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THE RISE OF RADICAL
REBELS IN PAKISTAN

WORLD 8
HEZBOLLAH FIRES OVER 200
ROCKETS INTO ISRAEL

MONEY 10
SENSEX, NIFTY HIT NEW
LIFETIME HIGHS

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TO OLYMPICS AT 14
11 SPORTS**



CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS COME HOME

PNS ■ NEW DELHI/MUMBAI

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

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

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

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

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



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

cricket team's title triumph last Saturday.

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

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

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

Meanwhile, here at the iconic

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

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

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

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

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

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



India script cricket history in England

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

BJP vs Cong over Rahul's 'incorrect' remarks in LS



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the Centre on Thursday said any MP trying to mislead Parliament will not get away easily and the "rules will get them", a war of words between the ruling BJP and the Opposition Congress escalated. This comes after the Congress wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, alleging that Prime Minister Narendra Modi and BJP MP Anurag Thakur made "factually incorrect, inaccurate and misleading statements" in the Lok Sabha and sought appropriate action in the matter.

The BJP has already submitted a notice against Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi in the Lok Sabha over alleged inaccuracies in his speech. Congress Lok Sabha MP Manickam Tagore has written to Speaker Birla, requesting that provisions of direction 115(1) be invoked over the statements made by Modi and Thakur.

"Nobody can expect to escape. There is no special privilege for anyone just because he comes from a privileged family. If anybody wants to misuse the position in the House to mislead the House, he will not easily get away. Rule will get them," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said. Rijiju was in fact referring to a notice submitted in the Lok Sabha by BJP member Bansuri Swaraj urging the Speaker to take cognisance of her notice against certain inaccuracies in Rahul's speech on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address.

"When the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha kept on lying on many things, including facts and figures, a notice was put to the Speaker and we have requested the Speaker to take appropriate action. We are waiting for the action," Rijiju said in response to questions on the issue.

The Minister said rules apply equally to everyone as no

member is above the Chair in the House.

In his letter to Speaker, Tagore flagged that Prime Minister Modi in his reply to the Motion of Thanks to the President's address had said the Congress made a "false promise" of ₹8,500 per month to women, when the party's promise was conditional to victory and Government formation.

He also challenged Modi's claim that the Congress vote share has gone down in 16 States in which it had contested alone. "This is factually incorrect. The Congress vote share increased in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Karnataka, Telangana etc.," Tagore was quoted as saying in the letter.

He also termed as "grossly misleading" Modi's remarks that "no bullet proof jackets [were provided] for the Army during the Congress' time." "There was a shortage of jackets, not that jackets were not there. Even police had bullet proof jackets like in Mumbai attacks," Tagore said.

He also challenged the Prime Minister over the claim that the Congress didn't give fighter jets to the Army. "We had Jaguar, Mig 29, SU-30, Mirage 2000," the letter read. Tagore also pointed out alleged inaccuracies in Thakur's July 1 speech in the Lok Sabha.

The Congress MP said Thakur claimed that the Army was not given arms and fighter jets when the party ruled the country.

CBI files first FIR under new laws in Capital

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The CBI has registered its first FIR under newly enforced Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) against two Delhi Police officers for allegedly demanding ₹10 lakh bribe to help the release of a person lodged in Tihar Jail. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) has replaced the British era Indian Penal Code (IPC). The FIR registered on Wednesday evening booking Head Constables Ravindra Dhaka and Parveen Saini both posted in Narcotics Cell, Maurice Nagar, under BNA 61(2) related to alleged criminal conspiracy and provisions of bribery under the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Naidu bats for raise in Andhra's Central aid

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the full annual Budget of third tenure of BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu met Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the national Capital on Thursday and described their discussions on key development issues concerning the State as "constructive".

Naidu's assertion has come a week after another significant ally of the NDA, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar-led JD(U) had pressed for special package and grants for Bihar during the meeting of party's national executive.

Sources said during the



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu meets Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Thursday PTI

meeting at the PMO, Naidu advocated for increased assistance to Andhra Pradesh in lieu of special category status. The Chief of Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which is

an important ally in the BJP-led NDA Government, presented several crucial proposals for the State's development and sought the Union Government support, sources said.

Following the meeting, he expressed confidence in Andhra Pradesh's potential to "re-emerge as a powerhouse among States" under Modi's leadership. "Today, I had a constructive meeting with the Prime Minister to address important matters concerning the welfare and development of Andhra Pradesh. I am confident that under his leadership, our State will re-emerge as a powerhouse among States," Naidu took to social media to share the details.

Hathras stampede site reeks of death, destruction

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ HATHRAS

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

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



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

dead back to life.

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

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

Victims rue medical neglect

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ HATHRAS

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

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

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

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

Jaishankar for isolating countries harbouring terrorists

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/ASTANA

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



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

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

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

Hemant Soren back in saddle

PNS ■ RANCHI/NEW DELHI

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

He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by



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

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

Pushkar Singh Dhama completes three years in office as CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama completed three years at the helm in Uttarakhand on Thursday. Earlier, in a surprising turn of events, Teerath Singh Rawat resigned on July 1, 2021 in less than four months of assuming charge as CM from Trivendra Singh Rawat and young Dhama was anointed on the position of CM of the State by the BJP leadership. He assumed office on June 4, 2021 and was reappointed on the coveted post on March 22, 2022 after the BJP came back to power in the State. Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaffirmed faith in Dhama even though he lost from his traditional Khatima assembly constituency.

In the last three years, CM Dhama has taken a series of important decisions and has cemented his position in the State BJP which has many senior leaders and as many as five former CMs. In his first tenure as the CM of the State, Dhama took many decisions in the interest of youth and women. In the assembly elections of 2022, the BJP

entered into fray in the leadership of the young CM Dhama. In the elections, the BJP registered victory in 47 out of 70 seats and came back to power breaking the myth that the ruling party did not win in the assembly elections. With the support of PM Modi and central leadership of BJP, Dhama emerged more assertive in his second tenure. He created history by preparing the draft of the Uniform Civil Code (UCC) and getting it cleared from the State assembly. The bill on UCC of Uttarakhand will act as template for similar bills in other States. In the wake of a series of recruitment scams, Dhama acted tough by bringing a stringent anti-copying act in the State which has helped in making the recruitment examination transparent. The Dhama government was also successful in making stringent provisions against conversions in the



anti conversion law. His government also enacted a strict anti-riot bill in which there is a provision to recover the damage caused to public and civil property in riots from the rioters. The Women of Uttarakhand were given 30 per cent reservation in government jobs by the Dhama government.

The completion of three years of Dhama as CM of the State kept trending on social media on Thursday. #DhakadDhamaKe3Saal was the second most trending thing on X (formerly Twitter) on Thursday after the #IndianCricketTeam.

Will continue to work for all round development of State: Dhama

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

In his message to people on the occasion of completion of three years in office, chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama said that the State government has worked with dedication for overall development and welfare of the people of the State. The CM said that he will continue to work for all round and all inclusive development of the State.

He said that in the last three years action against appeasement, land jihad and forced conversion was taken. Dhama said that the State has moved forward to keeping the original identity of Uttarakhand intact. He added that by taking action against corruption, copying mafia and rioters the State government has tried to safeguard the future of the State.

