricultural land. The Government did not provide funds for maintenance, leaving the financial burden entirely on the farmers.

Initially, the system worked well, providing timely water for crops like paddy and veg-

etables during the Kharif and Rabi seasons. However, issues arose when some panchayats failed to collect water bills, and theft of equipment became rampant. Consequently, LI points in various blocks, including Lakhapur, Jharsuguda, Laikera, Kolabira, and Kirmira, became defunct.

Currently, 15 LI points in Lakhapur, 21 in Jharsuguda, 2 in Laikera, 9 in Kolabira, and 2 in Kirmira are non-functional. This has severely affected farmers who rely on these points for irrigation, preventing them from starting their agricultural activities.

Jharsuguda Lift Irrigation SDO Satyanarayan Nahak stated that a letter has been sent to the State Government requesting funds to make the LI points operational again. Meanwhile, farmers are urging for 5 to 10 percent financial support from MLA or MP LAD funds to restore the irrigation projects.

The prolonged defunct state of these LI points underscores the urgent need for Government intervention and financial assistance to revive the irrigation system and support the farmers' livelihoods in Jharsuguda.

SLNMCH oxygen plant lying defunct since long

ACs, other furniture missing in Nayagarh DHH after shifting to new bldg

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Forget about other hospitals, even a medical college and a District Headquarters Hospital in Odisha are grappling with major problems and attracting attention for all the wrong reasons.

Take the case of Saheed Laxman Naik Medical College and Hospital (SLNMCH) in Koraput. As per reports, the oxygen plant set up in the hospital during the outbreak of Covid-19 is reportedly lying defunct. Some birds have even built nests on the fans of the plant. Only one oxygen plant of the hospital is currently in operation and most of the time, oxygen cylinders



are bought from outside to carry out treatment.

The oxygen plant, which is currently lying defunct, was set up in 2021 by the then Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. However, it malfunctioned only after six to seven months.

"An oxygen plant set up in the hospital has been lying defunct for the last three years.

It is quite unfortunate that the hospital authorities are taking no steps to repair the plant. The doctors in the hospital are referring patients to other hospitals due to inadequate oxygen facilities," rued Ramesh Chandra Biswal, a resident of Koraput.

In response to the allegation, SLNMCH Superintendent Sushant Kumar Sahu said,

"I have informed the higher authorities about the malfunctioning of the oxygen plant umpteen times. However, we have got no reply yet. We will inform our higher authorities again to take necessary measures."

Similarly, the Nayagarh District Headquarters Hospital also portrays a sorry state of infrastructure. Apart from

bed and water issues, as many as 60 air conditioners have allegedly vanished from the hospital.

As per reports, the hospital was shifted to a new building a few months back and new air conditioners were installed in the new building. However, a large number of air conditioners, LED lights and steel chairs have been allegedly sto-

len from the old building. It has been alleged that some employees of the hospital have either sold those articles or installed those in their own houses.

"Around 100 air conditioners have been stolen by the CDMO, two managers and a local resident. CDMO himself is involved in the incident and that is the main reason why he is not conducting an inquiry," alleged Congress leader Ranjit Das. "CDMO, ADMO and the managers are involved in the incident. We will stage a protest for the suspension of the officials," said Soumya Ranjan Pradhan, a social activist.

Following the allegations, Chief District Medical Officer (CDMO), Nayagarh Ramakant Panda ordered a vigilance inquiry into the incident. Subsequently, the hospital authorities lodged a police complaint.

A committee will be formed to inquire into the incident soon," said CDMO Panda.

Opp, BJP spar over Centre move on Govt staff RSS links

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP, RSS and the Congress on Monday locked horns over the Centre's move to lift the ban on Government employees from participating in activities of the Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh (RSS) with the BJP and RSS saying the decision would strengthen the country's democratic system, the grand old party which had actually banned the organisation saying the order passed by the Narendra Modi Government has withdrawn an order which was in place even during Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's regime.

Several Opposition leaders also criticised the move. BJP accused the earlier regimes of furthering their own political interests by imposing the ban in the past.

Union Minister Piyush Goyal said the Congress Government's decision in 1966 to ban Government employees from attending RSS activities was driven by political reasons. "Congress has always had a negative mindset for nationalist organisations, and such a thinking has no place in the country," Goyal told the media.



Opposition parties, which have criticised the Modi Government's decision to lift the ban, were only interested in appeasement politics and have displayed a negative attitude to Hindus, he claimed. Goyal described the RSS as a nationalist organisation whose members are full of patriotism.

RSS spokesperson Sunil Ambekar said in a statement, "The present decision of the Government is appropriate and strengthens the democratic system of India." RSS has been continuously involved in the reconstruction of the nation and service to the society for

the last 99 years, he added. "Due to the contribution of the Sangh in national security, unity-integrity and taking the society along during times of natural disaster, various types of leadership of the country have also praised the role of the Sangh from time to time. Due to its political interests, the then Government had baselessly banned the Government employees from participating in the activities of a constructive organisation like the Sangh," the statement said. There have been multiple instances of the Government barring its employees in the

past from associating with the RSS. BSP chief Mayawati termed the Centre's order removing the ban on the participation of Government employees in RSS activities a politically motivated move to "appease" the organisation and demanded its immediate withdrawal.

"The Centre's decision to lift the 58-year-old ban on Government employees from attending RSS shakhas is a politically motivated move to appease the RSS rather than serving the national interest. This is to ease the tensions that intensified between the two after the Lok Sabha elections over Government policies and their arrogant attitudes," Mayawati said in a social media post.

Congress chief spokesman Jai Ram Ramesh slammed the central Government over the order as he first shared it issued by the Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances and Pension dated July 9 pertaining to the participation of the Government servants in the activities of the RSS.

"Sardar Patel had banned the RSS in February 1948 following Gandhi's assassination. Subsequently, the ban was withdrawn on assurances of

good behaviour. Even after this the RSS never flew the Tiranga in Nagpur. In 1966, a ban was imposed - and rightly so - on Government employees taking part in RSS activities," Ramesh said.

AIMIM chief and MP Asaduddin Owaisi hit back at the BJP for withdrawing the ban, saying that no civil servant can continue to be loyal towards the nation if they are a part of RSS, and the order goes against India's unity.

Shiv Sena (UBT) Rajya Sabha MP Priyanka Chaturvedi said that with the order, Government officers in the Enforcement Directorate, Income Tax Department, Central Bureau of Investigation, Election Commission and other departments can "officially prove their Sangh credentials". "Such a shame, instead of aligning only to Bharat Mata's interests, the BJP is leading them towards keeping ideological interests first," Chaturvedi said.

Trinamool Congress MP Derek O'Brien said, "Are we surprised that the Union Government has now revoked a 60-year ban on Government employees taking part in RSS activities?"

NTA postponed at least 16 exams since 2018, Ministry informs LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Education Ministry on Monday informed the Lok Sabha that the National Testing Agency (NTA) postponed at least 16 exams due to different reasons since its inception in 2018. The reasons for postponement included COVID-19 pandemic, administrative reasons, logistical reasons, and technical issues. The information was shared by Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar in response to a written question in Lok Sabha asked by DMK MP Kanimozhi Karunanidhi. "Since its inception in 2018, NTA has successfully conducted over 240 examinations involving over 5.4 crore students." Since most of the examinations conducted by NTA are held in multiple-shifts, multiple-shifts and span over a number of days, there have been instances due to unforeseen circumstances like COVID-19 pandemic, logistical and technical issues, administrative issues, legal orders etc, when examination



Admission Test (CMAT)-2021 was postponed due to the revision of the examination pattern by the AICTE. All India Ayush Post Graduate Entrance Test (AIAPGET), 2021, and Joint Integrated Programme in Management Admission Test (JIPMAT), 2021, were postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic. IGNOU PhD Entrance was postponed in 2022 due to administrative reasons. Graduate Aptitude Test in Technology (GAT-B), 2023 was postponed as per consultation with regional centres for biotechnology. In 2024, National Common Entrance Test (NCET), 2024 was postponed due to technical issues and CSIR-NET, 2024 due to logistic issues. "NTA has started declaration of examination calendar of major examinations, much in advance for the facilitation of candidates. The examination calendar is planned taking into consideration, buffer days to accommodate for reschedules and postponements for reasons beyond the control of NTA," the minister said.

dates initially notified in respect of specific subjects or shifts could not be adhered to," the Minister said. According to the data shared by the minister, four exams -- JEE-Main (2020), NEET-UG (2020), JEE-Main (2021) and NEET-UG (2021) were postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic. CSIR UGC-NET (2020), UGC-NET (December, 2020), UGC-NET (May, 2021) and Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) AIEEA (2020) were postponed due to "COVID-19 pandemic and logistical challenges". Delhi University Entrance Test (DUET) 2020 for admission to UG, PG-MPhil and PhD courses was postponed as the registration process was put on hold by DU due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Common Management



BJP slams Kerala Govt for Foreign Secy appointment

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

BJP Lok Sabha member on Monday said the appointment of an IAS officer as "Foreign Secretary" by the Kerala Government was "unconstitutional" and an "encroachment" on the responsibilities of the Centre. Raising the issue in the Lok Sabha, BJP member P P Chaudhary said the Kerala Government order of July 15, appointing IAS officer K Vasuki as "foreign secretary" was a "blatant outreach". "Is the Kerala Government treating itself as a separate nation," Chaudhary said in the Lok Sabha.

The Kerala Government had on July 15 issued an order giving Vasuki, Secretary in the Labour and Skills Department, the additional charge of "the matters connected with External Cooperation". Chaudhary said external cooperation meant dealing with various nations, Indian embassies and missions abroad, functions that formed part of the Union List as per the allocation of business rules. "As per the allocation of business rules, these functions can only be performed by the Government of India through the Ministry of External Affairs," the BJP member from Pali in Rajasthan said. "So, the action on the part of Kerala Government by issuing such an order and appointing an IAS officer as foreign secretary is unconstitutional, and it is an encroachment on the union list," Chaudhary said.

Eco Survey pitches for FDI from China to boost manufacturing, export

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Among strained ties with China, the pre-budget Economic Survey on Monday made a strong case for seeking foreign direct investments (FDI) from Beijing to boost local manufacturing and tap the export market.

As the US and Europe are shifting their immediate sourcing away from China, it is more effective to have Chinese companies invest in India and then export the products to these markets rather than importing from the neighbouring country, the Survey said.

India faces two choices to benefit from China plus one strategy it can integrate into China's supply chain or promote FDI from China.

"Among these choices, focusing on FDI from China seems more promising for boosting India's exports to the US, similar to how East Asian

economies did in the past. "Moreover, choosing FDI as a strategy to benefit from the China plus one approach appears more advantageous than relying on trade. This is because China is India's top import partner, and the trade deficit with China has been growing," it added.

It also said that increased foreign direct investment inflows from China can help increase India's global supply chain participation and push exports. The Survey explained how increased FDI inflows from China can help in increasing India's global supply chain participation along with a push to exports.

These economies have typically pursued two main strategies - reducing trade costs and facilitating foreign investment. At present, the bulk of the FDI coming into India falls under the automatic approval route, however, FDI from countries sharing land borders with India

needs mandatory Government approval in any sector. China stands at 22nd position with only 0.37 per cent share (USD 2.5 billion) in total FDI equity inflow reported in India from April 2000 to March 2024.

Countries which share land borders with India are China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Bhutan, Nepal, Myanmar, and Afghanistan.

The Indian and Chinese militaries have been locked in a stand-off since May 2020 and a full resolution of the border row has not yet been achieved though the two sides have disengaged from a number of friction points.

The ties between the two countries nosedived significantly following the fierce clash in the Galwan Valley in June 2020 that marked the most serious military conflict between the two sides in decades. India has been maintaining that its ties with China cannot



be normal unless there is peace in the border areas. Following these tensions, India has banned over 200 Chinese mobile apps such as Tiktok, Wechat, and Alibaba's UC browser. The country has also rejected a major investment proposal from EV maker BYD. However, earlier this year the Competition Commission of India (CCI) cleared JSW Group's proposed acquisition



of a 38 per cent stake in MG Motor India Pvt Ltd. MG Motor India is a wholly-owned subsidiary of Shanghai-headquartered SAIC Motor. The government is also looking at further streamlining processes for timely approval of visas for Chinese professionals and technicians whose expertise is required by the Indian industry to set up manufacturing capacity.

largest trading partner of India with USD 118.4 billion two-way commerce in 2023-24, edging past the US. India's exports to China rose by 8.7 per cent to USD 16.67 billion in the last fiscal. The main sectors which recorded healthy growth in exports to that country include iron ore, cotton yarn/fabrics/madeups, handloom, spices, fruits and vegetables, plastic and linoleum. Imports from the neighbouring country increased by 3.24 per cent to USD 101.7 billion. The trade deficit has widened to USD 85 billion in the last fiscal from USD 83.2 billion in 2022-23.

According to the Commerce Ministry data, China was India's top trading partner from 2013-14 till 2017-18 and also in 2020-21. Before China, the UAE was the country's largest trading partner. The US was the largest partner in 2021-22 and 2022-23.

Modi muzzled Indians' voice for 10 yrs: Cong

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday over his remarks criticising the Opposition, alleging that it was he who "suppressed the voice" of the country for 10 years and for which people "punished" him in the Lok Sabha polls.

Hitting back at Modi over his remarks, Congress's media and publicity department head Pawan Khera said the person who "throttled the country and suppressed its voice" for 10 years, today looked "very weak and was seen weeping" when the opposition raised its voice. The prime minister started the Monsoon session by making a comment on the opposition that was not befitting of his post, Khera said.

"He said the opposition throttled the voice of the prime minister for two-and-a-half hours. It is important to remind Prime Minister Modi

that during his unjust rule of the last 10 years, the entire country was suffocated, for which the public has punished him," he said in a post in Hindi on X.

"Prime Minister Modi has forgotten that he is not the prime minister of a majority government, but the 'one-third' prime minister of an NDA government run with the support of two parties," he added. He should also avoid using the term Modi government and



speech full of arrogance and lies, it is important to tell you that more than 15 Agniveers of the country have been forced to commit suicide with the dream of sacrificing their lives for the country in their hearts," the Congress leader said.

"It is our parliamentary duty to repeatedly interrupt and stop you so as to raise the voice of the country. You too must understand that it is important to leave everything aside and listen to the questions related to the immediate needs and problems of the country," the Congress leader said. Talking to reporters ahead of the start of a Parliament session, Modi said in the first session of this Lok Sabha, "an undemocratic attempt was made to scuttle the voice of the government that had been ordered by 140 crore Indians to serve."

"For two-and-a-half hours, attempts were made to scuttle the voice of the prime minister and such a thing has no place in democratic traditions. They

(opposition) has no remorse over it," PM Modi said. Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Gaurav Gogoi hit out at the prime Minister, saying the NEET issue was listed as the second topic in Monday's Question Hour, but Modi stood up and walked away before that.

"Why did he go? Was it not his responsibility to give an answer on the issue? When we demanded the Education Minister's resignation, he (Dharmendra Pradhan) arrogantly said why would he resign when he has been appointed as the education Minister by Prime Minister Modi," Gogoi told reporters outside Parliament.

Hitting out at Modi for his remarks, the Congress's whip in the Lok Sabha, Manickam Tagore, said the Prime Minister should practise what he preaches by doing positive things. "He says something else outside and does something else inside the House," Tagore alleged.



Extreme weather, low reservoir levels hit farm output, food prices

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Economic Survey 2023-24 tabled in Lok Sabha on Monday highlighted that extreme weather, lower reservoir levels and crop damage have affected farm output and led to higher food prices over the past two years. Unfavourable weather conditions particularly impacted the production prospects of vegetables and pulses, it said.

"In FY23 and FY24, the agriculture sector was affected by extreme weather events, lower reservoir levels, and damaged crops that adversely affected farm output and food prices. So, food inflation based on the Consumer Food Price Index (CFPI) increased from 3.8 per cent in FY22 to 6.6 per cent in FY23 and further to 7.5 per cent in FY24," read the consolidated report on the state of the economy in the previous year. Food inflation has been a global phenomenon in the last two years.

Research, the government said, indicates the rising vulnerability of food prices to climate change - heat waves, uneven monsoon distribution, unseasonal rainfall, hailstorms, torrential rainfall, and historic dry conditions.

According to the Economic Survey, tomato prices surged in July 2023 due to seasonal changes, region-specific crop

diseases such as white fly infestation, the early arrival of monsoon rain in the northern part of the country, and logistics disruptions in isolated areas due to heavy rainfall.

"The spike in onion prices was attributed to several factors, including rainfall during the last harvesting season affecting the quality of rabi onions, delays in sowing during the kharif season, prolonged dry spells impacting kharif production, and trade-related measures taken by other countries. "The prices of pulses, particularly of tur, increased due to low production over the past two years, caused by adverse weather conditions. Urad production was affected by slow sowing progress in the rabi season coupled with climatic disturbances in the southern states," the government said. The area and output of gram was also lower compared to the previous rabi season, it said.

The government also said the Indian economy has consolidated its post-Covid recovery and is on a strong wicket and stable footing, demonstrating resilience in the face of geopolitical challenges. For the recovery to be sustained, it stressed, there has to be heavy lifting on the domestic front because the environment has become extraordinarily difficult for reaching agreements on key global issues such as trade, investment and climate.

Obesity, mental health key challenges: Eco Survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Emphasising on the importance of the healthcare sector for a resilient economy, the Economic Survey 2024 tabled in Parliament on Monday flags two critical health challenges facing India: obesity and mental health.

It notes that obesity has emerged as a significant public health issue, constituting 54 per cent of India's disease burden due to diets high in processed foods. The survey highlights a tripling of adult obesity rates and steep increases among children, particularly in urban areas and among women. Urgent preventive measures are urged to promote healthier lifestyles and mitigate associated health risks.

Concurrently, the survey

underscores the importance of addressing mental health, emphasizing its profound impact on individual well-being and national productivity. It calls for destigmatizing mental disorders through increased awareness and support systems, citing gaps in mental health infrastructure and the need for more psychiatrists.

The economic implications are noted, including productivity losses and increased healthcare costs due to untreated mental health issues. Both issues demand comprehensive strategies—from dietary reforms and promoting physical activity to enhancing mental health education and support services—to foster a healthier and more resilient society in India. With obesity rates soaring,

particularly in urban areas and among women, urgent preventive measures are advocated to foster healthier lifestyles and mitigate escalating health risks, said the survey. "Combined with an ageing population in some states, obesity presents a concerning situation. Preventive measures must be taken to enable citizens to have a healthier lifestyle," the survey said.

On mental health issues, the survey has called for integrating mental health education into school curricula besides bolstering mental health infrastructure and breaking the stigma surrounding mental illness. Highlighting the profound impact of mental well-being on both individual development and national productivity, the survey has called for breaking



the stigma around mental health by stopping being in denial about its existence. "There is a need to bring about a massive shift in the way we talk about mental health in the community and advocate an increase in the number of psychiatrists and mental health interventions in schools," the survey has said. Citing a study, the report pointed

out that there remain certain gaps in the existing programmes which need to be addressed to maximise their effectiveness, it said. For instance, doubling the efforts to increase the number of psychiatrists, from 0.75 psychiatrists per lakh population in 2021 to the WHO norm of 3 per lakh population. The report stressed developing

comprehensive guidelines for the excellence centres' services alongside mental healthcare professionals and called for nurturing peer support networks, self-help groups, and community-based rehabilitation programmes to destigmatise mental disorders and develop a sense of belongingness in their victims. "Arguably, mental health issues drag down productivity more widely in the ecosystem than individuals' physical health issues," the report said, emphasising that paying attention to mental health issues in society is both a health and an economic imperative. The increase in mental health issues in children and adolescents is often linked to the overuse of the internet and specifically, social media, said the report.

Three newly elected MLAs take oath in Himachal



PTI ■ SHIMLA

Himachal Pradesh Vidhan Sabha Speaker Kuldeep Singh Pathania on Monday administered oath to the three newly elected legislators, including Kamlesh Thakur, the wife of Chief Minister Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu. The oath ceremony was conducted inside the House in the presence of the chief minister, leader of the opposition, cabinet ministers and other members. The members who took oath included Congress MLAs Kamlesh Thakur from the Dehra assembly seat, Hardeep Singh Bawa from the Nalagarh seat and BJP legislator Ashish Sharma from the Hamirpur assembly constituency. With the induction of the three MLAs, the House is complete with 68 members and the strength of Congress has risen to 40 while BJP has 28 members in the legislative assembly. There is no independent MLA in the Vidhan Sabha for the first time in the history of Himachal Pradesh. Also, this is the first time a couple, CM Sukhu and his wife Kamlesh Thakur, are members of

the same House. The by-elections for the three seats — Dehra, Nalagarh and Hamirpur — were held on July 10 following the acceptance of the resignation of three independent MLAs, Hoshiyar Singh, K L Thakur and Ashish Sharma. The three independents along with six Congress rebels had voted in favour of the BJP nominee Harsh Mahajan in the Rajya Sabha polls held on February 27. On March 22, the three independent MLAs submitted their resignation and joined the BJP the next day. However, their resignation was accepted by the speaker on June 3. The three Independents were given tickets by the BJP from their respective seats but Ashish Sharma was the only MLA to retain his seats while the other two lost the by-polls to Congress rivals. Talking to the media persons here, CM Sukhu accused the BJP of hatching a conspiracy to destabilise the government by horse-trading. In his response, leader of opposition Jai Ram Thakur accused the Congress government of winning the by-polls by

misusing the official machinery. Sukhu hoped that the BJP would now shun the negative politics and cooperate with the government in pursuing the development agenda. "The people of the state have rejected the politics of toppling the elected government through money power and shown the mirror to the BJP," the chief minister said. The BJP forced the by-polls and created political turmoil and as a result, the government could not implement a developmental agenda after passing the budget due to implementation of a model code of conduct, he added. Reiterating the resolve of the state government to make the state self-sufficient, Sukhu said the Congress government was forced to raise loans to pay the interest and instalment of loans taken by the previous BJP government headed by Jai Ram Thakur. He claimed that due to prudent policies of the government, the financial condition of the state has improved by 20 per cent. Thakur said, "The BJP snatched the Rajya Sabha seat, Mandi Lok Sabha seat and three out of nine assembly seats increasing its tally in Vidhan Sabha to 28." "We accept the verdict of the people but the results would have been different if the three by-elections caused by the resignation of the Independent legislatures were held simultaneously with six bypolls and Lok Sabha polls," he said. Earlier, six assembly seats fell vacant following the disqualification of Congress rebels for defying the whip to vote in favour of the Congress during the budget. These Congress MLAs had also voted in favour of the BJP candidate in the Rajya Sabha polls.

Dams in Karnataka filled to the brim due to torrential rain

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Most of the dams in Karnataka are filled to the brim, thanks to the torrential rains in the catchment areas of the major rivers for the past few days. The coastal and Malnad region in the Western Ghats have been receiving incessant rains for the past 15 days due to which many rivers originating from here are in spate. According to the Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre (KSNDMC), the inflow of water in the Cauvery basin was 98,577 cusecs while the outflow was 70,645 cusecs. The KSNDMC said the cumulative outflow since June 1, was 118.25 thousand million cubic (TMC) feet, while the outflow was 41.52 TMC ft. The Krishna Raja Sagar (KRS) dam with a reservoir level of 124 ft presently has 123.2 ft water. As on Monday, the inflow was 60,016 cusecs and outflow 52,020 cusecs. Other dams in the Cauvery basin namely Harangi, Hemavathi and Kabini are also filled to the brim. The rains in the Cauvery basin have been received at a time when Karnataka was worried with the scanty rainfall and was gearing up for a legal battle with neighbouring Tamil Nadu. The Cauvery Water Regulation Committee had directed Karnataka to release



one TMC ft water to neighbouring Tamil Nadu till July-end.

The Chief Minister convened an all-party meeting on July 14 saying that it will not be able to meet the direction and was preparing to approach the Cauvery Water Management Authority with a request that it will release 8,000 cusecs water and not 11,500 cusecs water, which is one TMC. After visiting the KRS Dam, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar who holds the Water Resources portfolio, said the CWRC had directed the state to release 20 TMC water starting from July 11 till month-end. "The rain God is merciful to us and Mother Cauvery is flowing gently. Already 30 TMC water has flown to Biligundlu in Tamil Nadu at the Karnataka border. Our dams are completely full and we are releasing water," Shivakumar said. e also said that 51,000 cusecs

water is being released to Tamil Nadu. In a normal year, we have to release 40.14 TMC ft of water. Karnataka will be able to release the requisite water to Tamil Nadu, Shivakumar said. This apart, channels will be opened to fill 1,657 tanks in the Cauvery basin. Dams in the Krishna river basin namely Bhadra, Tungbhadra, Ghataprabha, Malaprabha, Almatti and Narayanapura are almost filled up and water is being released from these dams. These six dams have a gross capacity of 422.45 TMC while on Monday there was a storage of 312.96 TMC. Last year, the storage was 129.59 TMC water on this day. Three hydel project dams Linganamakki, Supa and Varahi and Vani Vilas Sagar too are completely filled up. The major dams in Karnataka with a gross water holding capacity of 895.62 TMC have gross storage of 615.20 TMC.

Telangana CM meets Cong top brass in Delhi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Monday met Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra HERE, and invited them to a public meeting in Warangal focused on the state's farm debt waiver programme. At the meeting, which comes close on the heels of the state government initiating the first phase of its loan waiver scheme on July 18, Reddy emphasised the symbolic importance of Warangal. Since the farm-loan waiver was promised by the Congress at a campaign rally in Warangal during the Assembly polls, the party's state unit plans to hold a public meeting there to highlight its implementation, sources said. They said the chief minister may also call on former Congress president Rahul Gandhi for the proposed public meeting at Warangal. The Telangana government has already credited Rs 6,098 crore to farmers' bank accounts, covering loans up to Rs 1 lakh in the initial phase. The scheme is set to unroll in three stages, with the second phase targeting loans up to Rs 1.5 lakh by July-end, and the final phase covering loans up to Rs 2 lakh in August. In a separate engagement, Reddy also met Union Jai Shakti Minister C R Patil, seeking central funds for the Musi River Beautification Project.

Woman to get ₹5 lakh compensation 20 years after needle left in her body after surgery

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A Bengaluru based woman has been awarded a compensation of Rs five lakh by a consumer forum, nearly 20 years after a 3.2 centimetre surgical needle was left in her body following her surgery at a private hospital here. The Karnataka State Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission has directed the hospital and two doctors to pay Padmavathi, a resident of Jayanagar, Rs 50,000 as litigation expenses. It has also directed New India Assurance Co Ltd, which had issued a policy covering the hospital expenses, to pay her Rs five lakh for "the professional and medical negligence caused." The then 32-year-old woman underwent the surgery on September 29, 2004 at the Deepak Hospital, with the two doctors allegedly performing the



hernia operation. On completion of the surgery, her appendix was also removed, according to the Commission's order last month. Immediately, on the next day, she complained of severe pain for which she was prescribed some pain killers and assured that it is post surgery discomfort and that it will get cured. She suffered acute stomach and back pain for several years and was also admitted in the same hospital twice later, the order noted. Padmavathi later approached another private hospital here in 2010 and during a scan, it was noticed that some foreign body existed in the abdominal

and back portion of her body and it was suggested to her to get it (surgical needle) removed. She then underwent surgery and the 3.2 cm surgical needle was removed following which she approached the consumer forum with a complaint the following year. The forum noted that the complainant was aged about 32 years, when she underwent all these surgeries and removal of the surgical needle. "Definitely she suffered severe pain and inconvenience till removal of the surgical needle," the order stated. Hence, she is entitled to get "global compensation" of Rs five lakh and the insurance company (New India Assurance Company Limited) is directed to pay the amount while the two doctors are liable to pay litigation expenses of Rs 50,000 to the complainant, it further added.

Rain pummels Vidarbha, more than 700 houses damaged, villagers evacuated

PTI ■ NAGPUR

More than 700 houses were damaged, and several roads were inundated as rains pummelled Maharashtra's Vidarbha over the weekend, and intermittent spells continued in the region on Monday. In Chandrapur, seven gates of the Irai Dam were opened by one metre as incessant showers lashed the district in the morning. According to officials, 740 houses were damaged, particularly in villages in Chandrapur, in the last 48 hours. Water entered houses in Chichpalli village in Chandrapur after the retaining wall of a nullah developed cracks. At least 33 roads were blocked due to waterlogging in Gadchiroli district, and five were gradually opened as water started receding in the morning, officials said.



More than 100 people were evacuated from Asgaon (Paoni tehsil), Opara and Dholsar villages in Lakhandur tehsil of Bhandara district on Sunday night and shifted to temporary shelters. Heavy rains pounded Paoni and Lakhandur for more than two hours, resulting in

waterlogging, and residents were in danger, district disaster management officer Abhishek Naamdasa said. A district search and rescue team evacuated villagers and sent them to temporary shelters, the official said. As a preventive measure, the SDRF is on standby, and collector Yogesh

Kumbhejkar was monitoring the situation, it was stated. The weather department has issued orange and yellow alerts for the region, warning of thunderstorms accompanied by lightning at a few places in Nagpur, Wardha, Chandrapur and Amravati for the next two to five days. According to the regional meteorological centre, Nagpur recorded 43 mm rainfall in 24 hours ending 8.30 am on Monday. The department has forecast thunderstorms with lightning and light to moderate rainfall at isolated places over Wardha, Nagpur, Gadchiroli, Bhandara, Gondia and Chandrapur districts. The Regional Meteorological Centre has issued an orange alert for Bhandara and Gondia for Monday and a yellow alert for Nagpur, Wardha, Chandrapur, Gadchiroli, Amravati, Akola, Yavatmal and Buldhana.

Nipah: Contact list of deceased boy updated, more tests being conducted

PTI ■ KOZHIKODE

The number of people at risk for contracting Nipah in the contact list of the 14-year-old boy who lost his life to the rare infection, has been increased to 350, out of which 101 are in the high-risk category, Health Minister Veena George said on Monday. The Kerala Health Department is waiting for the test results of 13 people, whose samples were sent to the Kozhikode Medical College virology laboratory and the Advanced Virology Institute at Thiruvananthapuram for testing. "Out of the samples sent for testing, six of the persons have symptoms. Three of them are on the secondary contact list. Even though the parents of the deceased boy do not have symptoms, we have sent their samples also for testing to rule out all possibilities," she said. The health department said two of the persons on the contact list are from Palakkad, while four are from Thiruvananthapuram. The two from Palakkad are working in a private hospital, while the four from Thiruvananthapuram have



reached Perinthalmanna for treatment. The minister added that the friends of the deceased child have informed them that he had consumed a fruit from a nearby property in Pandikkad panchayat, where the presence of bats has been detected. The 14-year-old boy from Kerala's Malappuram who was under treatment here for Nipah infection died on Sunday morning. Minister George said counselling will be given to the friends of the deceased child to help them cope with his loss, and that their classes will be held online. The department has released a detailed route map of the boy's movements and has asked the people who are suspected to have come into contact with him to contact the health department and seek treatment.

Karnataka Govt to issue guidelines to malls following denial of entry to farmer due to his attire

PTI ■ KARNATAKA

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Monday said the government will issue guidelines to malls and other establishments, in the wake of a farmer being denied entry because of his attire. The government on July 18 ordered closure of the G T World mall here for seven days after the incident, which drew strong condemnation from members cutting across party lines in the Legislative Assembly. It had also termed the alleged insult to the farmer as

infringement of "dignity and self respect" of an individual, and said it cannot be tolerated. "There had been discussion last week in the Assembly over a farmer from a village being denied entry into a mall owing to his attire -- wearing a 'panche' (dhoti) -- which is our cultural attire. Following the incident, orders were issued for its closure. We have also decided to issue guidelines in this regard, whether it is a mall or any other place -- small or big. 'Panche' is part of our culture," Shivakumar told the Assembly on Monday.