Dhama damaged U'khand & Uttarakhandiyat: Cong

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chief spokesperson of Uttarakhand Congress Garima Dasauni has said that the three years under chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama have damaged both Uttarakhand and Uttarakhandiyat. She said that the State government lacks a clear view on the issues of land laws and Mool Niwas and the summer capital Gairsain has been forgotten completely. Dasauni said that the Dhama government has hit the communal harmony in the State in the name of conversion, land jihad and Uniform Civil Code (UCC). Terming Dhama as a poor administrator, the Congress leader said that the CM has failed to constitute Lokayukta and the State got defamed in the country due to a series of recruitment scams. She said that the government is terming Global Investors summit as one of its achievements but it should inform

about the money spent in the programme and the investment the State has got.

Dasauni said that crime against women is increasing and the rapists, criminals and the corrupt are getting protection. She said that the mining, forest and liquor mafia are ruling the roost in the State.

Dasauni said that the CM Dhama is following the strategy of going solo and there is a clear lack of coordination between the CM and the members of his cabinet. She said that the parents of Ankita Bhandari are yet to get justice, the recruitment scams are going on, the farmers have not received the MCP and the alleged theft of 200 kilograms gold in Kedarnath was not investigated. Dasauni added that CM Dhama has failed on all fronts.

Dhama's three years as CM incomparable, says BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Terming Pushkar Singh Dhama's three years as chief minister so far as incomparable, the Bharatiya Janata Party has congratulated him for "historic decisions". The BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt said that work is underway at a swift pace under Dhama to develop Uttarakhand while also maintaining its original form.



Addressing the media here at the BJP State office on Thursday, Bhatt said that during his three years in office so far Dhama took various decisions to develop the State while maintaining its form as Devbhumi, which have become an example for other States. "Uttarakhand became the first State in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code. Other States are now attempting to implement this law. A strict law was also enforced in Uttarakhand to check forced religious conversions. Thousands of acres of land were freed from illegally built religious constructions to dismantle attempts at land jihad. A strict law was also enacted against some mischievous elements which used to damage government property under the pretext of agitations. As a result of this law, the guilty will be made to compensate for the damage they cause to public property. The BJP State government has taken various steps in public interest ranging from 30 per cent reservation for women in State government jobs and provision of 30 per cent or upto Rs one lakh subsidy to women for self-employment to interest-free loan of upto Rs five lakh to women self help groups. About 80,000 women have benefited so far under the Lakhpati Didi Yojana which aims to benefit 1.25 lakh women by 2025. Similarly, ambitious schemes are being made to benefit youths, farmers and other sections of society. These schemes will boost development and will play an important role in making Uttarakhand prosperous," the BJP State chief said.

Bhatt further said that the State government had enacted the strictest anti-copying law in the nation in addition to taking other proactive measures with special focus on home stays, the production of coarse grains, new sports policy and other aspects. He said that the State government had also laid spe-

cial focus on providing employment in various government departments. Advertisements for recruitment to 19,000 posts in government departments are to be released in the near future. He further claimed that the Dhama government has maintained a zero-tolerance policy on corruption with 63 persons having been acted upon for corruption.

Case registered against suspended police officer in Pantnagar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After the protest of Congress leader and Kichha MLA Tilak Raj Behar and locals, a case was registered against the suspended station house officer of Pantnagar police station Rajendra Singh Dangi late on Wednesday. Dangi was suspended a week ago after an audio clip of his conversation with a 20-year-old woman went viral in which he was allegedly making sexual advances towards her while pressurising her to meet him alone. According to officials, there was a dispute between two families in the Pantnagar police station area. The police sent a man and his daughter to jail in the case. Subsequently, the second daughter of the man reportedly approached the police multiple times seeking action in the case. During her interactions, she came in contact with the SHO who reportedly started making advances towards her instead of addressing her complaints. He engaged in obscene conversations with the young woman, according to the claims. The woman then recorded the conversation with the SHO and sent it with a complaint to the Kichha MLA. The senior superintendent of police of Udham Singh Nagar Manjunath TC suspended the officer after director general of police Abhinav Kumar's order. However, no case was registered against the accused officer in the matter. The MLA and some locals staged a protest in heavy rain in the SSP office premises on Wednesday morning. The SSP appealed to Behar and others to stop the protest while assuring that appropriate action will be taken in the matter. A case was finally registered against Dangi late on Wednesday. The DGP also recently issued an order to all districts in-charges to take strict action against those police officers and personnel who are found to be behaving inappropriately and indecently with females.

Rawat orders action on illegal pathology centres in State

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat has directed the Chief Medical Officers (CMOs) to take action against illegal pathology centres and laboratories operational in the State. The minister has asked the Health department to start a checking drive of the pathology centres and blood collection centres.

He said that the verification and checking of private pathology labs will be done in the State to ensure that they do not play with the lives of the people.

The minister said that he has received many complaints against the private

pathology labs in the State and the facts produced by the complainants are very disturbing. He said that large numbers of complaints about illegal pathology labs are from Dehradun, Udham Singh Nagar, Haridwar and Pauri districts. These labs do not have doctors and employees as per the Clinical Establishment Act. The minister added that many labs are operational in the State which are not registered under the Clinical Establishment Act. He said that illegal pathology labs will be identified and strict action will be taken against them.

UPCL issues guidelines to all regional units for monsoon measures

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Following the directions of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama, the Uttarakhand Power Corporation Limited (UPCL) has issued guidelines to all regional units regarding measures for the monsoon season. Stating this, UPCL managing director Anil Kumar informed that he has instructed officials of all regional units to conduct patrols, inspections, and earthing of 33 kV, 11 kV and LT lines to prevent potential electrical accidents resulting from leaks during the rainy season. He emphasised the importance of completing necessary tasks such as repairs before peak of the monsoon to prevent any loss of life due to electrical accidents. Additionally, Kumar highlighted that the guidelines include

the prompt arrangement of essential storage of items like poles, cables, transformers, conductors and decentralised materials at the nearest sub stations or storage centres, especially in highly sensitive areas, to ensure uninterrupted power supply in the event of a potential disaster.

He further added that precautionary measures must be taken in light of the monsoon season. All officers and employees are required to remain present at their designated headquarters unless faced with unavoidable circumstances. This is essential to ensure prompt restoration of power supply in case of emergencies. Apart from this, it is imperative that all personnel prioritise adher-

ence to safety protocols to prevent electrical accidents resulting from waterlogging in various areas due to heavy rainfall, he added.

"All officers must maintain continuous communication with chief engineers regarding power supply status using the designated WhatsApp group. Further, a control room has been established at the headquarters to facilitate rapid information exchange concerning power outages during the monsoon season. The control room in-charge will liaise with regional officials to acquire and relay information to the State disaster centre and managing director of UPCL," Kumar said.