He said: "notice was issued to the mall for its closure; they also had some tax dues, we have taken a written explanation from them and also apology. They (mall) have also given a cheque to pay the tax dues. To ensure that such incidents don't repeat anywhere in the state, we will issue guidelines." "The mall had tax dues to the tune of Rs two crore; they had paid in between; some amount was pending to be paid for which July 31 was the last date; we have taken cheque from them and we are allowing them (to operate)," Shivakumar added.

The incident reportedly happened on July 16 when septuagenarian Fakeerappa from Haveri district visited the mall along with his wife and son to watch a movie at a multiplex. Fakeerappa was reportedly wearing white shirt and 'panche' (dhoti), and the security staffer at the mall allegedly told him and his son that he won't be allowed inside in a 'panche', and to "wear trousers and come." JD(S) floor leader C B Suresh Babu requested the Deputy Chief Minister to bring private clubs too under the guidelines.

Mahayuti allies free to go solo in elections to local bodies: Ajit

PTI ■ PUNE

Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has said the Mahayuti constituents, including the NCP led by him, are free to contest local bodies elections independently. Addressing Nationalist Congress Party workers in Pimpri Chinchwad city on Sunday, he argued that independent contests would help strengthen the cadres. "Even though we are allies in Lok Sabha and state assembly, Mahayuti members are free to contest local bodies polls independently," he said. The schedule for elections to local bodies, which include municipal councils, nagar panchayats and zilla parishads, is not yet announced.

The ruling Mahayuti alliance includes Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde, BJP, and the NCP led by Ajit Pawar. Notably, Ajit Pawar's assertion on going solo in the local bodies elections came days after a Marathi weekly linked to the RSS blamed Ajit Pawar-led NCP's alliance with BJP for adverse public sentiments against the saffron party, leading to the BJP's Sabha polls in Maharashtra. The report said BJP members and other individuals expressed disapproval of the party's decision to join forces with the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP), which became an ally in the Shiv Sena-BJP government in the state in July 2023. Meanwhile, Ajit Pawar denied stopping his estranged uncle

member Sharad Pawar from speaking at a Pune District Planning and Development Committee (DPDC) meeting held on Saturday. Baramati MP Supriya Sule had claimed that Ajit Pawar had objected to her father asking questions about the disbursement of development funds at the meeting. She claimed Ajit Pawar had cited a GR (Government Resolution) and said MPs and MLAs cannot ask questions about fund disbursement or vote during these meetings as they are only invitees. Sharad Pawar had attended the meeting in his capacity as a Rajya Sabha member. Clarifying his stand, Ajit Pawar said, "Supriya Sule yesterday claimed that I had insulted Pawar saheb. How can I do this to a person for whom I have high respect".

More than 200 mm rainfall in several areas of Mumbai over 24 hours, NDRF teams deployed



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Several locations in Mumbai received over 200 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours leading up to 8 AM on Monday, with the intense rain in the morning briefly disrupting local train services during the rush hour between Kalyan and Thakurli stations, causing delays. Some areas received up to 34 mm of rainfall in just one hour between 6 AM and 7 AM. The civic body claimed its Automatic Weather Stations (AWS) located across the city recorded more than 200 mm of rainfall at multiple locations in the last 24 hours ending at 8 AM. Three teams of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) have been deployed in Mumbai to tackle any situation amid the forecast of a high tide and moderate to heavy rains in the city and its suburbs, officials said.

In its latest forecast for the next 24 hours starting at 8 AM on Monday, the Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has predicted "moderate to heavy rain in the city and suburbs", according to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC). A high tide of 4.59 meters is expected at 12.59 PM, the BMC stated. Malabar and Mulund Hill recorded 34 mm of rainfall between 6 am and 7 am, followed by Bhandup with 29 mm, Wadala East with 24 mm, and Versova with 20 mm. The city recorded significant rainfall in various locations, with the highest measurement of 241 mm reported at the AWS station in Trombay, Mankhurd. Other notable rainfall figures include 224 mm at Nutan Vidyamandir in Mankhurd, 223 mm at Nadkarni Park in Wadala, and 215 mm at the 'N' Ward Office in Bhandup, according to the BMC.



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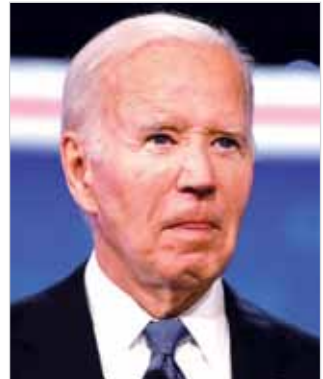
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Biden bows out

Joe Biden opts out of the race to US presidential elections, endorses Kamala Harris to take on Trump

Amid speculations about his health, Joe Biden has finally decided to withdraw his candidature from the US Presidential elections. In his place Kamala Harris, the US Vice President is likely to be the Democrat Candidate. It would be now Kamala vs Trump who is seeking re-election after he lost to Joe Biden in the previous election. President Biden, who will be 82 years old by the time of the election, cited personal reflection and a desire to pave the way for new leadership as the primary reasons for his decision. In his address from the White House he expressed confidence in Vice President Kamala's ability to continue the administration's agenda and lead the nation forward. President Biden stated that, after much thought and consideration, he and his wife believed it was time to pass the torch to a new generation of leadership. He mentioned that Vice President Harris had been by his side through the most challenging times of his presidency and that he had seen firsthand her dedication, intelligence, and unwavering commitment to the American people. Kamala's candidacy is historic in many ways. If elected, she would become the first female president, as well as the first Black and South Asian American to hold the office. Harris, who has served as Vice President, has been a prominent figure in the administration, particularly in areas such as criminal justice reform, immigration, and climate change. However, Harris will face significant challenges as she navigates the primary race and potential general election campaign. She will need to address concerns from both progressive and moderate factions within the Democratic Party and present a compelling vision for the future to win over undecided voters. Her



campaign is expected to highlight the achievements of the current administration, including economic recovery efforts, the handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, and initiatives aimed at promoting social justice and equality. Joe Biden's decision is unprecedented as no presidential candidate have ever opted out so late. Two significant events might have influenced his decision. First, his lacklustre performance in the presidential debate led opponents to question his credentials to lead the country. Second, the assassination attempt on Trump has put him in the limelight and drawn widespread sympathy. These two incidents, though unrelated, may have compelled Democrats to consider other options. On the Republican side, the announcement has prompted a reassessment of strategies. With Biden out of the race, potential Republican candidates will now focus their efforts on countering Kamala's policies. Donald Trump, and Florida Governor Ron DeSantis are among those expected to vie for the Republican nomination. The coming months will reveal how Kamala positions her campaign, addresses the pressing issues facing the country, and seeks to build a broad coalition of support. Her candidacy opens a new chapter in American politics, one that could redefine the future of the Democratic Party and the nation.

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PICTALK



Artists decorate a wall for the 46th Session of UNESCO's World Heritage Committee, in New Delhi

Tackling new wave of terror in Jammu

As administrative setups suffer, urgent and coordinated action is imperative to counteract these well-orchestrated threats and restore stability



UMANG KOHLI

There has been a spate of terror attacks in the Jammu Region in the last few months. These terror attacks clearly show that the enemy has changed its tactics to strike into regions that had otherwise become peaceful. After the revocation of Article 370, China and Pakistan felt rattled about the new dynamics. China then tried to capture territory in Leh and Galwan took place. We all know Galwan was a well-planned operation by the PLA. This led to the movement of Indian Army Troops from the hinterland particularly from the Jammu region.

The void of boots on the ground in near peace regions of Jammu has led to a vacuum as far as the intelligence network is concerned. Normalcy has to be maintained for some time, also with fewer boots in the Jammu Region the human intelligence that gets developed over some time gets depleted.

Most of the army posts in Jammu and Kashmir have an administrative setup based on locals. These locals provide fresh food, logistic support and other admirative material. Even in winter cut-off posts locals provide wood, and admirative backup in both Jammu and Kashmir. Now when troops are depleted all of a sudden, the intelligence gathering in the area dries up. It also leads to a shortage of earning opportunities for the locals making them more vulnerable to the lure of money to facilitate enemy design. This vacuum of this intelligence is being exploited by the enemy and make no mistake China is fully involved in helping Pakistan in this. The attacks are well-planned and deliberate. Pakistan has started refuelling its Over Ground Workers in the Jammu region specifically.

There have been a lot of FIRs registered by the army against these OGWs over the years but little or no action has been taken on them. It's about time we took action against these FIRs. Special courts must be set up to fast-track cases filed by the army against underground workers. Many of the men move to Himachal in search of work from Doda during summers. Some of them also



make hideous for terrorists during winter for them to come there and stay during summer. Once the men move out, there are a lot of women in Guwardi (resting place Gujjars make) and hideouts made during winters in higher reaches of Doda and these women provide them food there. They also provide them with information about force movement and then help them go to the other side of the ridge.

These women give food and information to the terrorists. The terrorists generally hide in Guwardi (resting place Gujjars make) and hideouts made during winters in higher reaches of Doda and these women provide them food there. They also provide them with information about force movement and then help them go to the other side of the ridge. Many women work for money yet others get physically involved with these terrorists. The army is not allowed to interrogate these women or to search them. Even after the AFSPA the rules to interact with women are very strict. If the soldiers try to check the movement details of these women, false FIRs are sometimes lodged against them. It would be prudent to provide Special Women Officers in army posts who could search these women and also interro-



THE ENCOUNTERS IN JAMMU REGION IS AN EFFORT BY THE ENEMY TO SHOWCASE THAT THERE IS NO REGION IN JAMMU AND KASHMIR THAT IS PEACEFUL. THEY WANT TO ALSO SHOW THAT THE REVOCATION OF ARTICLE 370 HAS MADE NO DIFFERENCE

gate them. Also, a lot of dog squads could come in handy to chase away these women after smelling them.

Till 2003 special women police officers used to stay at far-off army posts in Doda, however as comparative normalcy returned the practice was let go. Special women units in city centres like Doda, Jammu, Udhampur etc could also help. Doda has also had a history of women moving as guides of terrorists. They provide them with local SIM cards which terrorists keep disposing of. The movement of forces from one place to another is also communicated by these OGWs. However, rape of these women by terrorists is not uncommon. One odd local terrorist generally accompanies these Pakistani terrorists to act as a physical guide. Security forces in Jammu and Kashmir work together and police and army share information and intelligence, however when two different organisations share intelligence chances of overlap and double cross increase. It will be prudent to share intel-

ligence but not mix standard operating procedures which may be different for the two organisations.

Lungars of jawans of both forces must remain different at all times. Also, each piece of information and intelligence shared must be carefully corroborated by other sources independent of each other. It is also advised not to rush into situations based on half-corked information.

The encounters in Jammu region is an effort by the enemy to showcase that there is no region in Jammu and Kashmir that is peaceful. They want to also show that the revocation of Article 370 has made no difference to their effort to bleed India.

The entire effort of the enemy is hinged on Foreign Terrorists who are helped by local Over Ground Workers. Hoping fast action is taken against OGWs while the army eliminates these terrorists sent by Pakistan on the instructions of China.

(The author has firsthand experience of encounters in Doda Forests for three long years; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

STUDENT UNREST IN BANGLADESH

Madam — The unrest in Bangladesh due to student protests is a matter of concern for India. Students from Dhaka University are outraged about the government's quota system in education. The dissatisfaction among locals from the Awami League is evident, with reports of killings in the Chittagong district. Quotas and reservations were initially tools to promote equity in society, but their continued existence raises questions about government accountability.

This issue is not unique to Bangladesh; India also has a complex reservation and quota system that makes it difficult for average students to access good education and job opportunities. Brilliant students succeed on their own merits, while others rely on quotas, leaving average students frustrated. The governments of India and Bangladesh, along with other countries that adhere to quotas and reservations, need to address this critical issue to prevent future unrest among students.

A number of Indian students are still to be evacuated. Their families are anxiously waiting any news about them as most communication channels are blocked. This situation not only highlights the immediate need for safety and support for the students by the Indian government

The international community, including neighboring countries like India, is closely monitoring the situation, recognizing the potential for wider regional implications. It is imperative that the Bangladeshi government takes swift and decisive action to address the students' concerns and restore normalcy to ensure the well-being and future of its young population.

Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

POLITICAL AGENDAS: A REFLECTIONS

Madam — The All-Party meeting called by the ruling dispensation seems intended to push through its agenda for this

Mumbai's monsoon mayhem



Despite the BMC's tall claims of rain readiness, waterlogging has been a persistent issue at focal points in Mumbai.

Initial rains inundate low-lying areas and block vehicular traffic, creating chaos on the roads. The widespread presence of potholes on Mumbai roads and highways exacerbates the problem, keeping road users on edge.

Subways suffer from poor lighting and potholes, adding to the fears of road users. Waterlogging, traffic snarls, train delays, and fallen trees worsen the situation. The lethargy of BMC workers is evident, and public miseries go unaddressed. It is so unfortunate that the authorities take people for granted and despite enormous resources at their disposal do not act in time. It is now up to the people to take precautions during the rains and help others to avoid mishaps. Helping each other during floods is a practical solution to the pressing problems faced by the people of Mumbai.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

session of Parliament without opposition hurdles. Every party, state, and individual leader has a wish list. The former Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh, who previously demanded Special Category Status for the state before assuming office, was expected to achieve this goal with an absolute majority. However, to everyone's surprise, he never addressed this issue and focused instead on implementing Union government programs. Now, having lost power, he has again raised the issue of Special Category Status for Andhra Pradesh. People have come to understand the leaders and their parties; it is now up to the leaders to understand the people and their demands.

A G Rajmohan | Anantapur

CELEBRATING INDIAN TENNIS LEGENDS

Madam — It was a significant day at Newport, Rhode Island, as Indian tennis legends Leander Adrian Paes and Vijay Amritraj were inducted into the prestigious International Hall of Fame. Leander Paes, a Padma Bhushan and

Padma Shri awardee, is renowned as one of the all-time great doubles players, holding the record for the most doubles wins in Davis Cup. His illustrious career includes eight men's doubles and ten mixed doubles Grand Slam titles. In 1999, he, along with Mahesh Bhupathi, became the first pair in the Open era to reach the finals of all four Grand Slams in men's doubles in the same calendar year.

Vijay Amritraj, a Padma Shri awardee, was inducted in the contributor category, recognizing his visionary leadership and transcendent impact on the sport. In 2022, Amritraj was honored in London by the International Tennis Hall of Fame and the International Tennis Federation for his lifetime contributions to tennis. Their achievements continue to inspire and shape the future of tennis. Kudos to both Paes and Amritraj for making India proud.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

A silent revolution in mica mines of Jharkhand



BHUWAN RIBHU

The mica mines in Jharkhand's Koderma district are now free from child labour. This is a significant milestone in the region where child exploitation is rampant

On the 5th of July, the Chairperson of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), Priyank Kanoongo, declared that the mica mines in Jharkhand's Koderma district were free from child labour. NCPCR's announcement holds immense significance given that child labour in Koderma's mica mines has been an open secret for decades.

Despite the International Labour Organization considering mining and quarrying as hazardous work and one of the worst forms of child labour child labour continues to persist throughout the world, especially in the marginalised sector.

Children's small size makes them ideal for navigating the narrow caves and tunnels of mica extraction. In the wake of stringent environmental regulations including the 1980 Forest Conservation Act, legal mica mining paved the way for illegal trade thriving in Koderma and the rest of the mica belt looping through the dense forests of northern Jharkhand and southern Bihar. I've witnessed this journey up close. I've seen



Koderma transform from a district where every family's children were engaged in mica mining and collection to a district with all children from these mines enrolled in, and going to schools. Back in 2005, while searching for the children involved in mica mining and collection, I was in for a rude shock. The place resembled a parallel universe—schools shut down for months, CRPF battalions camping in schools, curfew-like atmosphere post 5 pm, no roads, mobile towers, electricity or tap water. I realised that the mica, which gave shimmer to our cars, cosmetics and electronic appliances, was coming from a place, which was oblivious to development and rights.

Over the last 20 years, over 32,000 children identified as working in mica mining and

collection, withdrawn from work, enrolled and retained in schools through the efforts of NGOs under the Child Labour Free Mica banner. And over 22,000 in the last two years alone. This monumental change was achieved by applying a multipronged strategy at a scale in the targeted geography:

Research: Data was gathered to assess the problem and plan their solutions. In 2019, over 20,000 children, a majority of them school dropouts, were found working in mica mines.

Participation: Children's councils were formed to allow the participation of children in decision-making on issues they were facing. This model broke the systemic barriers of oppression in access to rights and injustice. Hundreds of awareness programs were organised in mica mining villages to prevent child labour.

Protection: Based on information received from credible sources, children were rescued from mines from time to time. Additionally, in 2019, the findings of a study conducted on out-of-school children were submitted to

NCPCR. As a result, the stakeholders were able to monitor the school attendance of children to ensure that rescued children were retained in schools and no child was leaving school to work in mica mines. Partnerships: MoU with the Jharkhand state government, partnership with the NITI Aayog, local NGOs and NCPCR enabled the Child Labour Free Mica program to reach the farthest corners of the mica mining areas in Koderma.

Enhancing social security: People in mica mining-dependent villages were connected to social security schemes. Labour cards were made for daily wage labourers; and people were linked with the public distribution system and pension schemes. The above interventions, had following impact: 20,584 children withdrawn from labour and 30,364 children were enrolled in schools- Change is possible, the child labour-free mica program has proved this.

(The author is a child rights activist and founder of Just Rights for Children; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

It can liberate the mind from perpetual conflict and lead to inner peace



RAVI VALLURI

Recall the iconic lines, of Amitabh Bachchan in the movie Deewar — looks intently at the idol of Lord Shiva and says, “Bahut khush hoga tum!” Bachchan, in the movie, essayed the role of an atheist smuggler. However, eventually, in the final stages of his life, he surrenders to the Supreme Power and seeks forgiveness. True enlightenment is the art of living compassionately. The human mind and heart reach a point of inflexion where an act of pardon remains an inescapable reality.

A prosaic individual might not be able to separate the chaff from the grain. His mind is full of antipathetic thoughts that he cannot transcend the barrier and is unable to exonerate anyone who has inflicted pain or hardship on him. The mind, full of gloom-ridden and obstructive thoughts cannot perceive the divinity in others. It remains perpetually in a state of conflict. Such an emotionally distraught person would castigate even angelic and divine figures out of callowness. Several organised and structured religions lay prominence on the art of forgiveness. If an individual does not rise to the sublime spheres of compassion and forgiveness, then he gets trapped in the whirlpool of cause and effect. The unabated Karmic cycle continues without any resolution.

The pivot is to fortify and protect the human mind to make it robust and compassionate. It attempts to extricate the self from the cause and effect of actions and even non-actions. Action and non-actions of humans indeed leave an indelible impression on the human mind. It would be perspicacious to pose as to how non-actions are also a kind of Karmic activity and in what manner it impacts the human mind and consciousness. Non-action in a way represents not taking up the gauntlet. Sage Ashtavakra, who authored the treatise, Ashtavakra Gita, posits a theory that an individual should break the bondage of guilt and anger to invoke the grace of remission. There is a poignant Zen story that explains the exemplary tenets of compassion and forgiveness. Aeons ago a Zen Master summoned his tutees in a Temple of Knowledge and asked them if they harboured the antipathetic emotion of hatred in their minds. “Yes!” exclaimed the disciples. The Master directed his disciples to place a potato each



in their bag and always travel with it as a reminder that despite the practice of meditation and breathing exercises their prana level was not high enough to expatriate hatred and inculcate compassion. The number of potatoes was to increase depending on the quantum of anger and would be directly proportional to the antipathy in their minds. Some young monks ended up carrying a bagful of potatoes, which over a period became malodorous. In sheer exasperation, the harried disciples sought refuge in the grace of the master to dispense away with the bag. The Zen Master guffawed and chided his students to abandon the negative trait of abhorrence from their minds, lest the malodour of these traits become a burden all through their lives. To lead a warm and healthy life, individuals should embark upon the path of forgiveness and compassion. This suffuses the mind with immense strength and courage of conviction. It would be insightful for any individual to make positive affirmations, reinforcing love for every animate and inanimate object to build a divine society. Such affirmations would train the mind to remain unruffled and spread the quintessential gospel of forgiveness. Thereby humans would truly embrace fellow beings. If we construe the human mind to be the hardware, compassionate thoughts and forgiveness are part of non-negotiable software.

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

A blueprint for boosting rural economic growth

India’s rural sector stands at a pivotal juncture, poised for transformation through small-scale and green enterprises. It has potential to become India’s growth engine



MONICA B SOOD



India’s rural sector must be transformed for inclusive growth and sustainable development. This change relies on small-scale and green enterprises to boost the rural economy, empower women, and employ unskilled workers. By channelling resources such as the extra Rs 1 lakh crore RBI dividends into capital projects and innovative schemes, India can foster self-sustainability in rural areas, mitigate youth distress, and rejuvenate the demand side of the economy.

This comprehensive approach not only addresses immediate employment needs but also lays the foundation for long-term capital formation and environmental preservation.

Incorporation of small-scale and green industries as the engine of growth

Micro enterprises have always been the backbone of the Indian agriculture-based economy. These labour-intensive enterprises perfectly capture the unskilled and semi-skilled manpower from the farming communities, therefore, creating employment and improving existence standards without much training. The development of these industries generates a massive multiplier effect on the creation of other business lines that support them and the general economy. Green industries are therefore leading this change. Encompassing renewable energy, organic farming, and sustainable manufacturing, these sectors offer dual benefits: employment opportunities for production and environmental management.

The establishment of green industries in the rural region targets to solve social problems like climate change and environmental degradation and at the same time create a sustainable means of living. This was done by allowing biogas and biofuel plants, solar energy farms, Ayurvedic and Unani medicine industries, and cooperative organic farming. These measures create employment, lessen the dependency on fossil energy and foster the preservation of the environment.

Women empowerment Out of the total rural population of India, the female population is about 30% which is a great unexplored talent pool. It is shown the pro-



THE ESTABLISHMENT OF GREEN INDUSTRIES IN THE RURAL REGION TARGETS TO SOLVE SOCIAL PROBLEMS LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION AND AT THE SAME TIME CREATE A SUSTAINABLE MEANS OF LIVING

motion of employment and entrepreneurship in these women brings substantial socio-economic returns. Micro and sustainable industries remain essential in empowering women since they create employment, skills development, and business opportunities for women. Self-help groups, women-based cooperatives and micro enterprises are the best way to ensure women’s productive participation in the rural economy. These initiatives exist in areas where women dominate including handcrafting, production in textiles, manufacturing of alternative/Ayurvedic products, processing of raw materials, farming organically, milk production, and food processing. Credit, training, and market linkages also enable women to set up and expand their businesses besides improving on household incomes and community development.

Public private partnerships

A Channel for Facilitating PPP for Rural Development PPP is a powerful platform for pooling resources and skills to promote rural development. Thus, PPP models can initiate the development of small and green industries in rural areas with the support of the government and private investors. The government can provide policy support and an environment for development and financial backing while the private players bring in funds, technical expertise, and managerial skills. As per this model, to encourage rural development, a part of ?1 lakh crore RBI dividends can be spent to co-finance with private entities. It can be used to fund the development of industrial clusters, renewable energy projects, and training institutions with efficient implementation and compliance with social and environmental responsibility.

Capital formation and rural employment

These are two basic objectives of

the growth process that need to be understood and analysed. To sum up, the provision of ?1 lakh crore RBI dividends for capital investments in the form of sustainable rural development plans provides a strong base. Construction of infrastructure such as roads, bridges, renewable energy facilities, and development of industrial estates can offer employment in the short run as well as in the long run spur economic development. A targeted investment can engage millions annually, thus erasing rural unemployment and distress to a large extent. In this way, employment of non-skilled and semi-skilled people from rural areas is possible, and thus future generations are protected from unemployment migration to urban areas, and rural-urban disparity. The placement of rural youth through placement in local schools, hospitals, and government offices helps in the tackling of manpower issues leading to improved service delivery and welfare of the populace.

Funding rural transformation

Funding the strategic rural development agenda calls for out-of-the-box funding acquisition strategies to tap several sources of funds. To the Rs 1 lakh crore RBI dividends, contributions from CSR, and own finances of panchayats and municipalities, and specific cess on fuel, income tax, and GST can be added. For example, the mandatory 25% contribution from CSR funds can be used to direct corporate money into rural development causes. While a 0.5% cess on luxury items, cars, aeroplane fares and GST can fetch a huge additional amount. However, it revealed that additional resources can be mobilized from the Skill Development Schemes (SKS) and hospital’s SKS funds for support of wages in essential sectors. The introduction of a small cess on share trading can also produce a fairly good revenue for such

a scheme in turn funding the rural employment programme permanently.

Addressing rural unemployment

At the moment, unemployment has touched the figure of 8% in India. 1 per cent of the nation’s unemployed populace is comprised of rural youth. If PM wants to bring the unemployment rate down to 6% and this is considered nearly equal to the employment rate observed in the developed countries, the scheme should ensure employment generation for at least 1 crore rural youth. The scheme should aim at offering low-wage employment to the increase in unemployment among the rural youthful population while at the same time ensuring that such employment offers incentives to make the youth stay in their given community without competing for skilled employment opportunities. This way the scheme means setting wages at ?10,000 per month with 80:20 work distribution will sustain rural households’ income and at the same time does not hinder organised labour employers markets.

A Roadmap to rural rejuvenation

Additional Rs1 lakh crore of RBI dividends coupled with idea capitalisms as sources of funding open the doors of a scheme that has the potential of providing a road map for rural rejuvenation. As a result, the small-scale industries, green industries, women and unskilled rural labour can make the scheme self-sustainable, reduce unemployment and bring a long-lasting impact on the environment. PPP and the focus on capital development will help the scheme to be sustainable and grow in scale, thus painting a better picture for rural India.

(The writer is Chairperson of the National Unity & Security Council; views are personal)

Bihar again misses out on Olympic representation

Bihar’s chronic issues in sports infrastructure, funding mismanagement, and administrative neglect continue to hinder its representation on the global stage

Bihar is bereft of a berth in the Olympics again. By Gyan Bhadra The last week of this month is going to witness the glistening inaugural ceremony of the Olympic games of 17-days duration in Paris. In its wake sports pundits in India are preempting and counting on their fingers the medal tally Indian athletes will bag for the country. However, at the time of writing this piece, the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs had put its imprimatur on the list of 117 athletes along with 140 supporting Staff. Now the question crops up: Is there any athlete from Bihar representing India in the Paris Olympics? The answer is a resounding “no”. As in the Tokyo Olympics; so in the



GYAN BHADRA

Paris Olympics, there is no representation of Bihar’s sportsmen. The reasons behind it are threefold. One, as far as sports infrastructure in Bihar is concerned, there is a lack of an adequate number of stadiums, sports-related training centres and the ablest guidance of coaches. The reasons could be attributed to the fact that government investment in the sports sector is abysmally low. Even central financial

assistance given to the Bihar government to the tune of 50.83 crores as part of the “Kheelo India” scheme was seemingly not utilised for either the development of infrastructure or the honing of skills of athletes in the state.

The patterns of allocation of funds to the sports sector are depressingly alarming. It has been observed that money meant for the overall growth of the sports sector is diverted as per the whims and fancies of politicians.

This invariably puts a toll on the sports industry which finds itself in a quandary and struggling always. Two, it goes without saying that the association of politicians with prominent sports bodies is an age-old pastime.



Every politician worth its salt desires to be a member of sports bodies. Whether it be BCCI or sports bodies at the state level, every political leader wants to usurp icing on the cake of huge funds invested in the sports bodies then how could Bihar be left behind? Instead of being deeds heroes, espousing the

cause of sports development in Bihar, politicians, once getting a coveted position in sports bodies, exploit available resources to serve their ends.

Public memory is short. But not so painfully short that it will forget the fact that former Chief Minister Lalu Yadav, when, at the helms of Bihar Cricket Association as President, did not do enough in the realm of training budding talents of Bihar. The lack of Lalu’s political will to promote cricket could be gauged by the fact that during his tenure as BCA president, no cricket player from Bihar had got a berth even in the Ranji Trophy squad; what to talk of big league matches at an international level. Now

sports pundits may arguably put a contention that during Lalu’s tenure as BCA president, Bihar did not have a State Ranji Team as partition of Bihar caused losses to Bihar concerning sports facilities. Jharkhand carried takeaways of a major chunk of sports facilities with itself. However, taking refuge in this excuse by sports pundits held no water for scores of young cricket players then. This is more so because, during that period, RJD was led by Rabri Devi at the helm of state affairs; and Lalu could have done a lot about setting up a proper state Ranji Team and appointing the ablest coaches to train state’s cricket players. Three, the role of the Bihar

Olympic Association (BOA) in preparing athletes for the Olympic games leaves much to be desired. Going by records, BOA officials do not take the trouble to organise events and trials for grooming athletes to the level of world-level Olympic games. So it springs no surprise that no athlete from Bihar had figured in the list of 117 athlete-member teams for the Paris Olympics. What is worse, there is a blame game between BOA and the state government over this sorry state of sports affairs. BOA puts the onus on the state government for sheer negligence about the lack of infrastructure and trained coaches. This results in BOA finding itself unable to organise

events at regular intervals. On the other hand, the state government absolves itself of essential responsibilities about BOA by saying that BOA is an independent entity and the government cannot interfere with its functioning. In this ongoing war of attrition, budding talented athletes are the losers. Eventually, it could be summed up that the scheme “Medal Lao, Naukri Pao” may seem to be alluring to a large number of youth at first glance. However, due to the lack of necessary sports wherewithals in Bihar, the scheme would not cut much ice with scores of young talents.

(The author is a columnist, views are personal)

World leaders thank Biden for his 'global leadership'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

World leaders on Monday thanked him for his bold steps and global leadership during challenging times. Biden on Sunday announced that he is exiting the 2024 presidential race and backed his deputy Kamala Harris to be the Democratic Party's presidential candidate in the November 5 election. In a post on X, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said he respects President Biden's decision and looks forward to working together for the remainder of his term. "I know that, as he has done throughout his remarkable career, he will have made his decision based on what he believes is best for the American people," said Starmer, who met with Biden this month in Washington. Former UK prime minister Rishi Sunak said in a post on X that he saw Biden's "love for America and dedication to service" firsthand while working with him. He also outlined some achievements between



Patricia Greene, of Washington, is photographed holding a sign thanking President Joe Biden near the White House in Washington, Sunday, July 21, 2024. Biden dropped out of the 2024 race for the White House on Sunday, ending his bid for reelection following a disastrous debate with Donald Trump that raised doubts about his fitness for office just four months before the election. AP/PTI

the US and the UK. Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in a post on

X thanked Biden for his "leadership and ongoing service." "The Australia-US Alliance

has never been stronger with our shared commitment to democratic values, international security, economic prosperity and climate action for this and future generations," he said.

Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau thanked Biden for being a "partner to Canadians - and a true friend". "I've known President Biden for years. He's a great man, and everything he does is guided by his love for his country. As President, he is a partner to Canadians — and a true friend. To President Biden and the First Lady: thank you," Trudeau posted on X along with a photograph of him with Biden.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said, "I refrain from commenting directly on this issue because it involves domestic politics in the US but I recognise that President Biden's decision is based on his desire to make the best possible political decision."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky said his country is grateful to President

Biden for his "unwavering support" for its fight for freedom, which, along with strong bipartisan support in the United States, has been and continues to be critical.

"Many strong decisions have been made in recent years and they will be remembered as bold steps taken by President Biden in response to challenging times. And we respect today's tough but strong decision," he said on X.