Top legal minds converge at UPES conference

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

UPES recently hosted a conference to discuss the future of the legal industry driven by technological advancements and evolving opportunities for lawyers in today's high-tech world. The conference witnessed participation of leading experts, practitioners, educators and students to explore the impact of technology on the legal profession and how future lawyers can navigate this

transformative era. Themed 'Adapt or Perish,' the event was organised in a world café format to encourage collaborative dialogue around important topics. The discussions covered six major

themes- globalising legal education for a dynamic world, fostering a collaborative ecosystem for innovation in legal education, reconciling the gap between the legal industry and academia in the digital era, addressing ethical issues of using AI in legal education, next-generation lawyers adapting to technology and reimagining legal education for the digital age. Addressing the gathering,



Mombay Bar Association president Nitin Thakker said, "Today's young legal professionals not only use technology but breathe it. Embracing new-age legal tech solutions demands a significant shift in

mindset. They must view technology not merely as a tool but as an integral part of their education and practice. The advancement of technology presents an opportunity for lawyers to enhance efficiency, reduce costs and focus on more strategic endeavours. The future of legal education hinges on our ability to adapt to technology and the readiness of law schools to be dynamic with their curricula."

UPES School of Law dean Abhishek Sinha stated, "In the rapidly evolving landscape of technology, it's imperative for all of us, especially future lawyers, to integrate tools like AI into our workflows. While legal education remains heavily theoretical, the aspiration is to shift towards a more practical approach. Despite the buzz around AI, only 22 per cent of organisations globally have implemented it in their workflows, leaving a vast potential untapped. The legal sector must embrace these innovations to revolutionise our field within the coming years."

Take precautions to prevent fungal infection in monsoon: Experts

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Doctors in the city emphasised that people should take essential precautions during the monsoon season to prevent fungal infections. With the onset of the monsoon season, there has been a surge in cases of fungal and bacterial infections among the people. Maintaining proper hygiene by ensuring that the body remains dry and clean is crucial in preventing fungal infections. Self-medication should be avoided as it can exacerbate skin allergies, dermatologists warned. The head of the dermatology department at Government Doon Medical College (GDMC) hospital, Dr Shruti Barnwal said that the onset of the monsoon season has led to a spike in skin allergies among people. "I have observed ailments, including fungal infections, acne problems and chlorine allergies caused by water in swimming pools, becoming more prevalent now. Some patients have exacerbated their allergies by opting for medication with the help of local chemists rather than consulting doctors. This is a bad trend which should be avoided. During the monsoon, fungal and bacterial infections are common enough due to factors such as sweat-

ing, prolonged moisture and dampness leading to symptoms like reddish spots and itching. I advise people to take preventive measures like wearing loose, light-coloured clothing, drying the body with a towel upon returning home from the rain, taking a bath and cleansing the body with medicated soap to ward off fungal infections," she said. Further, a skin specialist based in Dehradun Dr Anil Arya said that during the monsoon season, increased moisture in the surroundings can lead to various skin allergies, particularly fungal infections and small boils. "I am now noting a rise in cases of fungal infection, especially among children, as the rainy season has commenced. Those with diabetes are more susceptible to fungal infections due to their weakened immunity. So, the diabetic patients must take extra precautions such as avoiding getting drenched in the rain, refraining from wearing tight and wet clothes and seeking medical advice from a doctor at the earliest instead of indulging in self-medication involving the local chemists," he added.

Culture department declares result of folk artists' audition

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Culture department recently declared the results of the auditions that were held in March to select folk artists across the State. According to officials, the auditions were organised from March 12 to 14, with approximately 250 individual folk artists and 20 groups participating. However, the announcement of the results was delayed due to the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The department has now declared the results, with 13 individual folk singers selected in the A-grade category, 82 in the B-grade category and nine out of 20 folk artist groups selected. Selected candidates and groups have been sent their selection letters by the department. Commenting about the selected folk artists salary, the officials have informed that the selected A-grade folk artists receive Rs 7,000 per programme, while B-grade folk artists are given Rs 4,000 per programme. Further, the group leader of the folk artists receives Rs 1,000 per programme, whereas the other artists in the group receive Rs 800 per programme. Apart from this, travel expenses will also be given by the department to the individual folk artists as well as the groups. It will be recalled that the audition was organised in the month of March. During the auditions, the selection of folk artists is carried out by an independent committee comprising one official from Akashwani (AIR) and two lecturers with extensive knowledge of folk culture. Earlier, department director Beena Bhatt informed that these auditions aim to identify talented folk artists from across the state and offer them a platform to showcase their abilities. The Culture department conducts auditions every four to five months to promote new talent and represent the state's rich culture. Additionally, in the year 2023, the department organised an audition wherein 16 folk singers were selected.

NORTHERN RAILWAY
E-AUCTION NOTICE

The bids are invited from the registered entities on IREPS by Sr.DCM./Chg./MB (ACO) through e-auction for allotment of Pay and Use Toilet, commercial advertising contracts and Train Side Vending contract (for selling misc items in train) in Moradabad Division on 19.07.2024 & 22.07.2024. The catalogues have already been published on IREPS website www.ireps.gov.in.

Open tender has been invited on 26.07.2024 for allotment of publicity contract for Dual display non-integrated system with QR code device and LED TV banner at ticketing counters of Haridwar, Dehradun, Shahjahanpur, Moradabad, Haridoi, Roorkee & Bareilly railway stations for a period of five years. Complete details of e-auction and open tender are available at website. www.ireps.gov.in.

2023/2024
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I, Vimla Devi M/V No. 4200123P Rank HAV Name Sandeep Kumar Singh R/o Kotkhas, Gonda Uttar Pradesh-271313. I have changed my name from Vimla Devi to Vimla Singh. My DOB is 01.01.1955. I should be known as Vimla Singh for future all purposes.

मेरे पति के सैन्य अभिलेखों में, मेरा गलत नाम नीलम देवी के रूप में दर्ज है, सही नाम नीलम आचार्य नं. 210583671091 पत्नी आर्मी नं. 3206995X नायक दिलावर, गांव-फरितिया भीमा, पोस्ट-लोहारू, तह-लोहारू, जिला-भिवानी, हरियाणा-127201 है।

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE is hereby given by Sh. Rajbir Sharma S/o Sh. Gopi Ram Sharma to public at large that Original Free- hold Deed dated 31.10.2012, document no. 9144, executed by Mussokie Dehradun Vikas Pradhikaran for free hold of property bearing property no. 155, First floor, M.I.G. A, measuring 65 sq.mtrs., having covered area 34 sq.mtrs., M.D.D.A. Colony, Kedarapuram, Distt. Dehradun in favour of Smt. Anju Sharma W/o Sh. Rajveer Sharma, which is duly registered in the office of the Sub- Registrar, Dehradun in Book No. 01, Vol. 4485, pages no. 351 to 362, as document no. 9144, on 08.11.2012. That the said free hold deed is lost. That if any person finds this free- hold deed kindly inform within 7 days from the publication of this notice and intimate to the contact numbers & address mentioned herein below". (SHAMMI TANDON, ADVOCATE) Contact: 9897006975

PUBLIC NOTICE

I hereby informed the general public that Sh. Subhash Chander Mangain S/o Late Om Prakash Mangain is absolute owner of the Property i.e. as per sale deed no. 9408 on 04.10.2006, Situated at Mauza Nathhanpur, Pargana Parwadon, Tehsil & District Dehradun, U.K. .