Zelensky said Ukraine will always be thankful for Biden's leadership. "He supported our country during the most dramatic moment in history, assisted us in preventing Putin from occupying our country, and has continued to support us throughout this terrible war," he said. Taking to X, Israeli President Isaac Herzog described Biden as a "true ally of the Jewish people" and thanked him for his friendship and steadfast support for the Israeli people over his decades-long career. "As the first US President to visit Israel in wartime, as a

recipient of the Israeli Presidential Medal of Honor, and as a true ally of the Jewish people, he is a symbol of the unbreakable bond between our two peoples. I send him, @FLOTUS Jill Biden, and all his family, my warmest wishes from Jerusalem," Herzog wrote. Israeli Defence Minister Yoav Gallant in a post on X said the US president's "steadfast backing, especially during the war, has been invaluable". The Biden administration has been one of the biggest supporters of Israel's war in Gaza since Hamas' October 7 attacks last year. But he has increasingly clashed with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over humanitarian aid and the mounting civilian death toll of the conflict.

Netanyahu, who is expected to visit Washington this week, has not yet given any statement on Biden's decision to withdraw from the presidential race. Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris called Biden "a proud American with an Irish soul," and thanked him for his "glob-

al leadership" and "friendship". In a post on X, Ireland Foreign Minister Micheal Martin said he heard the news "with both sadness & admiration", describing Biden as an "abiding friend of Ireland". Martin said Biden provided "invaluable support for peace & prosperity on this island" and wished him the best.

New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon said in a post on X that "Biden has dedicated his life to public service, and that is something that deserves much respect." He thanked Biden for his "commitment to New Zealand" and said he looks "forward to working with him for the remainder of his presidency".

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk wrote on X that Biden had made difficult decisions "thanks to which Poland, America and the world are safer, and democracy stronger." "I know you were driven by the same motivations when announcing your final decision. Probably the most difficult one," Tusk said.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro at a rally on Sunday said Biden made the "correct" decision and put his family and health first. He wished him "health and a long life." South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol's office said it does not wish to comment on domestic political situations in other countries, but added that the South Korean government "will continue to work closely with the US to further develop the South Korea-US global comprehensive strategic alliance". Biden's decision to nominate Harris, who is of both Indian and African origin, follows weeks of intense pressure from fellow Democrats after his disastrous presidential debate performance against his Republican rival and former US president Donald Trump last month. "Today I want to offer my full support and endorsement for Kamala to be the nominee of our party this year. Democrats - it's time to come together and beat Trump. Let's do this," Biden said in a post on X.

Parts of Gaza humanitarian zone to be evacuated

AP ■ DEIR AL-BALAH

The Israeli military ordered the evacuation Monday of part of a crowded area in the Gaza Strip it had designated a humanitarian zone, saying it is planning an operation against Hamas militants there. Thousands of Palestinians, many carrying backpacks and accompanied by children, walked down dusty roads under the scorching sun, navigating dilapidated cars with belongings tied on top. Many Palestinians have been uprooted multiple times in search of safety during Israeli's air and ground campaign. "We do not know where we are walking," said Kholoud Al Dadas, as she clutched her children. "This is our seventh or eighth time we have been displaced. While we were sleeping in our homes, they started shooting at us, bombing from everywhere." Moments later, she collapsed in exhaustion. The Israeli military said it is planning to begin an operation against Hamas militants who have embedded themselves in the area and used it to launch rockets toward Israel. The area



Israeli Police and ZAKA emergency service work at the scene of an attempted stabbing attack at the entrance to Netiv HaAsara, near the Gaza border in southern Israel on Monday. AP/PTI

includes the eastern part of the Muwasi humanitarian zone in the southern Gaza Strip. Earlier this month, Israel estimated at least 1.8 million Palestinians are now in the humanitarian zone it declared, covering about 14 kilometres (8.6 miles) along the Mediterranean. That's the bulk of Gaza's 2.3 million popula-

tion. Much of the area is blanketed with tent camps that lack sanitation and medical facilities and have limited access to aid, UN and humanitarian groups say. Families live amid mounds of trash and streams contaminated by sewage. Gaza's Health Ministry said the toll from Israel's nine-

month war against Hamas in Gaza has surpassed 39,000 Palestinians killed and 89,800 wounded. The ministry's count does not distinguish between combatants and civilians. The war began with an assault by Hamas militants on southern Israel on October 7 that killed 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took about 250 hostages. About 120 remain held, about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities. Delicate negotiations continued for a cease-fire and hostage release, with US and Israeli officials expressing hope that an agreement was closer than ever. A negotiating team will be sent to continue talks on Thursday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said. Egypt, Qatar and the United States are pushing Israel and Hamas toward a phased cease-fire deal that would stop the fighting and free the hostages. Netanyahu left Monday on a much-anticipated trip to the United States to meet with President Joe Biden, who on Sunday said he would not seek another term, and address

Congress. Netanyahu said that regardless of who becomes the next US president, "our enemies must know that Israel and the United States stand together tomorrow and always." He said he will thank Biden for more than 40 years of friendship, while pushing him for more support on certain issues. The Israeli military said it was continuing to operate in central and southern Gaza. At least 38 people were killed in the southern city of Khan Younis, according to hospital officials and a count of the bodies by an Associated Press journalist. One person was killed and three injured in a strike outside Al-Aqsa Hospital in the central town of Deir-Al-Balah, where many people have sheltered outside the facility. The Israeli military announced the deaths of two additional Israeli hostages, saying they believe Yagev Buchshtab, 35, and Alex Dancyg, 76, kidnapped on Oct. 7, were no longer alive, based on intelligence. Both were seen alive in Gaza by other hostages who had been released. Dancyg, a Holocaust educator, gave history lectures to hostages to pass

the time, according to the Hostage and Missing Families Forum.

Netanyahu has vowed to wipe out Hamas' military and governing capabilities and secure the return of the remaining hostages. Families of hostages and thousands of other Israelis have held weekly demonstrations to urge the prime minister to reach a cease-fire deal that would bring their loved ones home.

Also Monday, Israeli police said a Canadian citizen was killed after threatening Israeli security forces with a knife near the Gaza border. The Israeli military said the man drove to the entrance of an Israeli town close to the border, left his vehicle and approached security forces with a knife. The forces opened fire and killed the man. There were no other injuries. The attack took place at the entrance to the Israeli town of Netiv HaAsara, 300 metres (yards) north of the border. On Oct. 7, Netiv HaAsara was attacked and 20 residents were killed after gunmen passed over the concrete border wall using paragliders, according to Israeli military officials.

Israel's Netanyahu treads carefully in Washington post-Joe Biden exit

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu left for Washington on Monday, leaving behind a brutal war to make a politically precarious speech before the US Congress at a time of great uncertainty following Joe Biden's withdrawal from the presidential race. With efforts ongoing to bring about a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, rising concerns about the war spreading to Lebanon and Yemen, and the US in the midst of a dizzying election campaign, Netanyahu's speech has the potential to cause disarray on both sides of the ocean. The risks only increased with Biden's decision Sunday to drop out of the race for president, especially since the choice of a replacement Democratic nominee — and the potential next American leader — are still up in the air. Before stepping on the plane, Netanyahu said he would emphasise the theme of Israel's bipartisanship in his speech and said Israel would remain America's key ally in the Middle East "regardless who the American people choose as their next president". "In this time of war and uncertainty, it's important that Israel's enemies know that America and Israel stand together," he said, adding that he will meet Biden during his trip and thank him for his support for Israel. A person familiar with Biden's schedule confirmed Sunday that the president will host Netanyahu at the White House. The official, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly, said the exact timing of the meeting has not been established because Biden is recovering from COVID-19. Netanyahu is scheduled to address Congress on Wednesday. He is also expected to meet with Vice President Kamala Harris, who is seeking the Democratic Party's presidential nomination. Netanyahu will deliver his congressional address with an eye on several audiences: his ultra-nationalist governing partners, the key to his political survival; the Biden administration, which Netanyahu counts on for diplo-



matic and military support; and Donald Trump's Republican Party, which could offer Netanyahu a reset in relations if he is reelected in November. His words risk angering any one of those constituencies, which the Israeli leader cannot afford if he hopes to hold on to his tenuous grip on power. "There are a few land mines and pitfalls on this trip," Eytan Gilboa, an expert on US-Israel relations at Israel's Bar-Ilan University, said before Biden's withdrawal. "He is thought of as a political wizard who knows how to escape from traps. I am not sure he still knows how to do that." It is Netanyahu's fourth speech to Congress — more than any other world leader. During his address, his far-right governing partners will want to hear his resolve to continue the war and topple Hamas. The Biden administration will look for progress toward the latest US-backed cease-fire proposal and details on a postwar vision. Republicans hope Netanyahu besmirches Biden and bolsters the GOP's hopes for perception as Israel's stalwart supporter. The war, which was sparked by Hamas' Oct 7 attack on southern Israel, has tested Israel's ties with its top ally as never before. The Biden administration has stood staunchly beside Israel. But it has grown increasingly alarmed about the conduct of the Israeli military, the continued difficulties of getting humanitarian aid into Gaza, especially after the short-lived US military pier off Gaza coast, as well as Israel's lack of postwar plans and the harm to civilians in Gaza.

US-Russian journalist convicted in secret trial

Washington (AP): A Russian court has convicted Alsu Kurmasheva, a Russian-American journalist for the US government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, of spreading false information about the Russian army and sentenced her to 6½ years in prison after a secret trial, court records and officials said on Monday. The conviction in the city of Kazan came on Friday, the same day that a court in the Russian city of Yekaterinburg convicted Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich of espionage and sentenced him to 16 years in prison in a case that the US called politically motivated. Kurmasheva, an editor for RFE/RL, was convicted of "spreading false information" about the military, according to the website of the SC of Tatarstan.

My aim is to defeat Trump: Kamala

PTI ■ WASHINGTON



Kamala Harris has said she plans to "earn and win" the Democratic presidential nomination to defeat Donald Trump after President Joe Biden decided not to seek re-election, putting her on the path to become the first Black woman and first Asian American to lead a major political party's ticket. Vice President Harris, 59, said she was "honoured" to receive Biden's endorsement and voiced her appreciation for his extraordinary leadership as President of the United States and his decades of service to the country. "I am honoured to have the President's endorsement and my intention is to earn and win this nomination," she said in a statement on Sunday. The historic endorsement came after Biden, 81, announced Sunday that he is dropping out of the race following weeks of disarray within the Democratic Party. Biden's disastrous first

presidential debate with his Republican rival and former president Donald Trump called into question his ability to win a second term and govern for another four years. Despite Biden's backing, it remains unclear whether Harris will become the nominee, or what process the Democratic Party would take to select an alternative. Democratic National Committee chairman Jaime Harrison said in a statement that in the coming days, the party will "undertake a trans-

parent and orderly process to move forward as a united Democratic Party with a candidate who can defeat Donald Trump in November." Though Biden's endorsement almost seals her position as the presidential nominee of her party, Harris still needs to get elected by the party's delegates during the Democratic National Convention in Chicago from August 19-22. Biden has won 3,896 delegates as against 1,976 required to win the party's presidential nomination. In a move that would give her access to the campaign funds, the Biden-Harris campaign amended filings with the Federal Election Commission to rename its principal committee and declare Harris a candidate for president. Following Biden's decision, Harris, who has been serving as the US' first female, first Black and first South Asian vice president since 2021, immediately secured the endorsement of former president Bill Clinton, thus making it a bit easier for her to

win the delegate battle during the party convention. "On behalf of the American people, I thank Joe Biden for his extraordinary leadership as President of the United States and for his decades of service to our country," she said. Harris said over the past year, she has travelled across the country, talking to Americans about the clear choice in this momentous election. "And that is what I will continue to do in the days and weeks ahead. I will do everything in my power to unite the Democratic Party — and unite our nation — to defeat Donald Trump and his extreme Project 2025 agenda... We have 107 days until Election Day. Together, we will fight. And together, we will win," she said. Meanwhile, the "overwhelming majority" of state Democratic Party chairs have announced their support for Vice President Harris as their nominee for president, the Association of State Democratic Committees (ASDC) said in a statement.

Assailant kills 6, wounds 6 at care home in Croatia

Zagreb (AP): An armed assailant entered a care home for older people in central Croatia Monday and opened fire, killing six people and wounding six others, police said. Croatia's police chief, Nikola Milina, said five people died immediately, while one more person died in a hospital. The suspect fled the scene, but the police soon caught him in a cafe near the facility in the town of Daruvar, he said. The victims were five residents of the care home and one employee, Milina said. Police said they were informed of the attack on Monday morning. The suspect is "under police supervision," said a statement by the regional police office.

Top Chinese university fires professor after complaint of sexual harassment

Hong Kong (AP): A top Chinese university fired a professor on Monday, a day after a graduate student accused him of sexual harassment on social media in a rare public allegation and posted recordings as evidence, drawing widespread support. The woman, who identified herself as Wang Di, said she is studying in a doctoral program at Renmin University of China's School of Liberal Arts. She posted a 59-minute video on Sunday on the Weibo social media platform in which she said her supervisor, an ex-vice dean and former Communist Party representative at the school in Beijing, physically and verbally abused her. She also said that for more than two years after she rejected him, he assigned her many tasks, scold-

ed her and threatened that she would not graduate. She also posted audio clips which she said were evidence of the harassment. In one, a man could be heard trying to kiss a woman, who kept saying, "No, no, teacher." "At this moment, I can no longer endure it and have nowhere to retreat, so I am speaking out," she wrote. She demanded that the professor be punished and a new supervisor be appointed for her. She wore a mask in the video, but held up an identification card. Her post drew 2.2 million likes as of Monday evening, with many users leaving comments in support of the student. Renmin University said Monday it concluded that the complaints against the professor were true following an investigation. In addition to

sacking him, it also revoked his party membership and reported the incident to authorities in accordance with the law, it said in a statement on Weibo. It said the academic had "seriously betrayed the original mission of teaching and educating" and that his acts violated party discipline and school rules. The professor did not immediately respond to a request for comment. After the university announced its decision, the woman's post on Weibo disappeared. The Associated Press does not generally name people who say they are victims of sexual harassment unless they publicly identify themselves. In China, public accusations of sexual harassment have become rare in recent years following an uptick during a brief

#MeToo movement that was swiftly snuffed out by the government. The ruling Communist Party views powerful social movements as a potential threat to stability and its hold on power. In June, a Chinese journalist who promoted women's rights as part of the #MeToo movement was sentenced to five years in prison on charges of incitement to subvert state authority, according to her supporters. In one of the most high-profile cases, former Chinese tennis star Peng Shuai disappeared from public view after accusing former high-level official Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault in 2021. Her accusation was quickly scrubbed from the internet and discussion of it remains heavily censored.

UK to fast-track returns of illegal migrants to safe countries like India

PTI ■ LONDON

The asylum applications of migrants entering the UK illegally from countries on its designated safe states list, including India, will be fast-tracked to deport them back speedily under new Labour government proposals. UK Home Secretary Yvette Cooper has said she has begun the work to move staff from the previous Conservative-led government's now-abolished Rwanda scheme to a new Returns and Enforcement programme. In place of the policy of trying to fly out illegal migrants to the African country, the Home Office plans to increase the returns to the countries of origin, starting with an increase in raids on businesses employing illegal workers. "We are drawing up new plans for fast-track decisions and returns for safe countries," Cooper wrote in 'The Sun on Sunday'. "Most people in this country want to see a properly controlled and managed asylum

system, where Britain does its bit to help those fleeing conflict and persecution, but where those who have no right to be in the country are swiftly removed," she said. India was added to the UK's "Safe States" list last November, which would speed up the process of returning Indians who travel from the country illegally, as Home Office figures show asylum seekers from India have a very low acceptance rate. The number of Indians crossing the English Channel illegally via small boats into the UK surged briefly between September 2022 and March 2023 before falling to a "negligible proportion", according to the Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford. Vietnam and Albania are among the other countries on the safe list which will be targeted for speedier returns. "I was shocked to discover the Conservatives had 1,000 civil servants working on the Rwanda Partnership. Not any more. We've moved staff instead into

a new Returns and Enforcement programme to increase returns of those with no right to be here and to make sure rules are respected and enforced, starting with an increase in illegal working raids," said Cooper. "We've directed Immigration Enforcement to intensify their operations over the summer, with a focus on employers who are fuelling the trade of criminal gangs by exploiting and facilitating illegal working here in the UK — including in car washes and in the beauty sector," she said. It comes as the newly appointed minister announced the creation of a new Border Security Command in the days after Labour won a landslide victory in the July 4 general election. Under the plans, a core team in the Home Office is establishing the remit, governance and strategic direction of the new command. Early legislation is being prepared to introduce new counter-terror style powers and stronger measures to tackle organised immigration crime.