He has lost the following original documents in respect of said property:-

1- Original sale deed executed by Sh. Subhash Chander Mangain S/o Late Om Prakash Mangain executed a sale deed in favour of Sh. Satendra Singh Bhandari S/o Late S.S. Bhandari, which is duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar, Dehradun in Book No. 01, Volume 1337, Page 1906, ADF Book No. 01, Volume 1717, Pages 703 to 712 at Serial No. 9408 on 04.10.2006.

A Police report/information has also been registered in this respect on dated 29-06-2024 at Thana Dalanwala, Dehradun. If anybody found the said lost documents then he may contact to undersigned and anybody having claim or claiming any prior rights or interest in any manner in this property or has raised loan by depositing the aforesaid documents to any person/bank/ corporation/ financial institution may approach the undersigned and may submit objections within 7 days from the date of this public notice. After the expiry of the period of this notice, no claim shall be entertained and such claim shall be deemed to be false, fake, frivolous, fraudulent and baseless claim and shall have no value in the eyes of law. Dated 04.07.2024

Parvender Kumar Advocate
R/o-Chamber No. 58, 2nd block
Court Compound, Dehradun
Contact No. 9758527116

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2024 winners' average vote share down by two per cent

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Modi to visit Russia, Austria next week: MEA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

PM pays tribute to Vivekananda on his death anniversary



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Armed forces should be technology ready, says CDS General Chauhan

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

India, UK to deepen cooperation between cyber agencies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

NEET candidates move SC to restrain NTA from cancelling exam

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

India, Australia to review bilateral defence ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Karnataka CM rejects BJP demand for CBI probe into MUDA scam

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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

The BJP has alleged that alternative sites were also allotted to the Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been acquired by the MUDA, and sought his resignation.

The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of over three acres of her land, which the authority had acquired for developing a residential layout.

The controversial scheme envisages allotting 50 per cent



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

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

question on BJP demanding for a CBI probe.

Urban Development Minister B S Suresha (Byrathi Suresha) has ordered a probe by a four-member committee. Siddaramaiah on Wednesday said he wouldn't resign. "What role do I have in the case?" he had asked. Home Minister G Parameshwara said the alleged irregularities in the allotment of residential sites by MUDA are being probed, and noted that the Chief Minister has already given clarification. On BJP demanding CBI probe, he said, "if everything is given to CBI, then there is nothing to do here. They (BJP) are asking for a CBI probe for everything...." To a question on the BJP planning to raise the MUDA irregularities issue in the coming Legislature session, Parameshwara said: "whatever issues they raise the government will respond to them effectively, without any hesitation."

Yogi reviews progress of various developmental projects in UP

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewed the progress of various projects at a meeting with the Urban Development Department on Thursday. Emphasising the rehabilitation of slums, he directed officials to identify one slum in each municipal corporation and prepare a plan for the development of a multi-storey residential complex with basic facilities like schools, markets, parks, etc nearby. The market developed in these complexes should be allotted to the families living in the slums, the chief minister said. According to an official statement, he added that the responsibility for managing the parks in these areas should also be given to them. This will lead to the rehabilitation of slums in a phased manner across the state, significantly improving the living standards of the



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

Develop parking space rules for better facilities in the future," he said. Adityanath directed officials to take immediate action against illegal taxi stands and asked them to encourage the use of electric buses in urban transport. He also directed officials to ensure the removal of encroachment on drains, which is the primary cause of waterlogging. On improperly placed advertising hoardings in urban areas, he said they not only spoil the city's beauty but also become a cause of

accidents every day. It should be ensured that no hoardings are placed on top of any building in any urban area. LED displays should be installed in place of the currently prevalent hoardings. This technology-based system will be convenient for advertising agencies, advertisers, local administration and the public. No type of advertising hoarding should be allowed anywhere except in designated areas," he said. He also emphasised that there is a need for cadre restructuring in urban bodies. For the smooth running of the system in all Municipal Corporations, Municipalities and Nagar Panchayats, the availability of adequate manpower is essential, he said. Efforts are underway to upgrade 17 cities in the state to Smart Cities. Each project must be completed on time and meet quality standards, ensuring physical verification of project quality as well, Adityanath added.

Heavy rain lashes several parts of HP, 115 roads closed



PTI ■ SHIMLA/MANDI

Heavy rains lashed several parts of Himachal Pradesh, leading to the closure of 115 roads for vehicular traffic. The Shimla meteorological office Thursday issued an orange alert, warning of heavy to very heavy rains accompanied by thunderstorm and lightning at isolated places till Friday. As many as 115 roads including 107 in Mandi, four in Chamba, three in Solan and one in Kangra district are closed for vehicular traffic following rains and 212 transformers are disrupted in the state as per the state emergency operation centre. Meanwhile, cracks have developed at a stretch between Mandi to Pandoh of the Chandigarh-Manali four-lane road and it has started sinking, forcing officials to allow only one-way traffic since Wednesday, officials said. Locals say a retaining wall was constructed by spending lakhs of rupees but it has started sinking and has gone down by about two feet and questions are being raised on the quality of construction. The tarring work is going at the spot at war

footing, said Project manager Raj Shekar. The MeT which also issued yellow warning of heavy rains on Saturday and Sunday (July 6 and 7) cautioned of damage to plantation, horticulture and standing crops, partial damage to vulnerable structures, minor damage to kutcha houses and huts due to strong winds and rain, disruption in traffic and waterlogging in low-lying areas. Several trees were uprooted in state capital Shimla which has received 84 mm rain since Wednesday evening and debris from drains was littered on the roads. Widespread rain occurred in the state. Sundernagar was the wettest with 111 mm of rain followed by Palampur 109.4 mm, Shimla 84 mm, Gohar 80 mm, Solan 79.8 mm, Mashobra 78.5 mm, Jogindernagar 75 mm, Bajinath 70 mm, Mandi 55.2 mm, Narkanda 48 mm and Kangra 44.2 mm. Narkanda in Shimla district was coldest at night recording a minimum temperature of 13.4 degree Celsius while Bhuntar in Kullu was hottest during the day on Wednesday with a maximum temperature at 35.6 degree Celsius.

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

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam further deteriorated with over 16.50 lakh population affected in 29 districts with the major rivers flowing above the danger level across the state on Thursday, an official bulletin said. An alert has been sounded in Kamrup (Metro) district with the Brahmaputra, Digaru and Kollong rivers flowing above the red mark with vast tracts of land inundated. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma is scheduled to visit flood-affected areas in Maligaon, Pandu Port and Temple Ghat areas in Guwahati Metropolitan area on Thursday to take stock of the situation. Sarma chaired a meeting on the flood situation with all District Commissioners late on Wednesday night and directed them to be liberal in granting relief as per norms,



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

over 2.23 lakh people suffering, followed by Darrang with nearly 1.84 lakh people and Lakhimpur with more than 1.66 lakh people reeling under flood waters. Brahmaputra is flowing above the danger marks at Nimatighat, Tezpur, Guwahati, Goalpara and Dhubri. Its tributaries Subansiri at Badatighat, Burhi Dihing at Chenimari, Dikhou at Sivasagar, Disang at Nanglamuraghat, Dhansiri at Numaligarh, and Kopili at Kamrup and Dharamtul are flowing above the danger levels. The Barak river is flowing above the danger mark at AP Ghat, BP Ghat, Chota Bakra and Fuletrak, while its tributaries Dhaleswari at Ghamura, Katakhal at Matizuri and Kushiya at Karimganj town and are also flowing above the danger marks.