Internet down in B'desh despite calm

AP ■ DHAKA

Bangladesh remained without internet for a fifth day and the government declared a public holiday Monday, as authorities maintained tight control despite apparent calm following a court order that scaled back a controversial system for allocating government jobs that sparked violent protests.

This comes after a curfew with a shoot-on-sight order was installed days earlier and military personnel could be seen patrolling the capital and other areas. The South Asian country witnessed clashes between the police and mainly student protesters 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 violence has killed more than a hundred people, according to at least four local newspapers. Authorities have not so far shared official figures for deaths.

There was no immediate violence reported on Monday morning after the Supreme Court ordered, the day before, the veterans' quota to be cut to 5%. Thus, 93% of civil service jobs will be merit-based while the remaining 2% reserved for members of ethnic minorities as well as transgender and disabled people.

On Sunday night, some student protesters urged the govern-



Bangladeshi military forces soldiers put up barbed wires on a main street in Dhaka, Bangladesh, Monday, July 22 AP/PTI

ment to restore internet services. Hasnat Abdullah, a coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, told the Associated Press that they were withdrawing their calls for a complete shutdown, which they attempted to impose last week. "But we are issuing an ultimatum for 48 hours to stop the digital crackdown and restore internet connectivity," he said, adding that security officials deployed at various universities should be withdrawn, student dormitories reopened and steps taken so stu-

dents can return to their campuses safely. Abdullah also said they wanted the government to end the curfew and ensure the country was back to normal within two days. Students have also demanded some university officials to step down after failing to protect campuses. Sarjis Alam, another coordinator of the Anti-Discrimination Student Movement, said that they would continue with their protests if all their demands weren't met. "We cannot step back from

our movement like a coward," he added. Another key organiser of the student protests, Nahid Islam, told reporters that the internet shutdown had disrupted their ability to communicate and alleged that authorities were trying to create divisions among protesters. "I am mentally traumatised ...our unity is being destroyed," he said. The US Embassy in the capital Dhaka described Sunday the situation as "extremely volatile" and "unpredictable," adding

that guns, tear gas and other weapons have been used in the vicinity of the embassy. They said the Bangladeshi army had been deployed and urged Americans to be vigilant, avoid large crowds and reconsider travel plans. 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 the main opposition groups boycotted. Universities have been closed, the internet has been shut off and the government has ordered people to stay at home. Protesters had argued the quota system was discriminatory and benefited supporters of Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and wanted it replaced by a merit-based system. Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect regardless of political affiliation. The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protests, vowing to organize its own demonstrations as many of its supporters joined the student-led protests. 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.

Pak Army says political mafia spreading canard about counter-terror operation

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Army on Monday said that an "organised political mafia" was spreading misinformation about a planned new counter-terrorism operation, 'Azam-e-Istehkam', aimed to flush out militants and foster economic growth and stability. Army spokesperson Lt Gen Ahmad Sharif addressing a press conference in Rawalpindi talked about various pressing issues, including the launch of the operation. "A massive illegal, political mafia rose to sabotage the operation and the first move of that mafia was to make the operations controversial through false and fake arguments," he said. Referring to Pakistan's earlier major military operations, Operation Zarb-e-Azb and Operation Radd-ul-Fasaad, which resulted in large-scale displacements, a reporter inquired if similar displacements would occur during the current operation, Azam-e-Istehkam. "This is not a military operation but a comprehensive counter-terrorism initiative aimed at fostering economic growth and stability," he said. He referred to the previous military operations and said, "Our issue is that we make every important issue ... a joke because of our politics." The army spokesperson said the problem is that "we are sacrificing even very important issues on the altar of politics and Azam-e-Istehkam is one

such example of this". He also clarified that it was only for the purpose of "reinvigorating the already in-place National Action Plan (NAP)", which was launched in 2014 to eliminate militancy. He said efforts already underway would be "augmented" by law enforcement agencies empowered by effective legislation, as per the original announcement of the operation. The spokesperson said a "very strong lobby" did not want the objectives of the NAP to be fulfilled "because the stakes in (sabotaging) operation are very high and it's not based on any ideology but involves a lot of money". Pointing to the National Action Plan's 14 points, he said kinetic operations were "underway in a splendid manner" with "four to five operations underway every hour". Sharif said the NAP decided in 2014 to set up Counter-Terrorism Departments at the provincial levels and they would be responsible for leading operations against terrorism. He said it was also decided to register all the religious seminars but only 16,000 out of about 32,000 seminars have been registered so far. Sharif said that so far, 22,409 intelligence-based operations have been conducted against terrorists and their facilitators this year. He said 137 officers and soldiers died in these operations, while 398 terrorists were also killed, including 31 high-value targets. The spokesperson said that

"digital terrorism" is active against the army and its leadership on social media, adding that militants involved in attacks on law enforcement agencies and "digital terrorists" have one thing in common and that is both targeting the army and its leadership. "Digital terrorists are using fake news to undermine the relationship between the army, the leadership of the army, the army and the people." He said that "just as a terrorist tries to get his point across by holding a weapon, in the same way, a digital terrorist tries to get his point across by spreading anxiety through mobile phones, computers, lies, fake news and propaganda". The spokesperson said that only law and punishment can stop digital terrorists, clarifying that if digital terrorists are not stopped, they will get more space. "Those illegal elements who want to make this country a soft state, we cannot allow it," he added. Sharif said over 112 operations were being conducted daily by the military and law enforcement agencies against terrorism. To a question about the Bannu protest case, he said that the protesters became violent, raised anti-state slogans and looted an army supply depot. He accused the provincial government of failure to stop the protesters. The spokesperson also talked about fake news and propaganda which was targeting the armed forces and other institutions of the state.

SL Tamil parties sans ITAK to field common candidate for prez election

Colombo (PTI): A group of Tamil parties sans the main party, ITAK, on Monday signed an agreement to field a common candidate for the presidential election to be held later this year. Last week, the election commission said that the date for the much-awaited presidential election in the island nation will be announced by the end of this month. Earlier this month, the election commission has indicated that the election is likely to take place on a date between September 17 and October 16. The leaders of the Tamil Eelam Liberation Organisation (TELO), People's Liberation Organisation of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), Tamil Progressive Alliance (TPA), Tamil National People's Front (TNPf), and Eelam People's Revolutionary Liberation Front (EPRLF) along with leaders of a civil group, Tamil People's Congress Association (TPCA) signed the agreement in Jaffna, sources said.

However, the main Tamil party Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kachchi (ITAK), which heads the umbrella group Tamil National Alliance (TNA), was not a party to the agreement, they said. The Tamils from the north and east regions have aligned historically with the opposition candidate in presidential elections since 1982. Among the group which signed the pact for a common Tamil candidate is the former northern chief minister CV Wigneswaran's TPA. Wigneswaran, a former Supreme Court judge, was publicly endorsing incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe until Monday's signing of the agreement to field a common candidate. Wickremesinghe as the then-opposition challenger at both the 1999 and 2005 presidential elections had received TNA backing. In 2005, a Tamil vote boycott led by the LTTE saw Wickremesinghe narrowly lose to the then-candidate Mahinda Rajapaksa.

UAE sentences Bangladeshi nationals to prison over home govt protests

AP ■ DUBAI

A court in the United Arab Emirates sentenced dozens of Bangladeshi nationals to prison, including three for life imprisonment, over protests against their home government in the Gulf country, state media reported Monday. The Abu Dhabi Federal Court of Appeal on Sunday handed 10-year prison sentences to 53 Bangladeshi nationals and an 11-year term to another Bangladeshi national, in addition to the three life imprisonments, according to the state-owned Emirates News Agency, WAM. The court ordered the deportation of the Bangladeshis from the UAE following their prison terms. "The court heard a witness who confirmed that the defendants gathered and organised large-

scale marches in several streets of the UAE in protest against decisions made by the Bangladesh government," WAM reported. On Saturday, authorities in the United Arab Emirates ordered an investigation and an expedited trial of the arrested Bangladeshi nationals. The protests in the UAE followed weeks of demonstrations in Bangladesh by people upset about a quota system that reserved up to 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971. The country's top court on Sunday scaled back the controversial system, in a partial victory for the mostly student protesters. The UAE's attorney general's office on Saturday indicted the Bangladeshis on several

charges, including "gathering in a public place and protesting against their home government with the intent to incite unrest," obstructing law enforcement, causing harm to others and damaging property, according to WAM. Bangladeshi nationals make up the UAE's third-largest expatriate community. Many of them are low-paid labourers seeking to send money back home to their families. The Emirates' overall population of more than 9.2 million is only 10 per cent Emirati. Political parties and labour unions are banned in the UAE, a federation of seven sheikhdoms. Broad laws severely restrict freedom of speech and almost all major local media are either state-owned or state-affiliated outlets.

School blown up in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

Peshawar (PTI): Unidentified militants blew up a government girl's school in a tribal district in Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday, officials said. There was, however, no loss of life in the explosion. The militants blew up the Govt Girls Middle School in North Waziristan tribal district, bordering Afghanistan, on the intervening night of Sunday and Monday, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Education Minister Faisal Khan Tarakai said. Seven rooms of the school were razed to the ground in the blast. A total of 255 girls were enrolled in the school. Tarakai said the school would be made functional soon. "Such cowardly acts cannot deter our resolve of education promotion in tribal areas. Provision of education is the top priority of the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government," he said.

Police arrest PTI information secretary during raid

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan police on Monday arrested jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's information secretary Rauf Hasan in a raid at the party's central secretariat here, stepping up the crackdown on the Opposition party. Initially, it was reported that PTI chairman Gohar Ali Khan was also arrested but Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) spokesperson Zulfi Bokhari rejected the report about Khan's arrest while confirming that Hasan had been arrested. It was not clear what are the charges against Hasan who was also attacked by unknown

persons a few weeks ago that left bruises on his face. The party also condemned the move through its official X account and lambasted the Islamabad police. "It's absolutely shameful how Islamabad Police continues to completely mock and disregard every law in this country," the party said. "Law of the jungle is reigning over Pakistan!" PTI leader Khurram Sher Zaman claimed that police personnel were confiscating documents and equipment from the party's office. "We've been informed that they've locked staff in a room & waiting for [the] prison van to arrive & have taken comput-

ers & important documents," he wrote on X. Earlier, SSP Hassan Jahangir Wattoo led the raid as the police encircled the PTI headquarters in the federal capital. The raid comes just days after PTI's international media coordinator Ahmad Waqas Janjua was arrested on Friday. According to Bokhari, he was presented before the Anti-Terrorism Court in Islamabad, which handed him over to police on a seven-day remand. According to the charges, explosives were recovered from Janjua during his arrest and his links with banned organisations are to be investigated, police said in the court.

Rescue op underway after flooding, bridge collapse kill 25

AP ■ BEIJING

Rescuers on Monday were searching for dozens missing after heavy rains caused flash flooding and a bridge collapse in different parts of China, killing at least 25 people. Flash flooding tore through a village in southwestern Sichuan province in the middle of the night Saturday, and rescuers said 10 people died and they were searching for another 29 missing. Days of heavy rain swelled the river that runs through the village of Xinhua in Hanyuan county. The water swept away 40 houses on the riverbank, according to local media, while also breaking bridges and cutting off roads. In northwestern Shaanxi province, vehicles fell into a rushing river when part of a highway bridge collapsed late Friday, and state broadcaster CCTV reported at least 15

deaths confirmed as of Monday. A photo released by China's Xinhua news agency showed a section of the bridge snapped and folded at almost a 90-degree angle into the rushing brown water below. Rescuers said Saturday some 20 cars and 30 people were missing. The collapse raised more questions about the safety of China's road and bridge infrastructure, which was built rapidly in recent decades. A similar collapse in May in Guangdong province killed 36 people. Heavy rain and flooding pose a special risk to mountain roads and high way bridges because of erosion, debris flows and landslides. With climate change, the world is likely to face more extreme weather and climate events such as record heat and rainfall. This year, in just the first five days of May, 70 countries or territories broke heat records.

Philippine prez orders shutdown of Chinese-run online gambling outfits

AP ■ LA MANILA

President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. on Monday ordered an immediate ban on widespread and mostly Chinese-run online gaming operations in the Philippines accusing them of venturing into crimes, including financial scams, human trafficking, torture, kidnappings and murders. Marcos also said in his state-of-the-nation address that the Philippines would press efforts to strengthen its defensive capability by forging security alliances with friendly countries to counter threats to its territorial interests in the South China Sea, adding that his country would only settle disputes through diplomacy. He made the remarks on the territorial conflicts before legislators, top officials and diplomats at the House of Representatives after the worst confrontation between Chinese and Filipino forces in the disputed waters last month. Marcos' decision to ban the

Chinese-run online gambling outfits — estimated to number more than 400 across the Philippines and employing tens of thousands of Chinese and Southeast Asian nationals — came amid an ongoing government crackdown backed by Beijing. That led to the shutdown of several sprawling complexes with dozens of buildings, where authorities suspect thousands of Chinese, Vietnamese and other nationals mostly from Southeast Asia have been illegally recruited and forced to work in dismal conditions. Relatedly, Philippine senators have ordered the arrest of a town mayor in Tarlac province north of Manila who has failed to appear in public hearings where allegations against her were being investigated, including her alleged links to a large online gambling outfit near her townhall and suspicions that she hid her Chinese nationality fraudulently to be

able to run for a public office reserved only for Filipinos. The mayor, Alice Guo, has denied any wrongdoing but has been suspended from her post with her financial assets ordered frozen. Philippine senators say the massive online gambling industry has flourished largely due to corruption in regulatory agencies and payoffs to local officials. "Disguising as legitimate entities, their operations have ventured into illicit areas furthest from gaming such as financial scamming, money laundering, prostitution, human trafficking, kidnapping, brutal torture, even murder," Marcos said. "The grave abuse and disrespect to our system of laws must stop." Marcos ordered the government's gaming agency to wind down the operations of the so-called Philippine offshore gaming operators, or POGOs, by year-end, drawing loud applause from legislators and top officials.

On stage, Zhadan starts with one of his most beloved songs "Malvi" or "Mallow". The crowd sings along with him, word for word. "But what can you do with my hot blood," they chant as one mass chorus. "Who will come at us." 18-year old Viktoriia Khalis was excited to see his performance, she said. She had been to the Atlas music festival once before in 2021. The difference is stark, she said. "The main thing that has changed, unfortunately, now the festival is connected with donations," she said. But she also feels more connected to her homeland, somehow. "I feel this entire crowd is related to me. I feel unity."

Hundreds of migrants leave southern Mexico on foot for US border

AP ■ CIUDAD HIDALGO

Hundreds of migrants from around a dozen countries left from Mexico's southern border on foot Sunday, as they attempt to make it to the US border. Some of the members of the group said they hoped to make it to the US border before elections are held in November, because they fear that if Donald Trump wins, he will follow through on a promise to close the border to asylum-seekers. "We are running the risk that permits (to cross the border) might be blocked," said Miguel Salazar, a migrant from El Salvador. He feared that a new Trump administration might stop granting appointments to migrants through CBP One, an app used by asylum-seekers to enter the US legally — by getting appointments at US border posts, where they make their cases to officials. The app only works once migrants reach Mexico City, or states in northern Mexico. "Everyone wants to use that route" said Salazar, 37. The group left Sunday from the southern Mexican town of Ciudad Hidalgo, which is next to a river that marks Mexico's border with Guatemala. Some said they had been waiting in Ciudad Hidalgo for weeks for permits to travel to

towns further to the north. Migrants trying to pass through Mexico in recent years have organised large groups to try to reduce the risk of being attacked by gangs or stopped by Mexican immigration officials as they travel. But the caravans tend to break up in southern Mexico, as people get tired of walking for hundreds of miles (kilometres). Recently, Mexico has also made it more difficult for migrants to reach the US border on buses and trains. Travel permits are rarely awarded to migrants who enter the country without visas and thousands of migrants have been detained by immigration officers at checkpoints in the centre and north of Mexico and bused back to towns deep in the south of the country. Oswaldo Reyna, a 55-year-old Cuban migrant, crossed from Guatemala into Mexico 45 days ago and waited in Ciudad Hidalgo to join the new caravan announced on social media. He criticised Trump's recent comments about migrants and how they are trying to "invade" the United States. "We are not delinquents," he said. "We are hard-working people who have left our country to get ahead in life, because in our homeland we are suffering from many needs."

In Kyiv, music fans rub shoulders with generals, artists

AP ■ KYIV

This year, Ukraine's largest music festival struck a different chord. Gone were the international headliners, the massive performance halls and the hundreds of thousands of visitors. Instead, the country's most beloved local artists graced the stage this past weekend at the Atlas Festival. The stage was erected on a shopping mall parking lot, the only option that contained a shelter large enough to contain the 25,000 people that that organisers expected in the event of an air raid. Carefree youth rubbed shoulders with hardened military

commanders and famous singers who crooned songs imbued with national pride. Music was the main draw, yes, but so was shattering the illusion that the capital is invulnerable to the bloody battles playing out hundreds of miles away. "Such kind of festivals can't be separated from the life of the stage country. The country is at war. The core issues here should relate to the war," said Vsevolod Rozhemyako, a businessman and one of the founders of the 13th "Khartia" Brigade, now a part of Ukraine's National Guard and defending the frontline in Kharkiv. "People who are still young and who don't join (the fight)

should understand that they cannot live in a bubble," he said. And yet, a bubble is precisely how it feels to be in Kyiv, as the war approaches its third year. While Ukrainian soldiers are killed and wounded everyday along the snaking 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) frontline in the east, the capital is a contrast with its bars and clubs filled with patrons. Every so often, Kyiv comes face to face with the war. Last week, a barrage of Russian missiles destroyed a children's hospital and a private clinic, in one of the deadliest attacks since the full-scale invasion. Residents have grappled with power cuts caused by Moscow's targeted destruction of Ukrainian ener-

gy generation at the height of a summer heat wave. At every corner of the music festival - the first time it was held since Russia's full-scale invasion of the country in February 2022 - visitors were confronted with the inescapable reality that theirs is a country trapped in a bloody war of attrition. Festival organisers hoped to raise USD 2.2 million (2 million euros) to help soldiers purchase supplies on the front line. In the mall's basement parking lot, various military units, from Khartia to the 3rd Assault, offered interactive games to lure donations, and possible recruits. First-person shooter game offered visitors a chance

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Tender Notice Reference No. GNDU/Gen/54/2024
The Department of G.N.D.U. Amritsar invites online bids for the following:

Sr. No.	Item	Quantity
1	Supply of Toner / Drum for various printer and photo copier machine	92 Items

Closing date & time: 01/08/2024 at 5:00 PM
For details log onto: www.eproc.punjab.gov.in
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.

Assistant Registrar (General),
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar

NA/12/24283/2023/35881 Dated CHD - 7/22/2024

Economic Survey slams energy guzzling developed world

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

On the one hand, developing nations are being forcefully nudged to sign up for climate commitments that they are not ready for, on the other hand, the developed world is in a mad 'Scramble for Africa' kind of rush to usher in the latest and the most expansive energy guzzlers like Artificial Intelligence ecosystem, the Government's 'Economic Survey 2023-24 has said.

"Even as the data centres are ramping up energy demand, cloud storage facilities, crypto mining, and AI are all expected to increase this exponentially." The report also took exception to the developed world's fancy to such energy demand driven technologies while planning to impose carbon taxes on carbon-intensive imports by the developing countries like India.

This technological advancement, aimed at enhancing efficiency and



productivity, paradoxically contributes to higher emissions. "Despite ambitious pledges by leading technology firms to achieve Net Zero emissions by 2030, their pursuit of AI dominance has resulted in a 30 per cent rise in emissions by 2023," the report further cautioned.

This means that India not only has to deal with climate change and undertake energy transition but also confront the protectionism of developed countries, said the report. The European Union is on

course to implement its Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), and both the United Kingdom and the United States are in different stages of imposing their versions of it in due course. The EU argues that this mechanism creates a level playing field for domestically manufactured goods, which must adhere to stricter environmental standards, and help reduce emissions from imports.

However, other nations, particularly developing countries, worry that this would harm their economies and make it too expensive to trade with the bloc.

According to a report by the independent think tank Centre for Science and Environment (CSE), CBAM will impose an additional 25 per cent tax on carbon-intensive goods, such as iron, steel, cement, fertilisers, and aluminium, exported from India to the EU.

Based on data from the past three years, this tax burden would represent 0.05 per cent

of India's GDP. "It would be a comedy if it were not real and tragic. Even as developed nations prepare to impose a carbon tax at the border on imports coming into their countries laden with carbon, they are ramping up energy demand like never before, thanks to their obsession with letting AI guide, take over and dominate natural intelligence," the report said.

For instance, the report cited a broad estimate by the International Energy Agency which said that a single ChatGPT search consumes 10 times more energy than a similar query on Google.

According to a research report published in April, Goldman Sachs analysts wrote that the demand for power in the United States would experience growth not seen in a generation, thanks to AI, and that "transmission, one of the major bottlenecks for clean energy transition, and the addition of data centres and AI could exacerbate this".

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ended lower on Monday, dragged down by heavy selling pressure in Reliance Industries and Kotak Mahindra Bank ahead of the Budget.

Besides, a weak trend in global equity markets also hit investors sentiment, traders said.

Falling for the second day in a row, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 102.57 points or 0.13 per cent to settle at 80,502.08. During the session, it tanked 504 points or 0.62 per cent to 80,100.65.

The NSE Nifty dipped 21.65 points or 0.09 per cent to 24,509.25. During the day, it dropped 168.6 points or 0.68 per cent to 24,362.30.

Among the Sensex pack, Reliance Industries declined over 3 per cent after the company reported a 5 per cent drop in its June quarter net profit.

Kotak Mahindra Bank also fell more than 3 per cent after its June quarter earnings failed to cheer investors.



ITC, State Bank of India, HCL Technologies and IndusInd Bank were the other big laggards.

NTPC, UltraTech Cement, HDFC Bank and Mahindra & Mahindra were among the gainers.

HDFC Bank climbed over 2 per cent after the company's consolidated net profit grew 33.17 per cent to Rs 16,474.85 crore in the June 2024 quarter.

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

ended in the positive territory.

European markets were trading higher in the mid-session deals. US markets ended lower in overnight trade on Friday.

According to the Economic Survey, 2023-24 tabled in Parliament on Monday, capital markets are becoming more prominent in India's growth story, with an expanding share in capital formation and investment landscape on the back of technology,

innovation and digitisation. Further, Indian markets are resilient to global geopolitical and economic shocks, it added.

"Despite heightened geopolitical risks, rising interest rates and volatile commodity prices, Indian capital markets have been one of the best performing among emerging markets in FY24," the Economic Survey said.

Meanwhile, global oil benchmark Brent crude dipped 0.08 per cent to USD 82.53 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,506.12 crore on Friday, according to exchange data.

The BSE benchmark hit its new all-time high of 81,587.76 in the initial trade on Friday but failed to carry forward the winning momentum and tanked 738.81 points or 0.91 per cent to settle below the 81,000 mark at 80,604.65.

Nifty tumbled 269.95 points or 1.09 per cent and ended at 24,530.90 after hitting its fresh record peak of 24,854.80 during the opening bell on Friday.

Rupee rises three paise to close at 83.67 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range to settle 3 paise higher at 83.67 (provisional) against the American currency on Monday, as crude oil prices and the US dollar retreated from their elevated levels.

Forex traders said the Indian rupee recovered from all-time low levels and traded in a narrow range as mixed-to-weak domestic markets put downside pressure on the rupee. However, weak tone in the US dollar and a decline in crude oil prices cushioned the downside.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.66, and touched an intraday high of 83.65 and a low of 83.68 against the dollar during the trading session.

It finally settled at 83.67 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close.



On Friday, the rupee depreciated 7 paise to settle at its all-time low of 83.70 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the weak tone in the global markets and overall strength in the US dollar. Weak Asian currencies and a weak yuan may also support the dollar. However, weakness in crude oil prices and FII inflows may support the rupee at lower levels," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at

Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Any intervention by the RBI may also support the rupee. Investors may take cues from India's Union Budget. USD-INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 84.20, Choudhary added.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading lower by 0.17 per cent at 104.22.

Brent crude futures, the

global oil benchmark, were trading marginally lower by 0.29 per cent at USD 82.39 per barrel.

On the macroeconomic front, India's forex reserves jumped by USD 9.699 billion to an all-time high of USD 666.854 billion for the week ended July 12, the RBI said on Friday.

In the previous reporting week, the kitty had increased by USD 5.158 billion to USD 657.155 billion, surpassing the previous high of USD 655.817 billion for the week ended June 7.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 102.57 points or 0.13 per cent to settle at 80,502.08 points and Nifty dropped 21.65 points or 0.09 per cent to 24,509.25 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Friday as they purchased shares worth Rs 1,506.12 crore, according to exchange data.

CRR cut to help banks facing low deposit growth: SBI MD

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Lowering the cash deposit ratio or the proportion of deposits which banks are mandatorily required to park with the RBI will help the lenders facing low deposit growth, SBI Managing Director Ashwini Kumar Tewari said on Monday.

Conversations for such a cut are on, he told reporters here, clarifying that the country's largest lender does not need such a reduction as it is well placed on the liquidity front.

There has not been any formal request for a CRR cut made either, he added.

Speaking at an event organised by domestic rating agency Careedge, Tewari said, "We have to look at various avenues for helping tide over the challenge posed by lower deposit growth", and specifically mentioned a request to get bank deposits at par with capital market investments while referring

to CRR and SLR.

To a question on whether the bank has sought a CRR cut, he said, "We have not sought any formal dispensation, but it is a conversation we continue to have. I don't think there is any move to do this at the moment".

When asked if a CRR cut will help banks tide over the continuing wedge between the credit and deposit growth, he said, "Of course, it will help".

The economy will need resources to help fund the growth, he said, adding that 90 per cent of all economic activity is funded by the banks.

SBI's statutory liquidity ratio or investments in government bonds are 2-3 per cent higher and hence, it may not benefit as much. But there are banks running credit deposit ratios of up to 90 per cent for whom the CRR cut, which expands the lendable resources for a bank, will be of help.

Gold rises ₹100 on jewellers' buying



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose by Rs 100 to Rs 75,650 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday due to increased buying by jewellers and a firm trend in the overseas markets.

However, silver prices plunged by Rs 600 to Rs 91,000 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 91,600 per kg, as per the All India Sarafa Association.

Saturday, the precious metal rates had closed at Rs 75,550 per 10 grams.

Meanwhile, gold of 99.5 per cent purity also rose by Rs 100 to Rs 75,300 per 10 grams. It had ended at Rs 75,200 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Traders attributed the rise in gold prices to fresh demand by local jewellers and a firm trend in the international markets.

The white metal has declined Rs 3,400 per kg in the past four sessions since July 18 when it had fallen by Rs 400 to end at Rs 94,000 per kg.

Globally, Comex gold is trading higher at USD 2,451.70 per ounce, up by USD 4.90 per ounce from the previous close.

"After a sharp pullback from all-time highs last week, Comex gold edged higher on Monday as US election uncertainty weighed on US dollar and treasury yields," Kaynat Chainwala, AVP of Commodity Research at Kotak Securities, said.

President Joe Biden's decision to end his re-election campaign and endorse Vice President Kamala Harris prompted speculation on whether it would benefit or hinder chances of former President Donald Trump returning to the White House.

As a result, the bulls of the US dollar remained cautious and the commodity prices gained some traction.

Traders are now eagerly anticipating the release of several key economic indicators ahead of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) policy decision next week, Chainwala added.

However, silver was marginally down at USD 29.25 per ounce in New York.

According to commodity market experts, traders also worried about slowing Chinese economic growth, geopolitical risks from the Russia-Ukraine war and the ongoing conflicts in the Middle East will benefit the safe-haven asset.

Further, traders are awaiting the upcoming release of the US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price index data on Friday for more cues about the US Federal Reserve's monetary policy path, which will provide directions for the bullion prices in the near future, they said.

Sebi returns draft IPO documents of recruitment solution provider Crizac

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has returned the draft documents of student recruitment solution provider Crizac Ltd, which was looking to float Rs 1,000 crore Initial Public Offering (IPO), an update with the markets regulator showed on Monday.

The move might delay the Kolkata-based company's initial share-sale.

The proposed IPO was entirely an Offer For Sale (OFS) by promoters, Pinky Agarwal and Manish Agarwal, with no fresh issue component.

The OFS consists of the sale of equity shares worth Rs 841 crore by Pinky Agarwal and up to Rs 159 crore by Manish Agarwal, according to the offer document.

The company filed its Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP) with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) in April.

According to an update on Sebi's website on Monday, the markets regulator returned the company's offer document on July 15 without providing reasons for the same.

Crizac offers international student recruitment



solutions to global institutions of higher education in the United Kingdom, Canada, the Republic of Ireland, Australia and New Zealand.

It has established partnerships with leading universities in the UK and is a major player in student recruitment from India to the UK, holding a significant market share of about 13 per cent based on the number of Indian students pursuing higher education in the UK in 2023, the draft papers quoted a F&S report.

Over the last three years, Crizac facilitated enrolment applications from over 72 countries through its registered agents on its technology platform. It processed more

than 3.82 lakh student applications and collaborated with over 140 global universities.

Crizac's pro forma consolidated revenue from operations during the fiscal year 2023 jumped 79.5 per cent to Rs 472.97 crore from Rs 263.53 crore in the previous year. Besides, profit after tax grew 65.50 per cent to Rs 112.14 crore for the financial year 2023 from Rs 67.76 crore in the preceding fiscal.

Equirus Capital and Anand Rathi Advisors are the book-running lead managers to the issue.

Cut import duty on smartphone components in Budget, Govt told

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Economic think tank GTRI on Monday urged the Government to cut import duty on smartphone components in the Budget as it could lead to an increase in superficial assembly plants that rely heavily on imported parts.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Union Budget for 2024-25 tomorrow.

The Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) said the current schemes and tariff structure resulted in great success, and the current framework is also ensuring duty-free imports of components for exports.

"Do not cut import duty on smartphone components in this Budget. Removing tariffs could lead to an increase in superficial assembly plants that rely heavily on imported parts, contributing little to the local economy.

"Imported components and subassemblies account for up to 90 per cent of the bill of material value for an India-made phone," GTRI Founder Ajay Srivastava said.

Currently, import tariffs on the product is 20 per cent while duty on components range between 0 and 20 per cent. The Budget should maintain these tariffs for several compelling reasons, he said.

"Smartphone is the most celebrated success story pushed by PLI (production linked incentive) incentives and a clever tariff arbitrage between these phones and its components," he added.

India's production of this item has crossed USD 49 billion in FY24, and its exports grew from USD 10.96 billion in FY23 to USD 15.57 billion in FY24, a growth of 42 per cent.

Additionally, over 98 per cent of smartphones sold in India are made locally,



demonstrating the success of policies like the PLI scheme, which offers a 4-6 per cent cash incentive on annual incremental production. No need to change a policy giving great results, it said.

The GTRI added that Indian manufacturers can import necessary inputs or capital goods duty-free for manufacturing and exporting electronic items, facilitated through schemes

like Advance Authorisation, Export Promotion Capital Goods, Special Economic Zones (SEZs), and 100 per cent Export Oriented Units. Firms can also use the customs bond scheme for

duty-free imports without localisation requirements.

"Apple, for example, through its contract manufacturers Foxconn and Wistron, benefits from SEZs to manufacture and export

smartphones. In 2023, Apple's iPhone production in India exceeded Rs 1 lakh crore (about USD 13.5 billion), with Rs 65,000 crore worth of exports," the think-tank said.

Schemes like SEZs thus allow import of all inputs at zero duty, thus making Indian smartphone globally competitive, it added.