MP Government eyeing tough law to curb illegal colonies

PTI ■ BHOPAL

The Madhya Pradesh government on Thursday told the legislative assembly that it was considering bringing a tough law to keep a check on illegal colonies in the state. "Illegal colonies are a big problem. A nexus is working in the state. MP Chief Minister Mohan Yadav has already given instructions to frame a tough law to deal with the problem of illegal colonies," state Urban Development and Housing Minister Kailash Vijayvargiya told the House during the Question Hour.



The government would come up with a bill to this effect, he said. The minister added that the existing illegal colonies won't be regularised, but basic amenities would be made available in such dwellings. Vijayvargiya, who is also the MP Legislative Affairs Minister, was replying to the questions raised separately by two BJP MLAs Hardeep Singh Dang and Rajendra Pandey over the mushrooming illegal colonies and the plight of the residents. The opposition Congress also targeted the state government over the nursing scam. After the question hour got over, Leader of the Opposition Umang Singhar sought a debate on the breach of privilege motion against state minister Vishvas Sarang in the nursing scam. He was joined by other Congress members. Speaker Narendra Tomar said he will take a call on the Congress' demand after examining their proposal. The Congress legislators have been alleging that MP

Sports, Youth Welfare and Co-operative Minister Sarang, who was medical education minister in the past, has provided incorrect information to the House over the nursing scam, which amounts to breach of privilege. Since Monday, when the monsoon session of the state assembly began, the Congress has trained its gun on Sarang and is targeting the government over the nursing scam. On May 30, the Madhya Pradesh High Court directed reinspection of 169 nursing colleges, which were given a clean chit by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the scam case, in light of two officers of the probe agency being caught allegedly taking bribes from institutions for favourable reports. The CBI is probing the scam pertaining to gross irregularities in the functioning of several nursing colleges that lacked infrastructure while some existed only on paper. The probe agency furnished its report to the court in January, stating that it found 169 colleges suited to function, while 73 colleges lacked infrastructure and 66 were unsuited, he said.

Landslides snap communication in seven Arunachal districts

PTI ■ ITANAGA

Landslides triggered by rain have snapped surface communication in at least seven districts of Arunachal Pradesh on Thursday, officials said. The districts affected by landslides are Siang, East Siang, Upper Siang, West Siang, Shi Yomi, Leparada and Upper Subansiri. A portion of the NH-13 along the Pasighat-Pangin-Aalo road has blocked following a landslide on Thursday morning. A huge boulder has completely blocked the road in between Lokpeng and Pangin tri-junction in Siang district, PWD Highways assistant engineer Gemar Padu said. The road is being cleared by engaging men and machinery for light motor



vehicles to pass through, he said. The Nigmoi-Aalo bypass road has also been blocked due to landslides in several locations. Upper Siang District Information and Public Relations Officer Y Jerang said

that landslides have cut off the strategic Tuting sub-division with the rest of the district. On June 29, landslides completely cut off the sub-division following heavy landslides in several places at Moying and Migging villages, she said, adding that Tuting-bound commuters are stranded in Yingkiang, district headquarters of Upper Siang. Quoting PWD Highways department official, the DIPRO said it will take at least a week to completely restore the road if weather permits. Incassant rain has disrupted water supply to Aalo in West Siang district. The water supply to Likabali township in Lower Siang district has also suffered extensive damages due to floods and landslides, officials said.

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

PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan minister Kirodi Lal Meena, who had said he will quit the state Cabinet if the BJP loses any Lok Sabha seat under his responsibility, has submitted his resignation but it is yet to be accepted. Meena -- who holds multiple portfolios including agriculture, rural development, disaster management and relief minister -- said the party high command has called him to Delhi on Friday and he would explain to them why he put in his papers. The 72-year-old said he has no expectations, or resentment with the organisation or Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma. Meena said he has submitted his papers due to his public vow that he will resign if the party loses LS any seat under his responsibility. During the recently held elections, he had said Prime Minister Narendra Modi



assigned him seven seats in eastern Rajasthan on which he worked hard during the polls. In the Lok Sabha poll results announced on June 4, the BJP lost four seats, including his native Dausa, in eastern Rajasthan. Overall the BJP won 14 of the state's 25 seats, its tally coming down from 24 in the 2019 polls. "The party high command has called me to Delhi tomorrow, I will go and satisfy them (on my decision). I could not make the party win. I had said if the party does not win, I will

resign," he told reporters here. "It is my moral responsibility to resign. I met the chief minister but he rejected my resignation... My credibility among the people should remain intact, I have resigned," he said. When asked whether he was unhappy with the party for not making him a deputy CM, Meena said no "If I was dissatisfied, I would have resigned immediately after taking oath. I have no complaint against the organisation or the chief minister, neither do I have

any complaints nor am I greedy for power. I did not resign because of the post. I resigned because I stand by what I said about my failure to get the party win seats," he said. Earlier, Meena posted on X, "Raghukul reeti sada chali aai, pran jaai par vachan na jaai to underline his unwavering intent to keep his promise at any cost. Meena campaigned on eastern Rajasthan seats including Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur, Alwar, Tonk-Sawaimadhopur and Kota-Bundi. In the results declared last month, the BJP lost Dausa, Bharatpur, Karauli-Dholpur and Tonk-Sawai Madhopur. He was also in the race for chief minister's post after the results of the assembly elections were announced in December last year, but the party high command picked first-time MLA Bhajanlal Sharma to lead the state.

Ahom era Moidams recommended for inclusion in UNESCO World Heritage list

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Ahom era 'Moidams', a resting place of royal families, in Assam's Charaideo district have been recommended for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List by its international advisory body ICOMOS. The International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) has prepared a report 'Evaluations of Nominations of Cultural and Mixed Properties' for the 46th ordinary session of the World Heritage Committee, to be held in New Delhi on July 21-31. The report, which PTI has accessed, evaluated a total of 36 nominations, including 19 new ones, received from across the globe and the Ahom Moidam was the only applicant from India. "I C O M O S recommends that Moidams -- the Mound-Burial System of the Ahom Dynasty, India, be inscribed on the World Heritage List on the basis of criteria (iii) and (iv)," it said.