In FY24, electronics imports crossed USD 83.92 billion, with components growing from USD 25.13 billion in FY23 to USD 34.36 billion in FY24, a 36.8 per cent increase.

It added that the high reliance on imported parts in local manufacturing suggests that cutting import duties would eliminate incentives to establish deeper manufacturing operations in India, leading firms to assemble mobile phones from nearly complete imported kits and exit once incentives disappear.

"Maintaining current import tariffs is crucial for sustaining the growth and depth of India's smartphone manufacturing sector. Reducing these tariffs could encourage short-term assembly operations over long-term, valuable manufacturing, undermining the industry's success and future potential," it said.

Srivastava said these tariffs are not just protective measures but catalysts for fostering a robust, self-reliant smartphone manufacturing ecosystem in India.

This ecosystem can compete globally while driving local employment and technological advancement, he added.

"Preserving these tariffs is essential for continuing the remarkable growth trajectory and nurturing the deep manufacturing capabilities of India's smartphone sector," he said.

ATHLETES OF INDIAN HERITAGE LOOK TO SHINE AT PARIS GAMES

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India would not be limited to the Indian contingent in the upcoming Paris Olympics.

PTI takes a look at some Indian-origin athletes who will be representing their adopted countries at the Paris Games:

RAJEEV RAM (Tennis, USA): Perhaps the most well known athlete on the list. The 40-year-old was born in Denver, USA to parents who migrated from Bangalore.

Stepped in academics, Ram's father Raghav, who passed away in April 2019, due to pancreatic cancer, was a botanist while his mother Sushma worked as a scientific technician. But Ram chose to break tradition and pursue tennis.

"I am very proud to be of Indian heritage and represent the community in any way I can. In tennis, there are not many of us from the community. Any success that we can achieve as a closed group can inspire the next generation to excel," Rajeev had once said.

Playing for the USA, Rajeev has achieved considerable success. The tennis doubles specialist won five Grand Slams titles including four men's doubles and one mixed doubles.



(Left to right): Rajeev Ram (Tennis, USA); Prithika Pavade (Table Tennis, France); Kanak Jha (Table Tennis, USA); Shanti Pereira (Singapore, Athletics) and Amar Dhesi (Wrestling, Canada)

He teamed up with Venus Williams to clinch the mixed doubles 2016 Rio Olympics. He will compete in the men's doubles event.

PRITHIKA PAVADE (Table Tennis, France): Prithika's father was born and raised in Pudukcherry. In 2003, he migrated to Paris after getting married. A year later, Prithika was born in the French capital.

A TT player himself, Prithika's father introduced

her to table tennis when she was six. At only 16 years old, she participated in her first Olympic Games in Tokyo. The 19-year-old is studying chemistry and environmental science and will compete in women's singles, where she has been seeded 12th, the women's doubles and mixed doubles events.

KANAK JHA (Table Tennis, USA): Another Indian origin athlete competing at the Paris

Games will be USA table tennis player Kanak Jha. Jha's mother Karuna is from Mumbai while father Arun was raised in Kolkata and Prayagraj. Both are IT professionals.

Jha's fascination with table tennis started at the India Community Centre in Milpitas, California. He and his elder sister Prachi, also a TT player, immediately wanted to try out the sport. In no time he started beating

players twice his size. To keep him close to his roots, Jha's mom enrolled him in a Jainshala and Hindishala, centres where he could learn Hindi and about Jainism. The 24-year-old is a four-time U.S. National Champion (2016, 2017, 2018, 2019) and two-time Olympian (2016, 2020).

He was USA's youngest athlete at the 2016 Rio Olympics and also the first American to win a medal at the Youth

Olympics in Argentina in 2018. He will be competing in the men's singles event at Paris.

SHANTI PEREIRA (Singapore, Athletics): Known as Singapore's Sprint Queen, Veronica Shanti Pereira has her roots in Kerala. Her grandparents hailed from Vettukad near Thiruvananthapuram. But after Shanti's grandfather got a job in Singapore, the couple migrated from India.

Last year, Pereira ended Singapore's 49-year-long wait for a track and field medal at the Asian Games, after she clinched a silver in women's 100m.

Awarded the 'Sportswoman of the Year' at the Singapore Sports Awards, Pereira will be one of the Lion City's two flag-bearers at the Paris Olympics opening ceremony. She also has a children's book -- 'Go Shanti Go!' -- based on her life, written by her two

elder sisters. She will compete in the women's 100m race in Paris.

AMAR DHESI (Wrestling, Canada): Amarveer was born in Surrey, British Columbia, a small province on the western coast of Canada to Balbir Dhesi.

A former Greco Roman national champion, Amar's father belongs to village Sanghwal in district Jalandhar in Punjab. Balbir had trained at the NIS Patiala and even got a job with the Punjab Police but moved to Canada in search of greener pastures in 1979. Once there, he worked in a sawmill factory and started the Khalsa Wrestling Club for youth in Surrey in 1985. Amar would attend practice with his dad and older brother Paramveer since he was five and entered his first competition as an eight-year-old.

Amar, who loves to watch London Games bronze-medallist Yogeshwar Dutt's wrestling videos, made his Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020 where he finished 13th in the men's 125kg freestyle event. He won his first senior gold medal a year later at the Pan American Championships and then captured 125kg gold at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham. The 28-year-old will compete in the men's 125kg freestyle event.

The Kerala Story in athletics: Growth hits flat-line as powerhouse on wane

PTI ■ BENGALURU

It's not a dire situation yet, but the dwindling number of athletes from Kerala in India's Olympic contingents shows that the growth of athletics in the state, which was once a track-and-field powerhouse, has certainly hit a disheartening flat-line.

These numbers will summarise the situation before the deep dive: India's athletics squad for Paris Olympics has 29 members (18 men and 11 women). Kerala will be represented by four members -- Muhammed Anas, Muhammed Ajmal, Mijo Chacko Kurian (all men's 4x400m relay), and Abdulla Aboobacker (men's triple jump).

In the Tokyo Olympics, Kerala made its presence through Yahiya, Noah Nirmal Tom, Alex Antony, KT Irfan, MP Jabir and M Sreeshankar in the track and field events.

The state had better representation at the Rio Games in 2016 through Anas, Jinson Johnson, T Gopi, Jisna Mathew, Tintu Luka, OP Jaisha and M Renjith.

Along with the diminishing overall numbers, a close look will reveal another anomaly -- a female athlete from the state is not a part of the Indian squad for the second successive Olympics.

It's a downfall for the powerhouse that produced some iconic names such as

PT Usha, Shiny Wilson, Anju Bobby George, Rosa Kutty, Mercy Kuttan and Bobby Aloysius among others. "It's a matter of concern that the current Indian (Olympics-bound) contingent does not have too many names from Kerala, especially women. It reflects the way athletics, and sports in general, is being treated in the state by the officials," a veteran administrator told PTI.

"Whenever an athlete from the state does well in an international competition, our politicians and other officials will make grand announcements. But there are hardly any follow-ups," said the administrator.

A decorated veteran athlete echoed that sentiment.

"Yeah! It is true. Action never really follows those promises. We have the example of (VK) Vismaya in front of us. She is running pillar to post to get the promised government job."

Vismaya held off the then world champion Salwa Nasser to win the 4x400m gold at the Jakarta Asian Games in 2018. She was pledged a job by the state government then, but it's yet to materialise.

Vismaya could not be contacted for the latest update about her job status. However, Hima Das, MR Poovamma and Saritaben Gayakwad, the other 4x400 relay team members, received jobs and other cash awards as per the



promise made by the respective state governments.

"If a gold winner in the Asian Games has to wait over five years to get a promised job, then you can guess the fate of other lesser-known sportspersons."

"I won't blame them if they look to play for a different state. After all, a job and financial security matter to an athlete whose career is unpredictable," the athlete said.

However, Kerala State Sports Council (KSSC) president U Sharaf Ali said the delay was not deliberate.

"There have been a few delays, I admit. But we will keep our word at the earliest to honour the athletes who have brought laurels to the country

and the state," said Ali.

He said injuries to front-line state athletes like Ancy Sojan, a long jump silver medal winner in the Hangzhou Asian Games, was also a reason behind the marginal representation of state athletes in the Indian Olympic squad.

"Some of the top names like Ancy are coming back after an (ankle) injury and T Gopi also has a long-standing knee injury issue, and could not qualify for Paris."

"Sreeshankar (long-jump) underwent a surgery recently and he will also not be competing in the Olympics. It's unfortunate," said Ali.

On her return, Ancy clinched top spot in the Indian Grand Prix '3 in

Bengaluru with a leap of 6.52m but that was not enough for her to book a ticket to Paris.

But these are issues at the top, while the rot has percolated to the grassroots level too.

The stories of mismanagement and apathy are galore in a state that often prides itself for the abundance of talent at junior level.

"Talent is there. But talent alone will not bring success, as the athletes' needs must be met as they require proper financial back-up to buy equipment."

"Many of them are coming from poor families and we don't get as many sponsors in athletics as in cricket or football. We are largely dependent on government funds," said a well-established state-level coach.

Few months back, the state athletes had to spend money from their pocket to travel to Coimbatore for the junior national championship.

"Money is one thing. Even some of the traditional track and field stadiums like the Maharajas are in a dilapidated state. The authorities are just starting the renovation work on many of them."

"What they don't realise is that it deprives budding athletes valuable practice time. It's affecting the overall quality of our athletes and they will be forced to leave the state in search of better facilities," rued the coach.



LeBron James selected as Team USA male flagbearer for Paris Olympics opening ceremony

AP ■ NEW YORK

LeBron James wasn't totally sure what the opening ceremony was all about when he was picked for his first Olympics in 2004.

This time, he'll be one of the stars of the show.

James has been picked by his fellow U.S. Olympians to serve as the male flagbearer for the Americans in Friday night's opening ceremony for the Paris Games. He becomes the third basketball player -- and the first men's player -- to carry the U.S. flag at the start of an Olympics, joining Dawn Staley for the Athens Games in 2004 and Sue Bird of the Tokyo Games that happened in 2021.

The 39-year-old James got word of the honor Monday in London, a few hours before the U.S. Men's team was scheduled to play its final pre-Olympics exhibition game against World Cup champion Germany.

"There's obviously the utmost respect for who he is as a person and a player and how good he is," fellow U.S. Star and first-time Olympian Stephen Curry said earlier this month of James, someone he's faced off against four times in the NBA Finals and is now teaming up with for the first official time.

The female U.S. flagbearer will be revealed in the coming days. The International Olympic Committee decided in 2020 that national delegations would have two flagbearers -- one male, one female -- at the opening ceremony at an Olympics, a move to promote gender parity. The U.S. is expected to have nearly 600 athletes in the Paris Games, about 53% of them female.

James -- a global icon, a four-time NBA champion and the league's all-time leading scorer set to go into his

record-tying 22nd NBA season -- is set to play in the Olympics for the fourth time, after he was part of U.S. Teams that won bronze in 2004, gold at Beijing in 2008 and gold again in London in 2012. He walked in the opening ceremony at each of his three previous Olympics.

This time, he'll float. This will be an opening ceremony like none other in Olympic history: Thousands of athletes will be part of a flotilla sailing along the River Seine at sunset toward the Eiffel Tower. It's a 6-kilometer (3.7-mile) route, with about 320,000 guests set to watch from the river bank and about 1 billion more, Olympic officials estimate, watching on televisions around the world.

Not all Olympic athletes take part in the opening ceremony; many skip it for logistical reasons, such as having to compete the following day. James and the four-time defending gold medalist U.S. Men don't open Olympic play until Sunday, when they face Serbia at Lille, France.

James and the U.S. Olympians will be waiting longer than almost any other nation for their trip on the Seine. By IOC custom, Greece -- which will have NBA star Giannis Antetokounmpo as one of its two flagbearers -- will lead the procession, followed by the Refugee Olympic Team and then about 200 more national delegations. The U.S. is scheduled to go next-to-last in the procession, because Los Angeles will play host to the next Summer Games in 2028. France, as the host, will be the final nation in the opening ceremony procession. Its men's basketball team, featuring reigning NBA rookie of the year Victor Wembanyama, opens Olympic play on Saturday and isn't expected to be present for the opening ceremony.



I am not going to make mistakes of Tokyo in Paris: Manika Batra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Wiser after her maiden Olympics appearance in Tokyo, Indian table tennis star Manika Batra on Monday said she is focused on taking one match at a time in the upcoming Paris Games and a medal will not be in her mind in the initial rounds.

Preparing for the Paris Olympics along with her teammates, Batra said she has learned from her Tokyo Games experience.

"I have learned many things from the last Olympics, and I am not going to make those mistakes again. My mindset has changed since then, I am calmer and have more confidence in myself," said Batra during an interview with Ultimate Table Tennis (UTT).

"I have been working on my stamina and my agility, and my ultimate aim is to challenge for a medal. "But I will go slowly. I will try to be in that zone and give my best. I will go round by round

and not think of a medal too early. I will give my best for my country," Batra, who represents PBG Bengaluru Smashers in UTT, added.

Batra played an instrumental role in the women's team qualifying for the Paris Olympics, a first for Indian table tennis. She also reached the quarter-finals of the WTT Saudi Smash in May beating World No. 2 and former world champion Wang Manyu of China and World No. 14 Nina Mittelham of Germany.

"India qualified for the first time (for the Olympics), this is a huge achievement. I am really happy with how we are working together (at the camp). I think we have a shot at the medal and we should give our best," Batra said.

"The growth of women's table tennis in India is really inspiring. I see many of my fellow players playing really well. Everyone in the team is motivated and training very hard. Women's table tennis in India will only grow further," she said.

Veteran Indian goalkeeper Sreejesh to retire after Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Celebrated India hockey goalkeeper P R Sreejesh on Monday announced that he will bid adieu to the game after the Paris Olympics, ending a career that spanned 18 years during which he was a pivotal figure in some historic moments for the side.

The 36-year-old, a veteran of 328 International caps, including three Olympic Games, and multiple Commonwealth Games and World Cups, will be playing in his fourth Olympics in Paris beginning July 26.

"As I prepare for my last dance in Paris, I look back with immense pride and forward with hope," Sreejesh said in a Hockey India press release.

"This journey has been nothing short of extraordinary, and I am forever grateful for the love and support from my family, teammates, coaches, fans and Hockey India. Thank you for believing in me."

"My teammates have stood beside through the tough and the ardent times. We all want to give our absolute best here in Paris and certainly, the desire is to change the colour of our medal," he added, referring to perhaps the biggest moment of his career -- a bronze in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

After making his debut at the 2006 South Asian Games, Sreejesh was a part of various memorable wins for India, including a gold in the 2014 Asian Games and a bronze medal in the 2018 Asiad in Jakarta-Palembang.



He was also there in the Asian Champions Trophy-winning side in 2018, and the 2019 FIH Men's Series Finals champion team in Bhubaneswar.

The affable keeper had a crucial role in the silver medal-winning team of the 2022 Commonwealth Games as well.

Sreejesh was one of the main architects of India's historic bronze medal win at the Tokyo Olympics and captain Harmanpreet Singh said the team will look to secure another medal at the Paris Games this time to make Sreejesh's last tournament a memorable one.

"Paris 2024 will indeed be a special tournament. We have decided to dedicate our campaign to the legend PR Sreejesh," said Harmanpreet.

"He has been an inspiration for all of us and I still remember his mentorship in 2016 Junior World Cup when we lifted the title. It was the beginning of

many of our careers in International hockey and he has shaped each one of our careers in his own way.

"We want to 'Win it for Sreejesh' and we are all the more encouraged to stand on the podium once again."

The man from Kerala, who had also played a vital role in India's third-place finish at the Hockey Pro League 2021/22, was awarded the Major Dhyan Chand Khel Ratna Award in 2021.

He is only the second sportsman from India to win the award of World Games Athlete of the Year in 2021. Besides, he won consecutive FIH Goalkeeper of the Year awards in 2021 and 2022.

Last year, Sreejesh stood tall in India's gold medal-winning campaign at the Asian Games that sealed the team's berth for Paris Olympics. Congratulating Sreejesh on his stellar career, HI President Dilip Tirkey said: "Sreejesh was