With this recommendation, the first-time applicant Moidams are just one step short of formally entering the World Heritage List by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These were first included in the Tentative List in April 2014. France-based ICOMOS, also an advisory body to UNESCO for cultural heritage, is an international non-governmental organisation that is comprised of

professionals, experts, representatives from local authorities, companies and heritage organisations, and is dedicated to the conservation and enhancement of the architectural and landscape heritage throughout the world. Inclusion of Moidams in the World Heritage List was sought by the Indian government on the basis of Cultural Criteria (iii), (iv) and (v). The nominated property has an area of 95.02 hectares and a buffer zone of 754.51 hectares. Criterion (iii) bears a unique or at least exceptional testimony to a cultural tradition or to a civilization which is living or which has disappeared and criterion (iv) is for an outstanding example of a type of building, architectural or technological ensemble or landscape which illustrates significant stages in human history. The criterion (v), which ICOMOS rejected, is for an outstanding example of a traditional human settlement, land use, or sea-use which is representative of a culture or human interaction with the environment, especially when it has become vulnerable under the impact of irreversible change. The report stated that 90 Moidams are found within the Charaideo necropolis, situated on elevated land. These were created by building an earth mound over a hollow vault constructed of brick, stone or earth, and topped by a shrine at the centre of an octagonal wall.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Litmus test

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

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

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

PICTALK



Villagers catch fish in flood water, in Morigaon district

The rise of radical rebels in Pakistan



BHOPINDER SINGH

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bowing to elders is a sign of respect



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

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

K V Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

PM'S REMARKS ON MANIPUR

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

HATHRAS TRAGEDY

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

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

K V Chandramouli | Mysuru

UNSUNG HEROES IN INDIAN CRICKET

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

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

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Balancing motivation and misuse in India's research landscape

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



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

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



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

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

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



FIRST COLUMN STRATEGIC DYNAMICS AT THE SCO SUMMIT

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



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

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

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



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

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

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

Railway accidents expose neglect, systemic failures



SHIVAJI SARKAR

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



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

The full extent of the losses is challenging to estimate, as they not only impact the railways but also disrupt the movement of goods and people, with far-reaching consequences. The CAG audit found that while the Gross Budgetary Support of Rs 15,000 crore had been contributed, the Railways' internal resources fell short of the target for funding the remaining Rs 5,000 crore per year to Rashtriya Rail Sanraksha Kosh (RRSK), set up in 2017. The report highlighted a decline in the allotment of funds for track renewal works, from Rs 9,607 crore in 2018-19 to Rs 7,417 crore in 2019-20. The railways' Rs 2.55 trillion budget is self-generated. Ignoring critical signal and track safety issues it has allocated Rs 24470 crore to be spent for 508 of the 1300 stations planned to be demolished and rebuilt in 16 states. The buildings may need some repairs and refurbishing but demolition is outrageous under Amrit Bharat Station Scheme. Many stations are already on the block though these hardly need demolition. The railways should have prioritised its operational safety issues and utilised the station rebuilding funds for safety. According to the CAG report 2022, an Analysis of 1129 'Inquiry Reports' of derailment accidents in 16 Zonal Railways (ZRs) revealed 24 factors



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

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

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

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

rendering the automatic signals defunct since 5.50 am.

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

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

1. Officials Overlooked Multiple Violations Earlier,

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

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

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

Women suffer in silence as violence against them keeps increasing

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

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



KAVITA DHAMEJA

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Hezbollah fires over 200 rockets into Israel

AP ■ BEIRUT

The Lebanese Hezbollah group said it launched over 200 rockets on Thursday at several military bases in Israel in retaliation for a strike that killed one of its senior commanders. The attack by the Iran-backed militant group was one of the largest in the months-long conflict along the Lebanon-Israel border, with tensions escalating in recent weeks. The Israeli military said "numerous projectiles and suspicious aerial targets" had entered its territory from Lebanon, many of which it said were intercepted. There were no immediate reports of casualties. It said about 200 "projectiles" were launched toward the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and over 20 drones into Israeli territory, but that it had intercepted some of them.



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

the Lebanese capital and other areas in the country. Israel on Wednesday acknowledged that it had killed Mohammad Naameh Nasser, who headed one of Hezbollah's three regional divisions in southern Lebanon, a day earlier. Hours after the killing, Hezbollah launched scores of Katyusha rockets and Falq rockets with heavy warheads into northern Israel and the occupied Syrian Golan Heights. It launched more rockets on Thursday and said it had also sent exploding drones into several bases. Nasser was of great importance to Hezbollah, which said he took part in battles in conflicts in Syria and Iraq from 2011 until 2016 and fought in the group's last war with Israel in 2006. Two other senior Hezbollah commanders have also been killed. The US and France are continuing to scramble to prevent the skirmishes from spiraling into an all-out war, which they fear could spillover across the region. Washington in its shuttle diplomatic efforts initially hoped for calm along the Lebanon-Israel border in a deal that is not linked to the war in Gaza. However, since the US has called for Hamas to agree to a cease-fire proposal

presented by President Joe Biden, it has said that an end to the war in Gaza would lead to calm in Lebanon and northern Israel as well. The relatively low-level conflict erupted shortly after the outbreak of the war in Gaza. Hezbollah says it is striking Israel in solidarity with Hamas, another Iran-allied group that ignited the war in Gaza with its October 7 attack into southern Israel. The group's leadership says it will stop its attacks once there is a cease-fire in Gaza, and that while it does not want war, it is ready for one. Israeli officials, meanwhile, say they could decide to go to war in Lebanon if efforts for a diplomatic solution fail. Hezbollah's retaliation comes a day after a senior adviser to US President Joe Biden, Amos Hochstein, met with French President Emmanuel Macron's Lebanon envoy, Jean-Yves Le Drian, in Paris. The fighting has displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border. In northern

Israel, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. In Lebanon, more than 450 people — mostly fighters but also dozens of civilians — have been killed. Israel sees Hezbollah as its most direct threat and estimates that it has an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles. In 2006, Israel and Hezbollah fought a monthlong war that ended in a draw. Meanwhile, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Thursday that the Palestinian death toll from nearly nine months of war has surged past 38,000. The ministry said that in the last 24 hours, the bodies of 58 people had been brought to hospitals, bringing the overall death toll to 38,011. It said more than 87,000 people have been wounded in the fighting. The ministry does not distinguish between fighters and noncombatants in its count, but many of the dead are said to be women and children.

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

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

AP ■ TEL AVIV

Israel's Cabinet was set to convene Thursday to discuss Hamas' latest response to a US-backed proposal for a phased cease-fire in Gaza, as diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the nine-month war stirred back to life after a weeklong hiatus. Fighting, meanwhile, intensified between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, with the militant group saying it fired more than 200 rockets and exploding drones into northern Israel to avenge the killing of a senior commander in an Israeli airstrike the day before. The relatively low-level conflict has literally set the border ablaze and raised fears of a potentially even more devastating war in the Middle East. Hezbollah has said it will halt its attacks if there is a cease-fire between Hamas — a fellow Iran-backed ally — and Israel. The United States has rallied world support behind a plan that would see the release of all of the scores of hostages still held by the militant group in return for a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. But until now, neither side appears to have fully embraced it. Hamas suggested "amendments" to the proposal last month, some of which the US said were unworkable, without providing specifics. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that the original proposal was an Israeli one, but has raised doubts over whether it would end the war — a key Hamas demand. Hamas confirmed Wednesday that it had sent another response to Egypt and Qatar, which are mediating the talks, without providing details. A US official said the Biden administration was examining the response, calling it constructive but saying more work needed to be done. The official, who wasn't authorized to comment publicly, spoke on condition of anonymity. An Israeli official said Netanyahu would convene a Cabinet meeting Thursday to discuss the latest develop-

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

Bratislava (Slovakia): The suspect in the attempted assassination in May of Slovakia's populist prime minister, Robert Fico, is now facing terror charges as part of an investigation by authorities, the country's prosecutor general said Thursday. Maros Zilinka said in a statement that the suspect identified only as JC, who was originally charged with attempted murder, now faces the additional charges. Zilinka said the change is based on evidence the investigators obtained, but didn't immediately give further details. The government officials originally said they believed it was a politically motivated attack committed by a "lone wolf" but announced later that a "third party" might have been involved in "acting for the benefit of the perpetrator." Fico has currently been recovering at home from mul-

iple wounds he suffered in the assassination attempt on May 15 when he was shot in the abdomen as he greeted supporters after his government's session in the town of Handlova. The assailant was immediately arrested and a court ordered him to remain behind bars. Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. He returned to power for the fourth time last year after his leftist party Smer, or Direction, won the parliamentary election last September, after campaigning on a pro-Russia and anti-American message. His critics worry that Slovakia could abandon its pro-Western course and follow the direction of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. Thousands have repeatedly rallied in the capital and across Slovakia to protest Fico's policies

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

PTI ■ LONDON

The future of Rishi Sunak as Britain's Prime Minister and leader of the Conservative Party hangs in the balance as polling booths opened across the UK on Thursday, with the British Indian leader and the man who wants his job — Keir Starmer — out early to cast their votes along with millions across the country. Sunak and his wife Akshata Murty walked hand-in-hand to their local polling booth on a sunny day in his constituency of Richmond and Northallerton in Yorkshire, northern England. A little later, Starmer and wife Victoria were at their polling station in Camden, north London, sporting Labour red colours. As is customary, there is no campaigning or party political canvassing on polling in the UK. Sunak, 44, is up against voter angst towards the incumbent Tories after 14 years in power



and has had to contend with trailing far behind 61-year-old Keir Starmer-led Labour Party throughout the six-week campaign. Both leaders wrapped up their poll pitches with contrasting messages — Sunak urging voters not to hand "tax-raising" Labour a "supermajority" and Starmer playing down the prospect of a landslide win for fear of a low turnout impacting the final outcome. Candidates are being fielded for 650 constituencies across England, Scotland, Wales, and

Northern Ireland, with 326 required for a majority in the first past the post system. Besides the two main parties, voters will be choosing from a list of candidates representing the Liberal Democrats, Green Party, Scottish National Party (SNP), SDLP, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Sinn Fien, Plaid Cymru, the anti-immigration Reform Party and several contesting as Independent. Around 40,000 polling booths opened across the country at 7 am local time as an estimated 46 million registered voters began turning out to mark a cross next to their chosen candidate on a paper ballot. Since this year, carrying an identification document to the polling booth has become compulsory in UK elections, which are open to all registered adult voters resident in the UK including Indians as Commonwealth citizens. Several voters have already cast their vote in a postal ballot, which can also be handed in to

their local councils if pending. Once the votes are cast and the booths officially close at 10 pm local time, the focus shifts to the definitive exit poll soon after which gives a fair snapshot of what can be expected UK-wide. Counting commences up and down the country right away, with the first results expected just before midnight local time. "Stop Labour's supermajority" is the central message British Prime Minister Sunak was trying to drive home as he wrapped up his campaign, even as most of the incumbent Conservatives all but conceded defeat in the general election. "Labour will put up your taxes. Again and again and again," posted Sunak on social media as the catch-all message to wind up the campaign trail. The British Indian leader and his team's strategy in the final hours was to canvass their traditional voters to narrow the gap of a widely expected defeat after clear Tory majorities in the last three general elections.

Hurricane Beryl roars toward Mexico after leaving destruction in Jamaica

AP ■ PLAYA DEL CARMEN

Hurricane Beryl ripped off roofs in Jamaica, jumbled fishing boats in Barbados and damaged or destroyed 95 per cent of homes on a pair of islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines before rumbling toward the Cayman Islands and taking aim at Mexico's Caribbean coast after leaving at least seven dead in its wake. What had been the earliest storm to develop into a Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic, weakened slightly but remained a major hurricane. Its eye was forecast to pass just south of the Cayman Islands overnight. Mexico's popular Caribbean coast prepared shelters, evacuated some small outlying coastal communities and even moved sea turtle eggs off beaches threatened by storm surge, but in nightlife hotspots like Playa del Carmen and



Tulum tourists still took one more night on the town. Mexico's Navy patrolled areas like Tulum telling tourists in Spanish and English to prepare for the storm's arrival. Early Thursday morning, the storm's center was about 500 miles (800 kilometres) east-southeast of Tulum, Mexico. It had maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (205 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 21

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

der. The storm had already shown its destructive potential across a long swath of the southeastern Caribbean. Beryl's eye wall brushed by Jamaica's southern coast Wednesday afternoon knocking out power and ripping roofs off homes. Prime Minister Andrew Holness said Jamaica had not seen the "worst of what could possibly happen." "We can do as much as we can do, as humanly possible, and we leave the rest in the hands of God," Holness said. Several roadways in Jamaica's interior settlements were impacted by fallen trees and utility poles, while some communities in the northern section were without electricity, according to the government's Information Service. The worst perhaps came earlier in Beryl's trajectory when it smacked two small islands of the Lesser Antilles.

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

of the British Future think tank. "There'll be a sense, I think, of regret and disappointment that this didn't go better for Rishi Sunak as there was great pride... but people aren't going to make their voting choice on that basis. And that's why I think, more British Indian voters are going to vote for change than vote for keeping Rishi Sunak, even though they appreciate his historic achievement in being the first British Prime Minister of Indian heritage," he noted. Against this backdrop, the issues that would influence British Indian voters would echo wider concerns such as the cost-of-living crisis, the National Health Service (NHS) waiting lists and getting a grip on illegal migration. While Sunak did meet his pledge to bring down inflation from the soaring levels he inherited in the aftermath of the chaotic terms of predecessors Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, it may not prove enough to get him over the line at the ballot box. "I don't know why he's not going around to every single member of the Tory party inside of the government saying, 'I told you so...' We've now reduced inflation down from the high of 11 per cent down to 2 per cent. We've seen the underlying

economic outlook for the country improving since Sunak took office in October 2022. "But the problem we have is that people have long memories of a time when we forgot what it was to be a Conservative," Andrew Boff, Tory Chair of the London Assembly, said during an election debate hosted by 'Eastern Eye' earlier this week. "Rishi Sunak, at one level, was a breath of fresh air because he's clearly an extremely bright, decent man attempting to do his best... [but] not much has changed since he became Prime Minister," said Lord Richard Newby, Leader of the Lib Dems in the House of Lords, during the event. For Anneliese Dodds, Labour Party chair and shadow secretary of state for women and equalities, Sunak's term marked a "huge amount of continuity" with his embattled predecessors. However, if the outcome of the election indicates a definitive shift among British Indian voters towards Labour, it would be seen more as a vote in favour of change rather than a decisive ballot in favour of party leader Keir Starmer — who is simply being viewed as a "choose-able alternative," according to poll analysts.

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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



says he remains mystified about where his daughter got her talent. "I'm an engineering graduate, as is my wife, but I'm not good at chess," he said. Bodhana first picked up chess during the pandemic lockdown when Siva's friend was going back to India and gave her a few bags which also had a chess board. "I was interested in the pieces, so I started playing," she recalls. Last December, Sivanandan won the European Blitz Chess Championship in Zagreb, Croatia, and was dubbed "super talented" at the time. Soon after, she was among a group of young chess enthusiasts invited by British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to 10 Downing Street to mark the government's major new GBP 1 million investment package for the game. The package has since been in place to support children attending schools in disadvantaged areas across England to learn and play chess, improve the visibility and availability of the game, and fund elite playing. As part of the package, the UK's Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) said it would invest GBP 500,000 in the English Chess Federation (ECF) over two years to develop the next generation of world-class talent. Funds will support expert coaching, training camps and cutting-edge computer analysis for international events to assist current grandmasters and up-and-coming players.

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

Copenhagen (Denmark) (AP): A verdict is expected on Thursday in the case of an Iranian-born Norwegian man who is charged with terrorism in a 2002 attack at an LGBT+ festival in Oslo, Norway, in which two people were killed and nine seriously wounded at three locations. The Oslo District Court is to rule on whether Zaniar Matapour fired 10 rounds with a machine gun and eight with a handgun into the crowd, chiefly outside the London Pub, a popular gay bar, on June 25, 2002. Prosecutors said Matapour, 45, a Norwegian citizen originally from Iran, has sworn allegiance to the Islamic State group. Extensive video material of the attack was presented in court. The verdict will not be read in court but will be sent out electronically. Matapour will have the verdict read to

him in prison, the court said. Matapour was overpowered by bystanders after the attack and arrested. Following the attack, a Pride parade was cancelled, with police saying they could not guarantee security. The shooting shocked Norway, which has a relatively low crime rate but has experienced a series of "lone wolf" attacks by individuals in recent decades, including one of the worst mass shootings in Europe. In 2011, a right-wing extremist killed 69 people on the island of Utøya after setting off a bomb in Oslo that left eight dead. Six days before the attack, Norway's external intelligence agency, E-Tjenesten, learned from an undercover agent that a possible action was expected in a Nordic country and the information was passed to the domestic security service.

Keir Starmer: Human rights lawyer turned Labour Leader

PTI ■ LONDON

Keir Starmer, the human rights barrister turned Labour Party Leader, has made it a manifesto pledge to pursue a "new strategic partnership" with India, including an FTA, if handed a mandate to form a Labour-led government in Thursday's general election. Sir Keir, who was knighted by the late Queen Elizabeth II for his services to law and criminal justice, spent much of his career in the legal profession before stepping into the world of politics, first elected as Labour's member of Parliament from London in 2015. The 61-year-old father of two teenage kids, who he and his National Health Service (NHS) employee wife Victoria have chosen to keep out of the political spotlight, has been credited with reversing the



party's fortunes from one of its worst poll performances in the 2019 general election to the edge of government. The other turnaround Starmer worked on was to try and rebuild Labour's connect with the Indian diaspora, alienated under former leader Jeremy Corbyn over a perceived anti-India stance on Kashmir. "I have a clear message for you all today: this is a changed Labour Party," declared Starmer at the India Global Forum (IGF) last year, setting the tone for the party's India-UK outlook. "What my Labour government will seek with India is a relationship based on our shared values of democracy and aspiration. That will seek a free trade agreement (FTA), we share that ambition, but also a new strategic partnership for global security, climate security, economic security," he said. This approach has been entrenched in the party's 2024 election manifesto, which commits to seeking a "new strategic partnership with India, including a free trade agreement, as well as deepening cooperation in areas like security, education, technology and climate change."

Putin, Xi among others attend SCO summit



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

AP ■ MOSCOW

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

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

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

Shehbaz raises terror concern

PTI ■ ASTANA

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

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

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

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

Sweden protests against death penalties to 3

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

Floated rise in gasoline prices may spark new protests in Iran

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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



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

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

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

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

Ukraine army retreats, Russia closer to seizing Chasiv Yar

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

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

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

Hasina to travel to China next week

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

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

Sri Lanka strikes private debt restructuring deal

PTI ■ COLOMBO

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

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

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

Russian-linked cybercampaigns put bullseye on France

AP ■ PARIS

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sensex, Nifty hit new lifetime highs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty ticked higher to scale fresh all-time high levels on Thursday, following buying in market heavyweights ICICI Bank, Infosys and TCS amid a largely positive trend in global equities.

The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 62.87 points or 0.08 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 80,049.67. During the day, it rallied 405.84 points to hit a fresh all-time high of 80,392.64.

The Nifty rose 15.65 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at a record closing peak of 24,302.15. Intra-day, it surged 114.5 points to hit a fresh lifetime high of 24,401.

Among the Sensex pack, HCL Technologies, ICICI Bank, Tata Motors, Sun Pharmaceuticals, Tata Consultancy Services, Infosys, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Mahindra and



Mahindra were the gainers. In contrast, HDFC Bank, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, Tech Mahindra, UltraTech Cement and IndusInd Bank were among the laggards.

In Asian markets, Tokyo, Hong Kong and Seoul ended in the positive territory, while Shanghai closed in the red. European markets were trading in the green territory in mid-session deals.

US markets ended higher on Wednesday during the

shortened trading session. Stock exchanges will remain closed on Thursday on account of Independence Day.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude fell 0.52 per cent to USD 86.89 a barrel.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 5,483.63 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data.

On Wednesday, the 30-share index hit the historic 80,000 mark for the first time intra-day trade. It surged 632.85 points or 0.79 per cent to a record intraday high of 80,074.30. The index later closed near the 80,000 level at 79,986.80, up by 545.35 points or 0.69 per cent over the last close.

The Nifty climbed 162.65 points or 0.67 per cent to end at an all-time high of 24,286.50. During the day, it zoomed 183.4 points or 0.76 per cent to hit a fresh intraday record peak of 24,307.25.

Sebi mandates institutional mechanism for fraud prevention in stock broking

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi on Thursday issued a circular requiring stock brokers to establish an institutional mechanism for prevention and detection of fraud or market abuse in a bid to protect the interest of investors in securities market.

The circular mandates the implementation of systems for the surveillance of trading activities and internal controls, introduction of a whistle-blower policy, among other obligations.

These requirements are part of Sebi (Stock Brokers) (Amendment) Regulations, 2024, which aim to ensure higher standards of market integrity and investor protection.

The standards for implementation of the same, including operational modalities will be formulated by the broker's Industry Standards Forum (ISF), in consultation with the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), the regulator said in the circular.

The implementation will be based on the size of the stock brokers. Brokers with more



than 50,000 active Unique Client Codes (UCCs) are required to comply by January 1, 2025.

Further, those with 2,001 to 50,000 active UCCs have to comply by April 1, 2025, and brokers with up to 2,000 active UCCs must comply by April 1, 2026.

In addition, qualified stock brokers must comply with these requirements by August 1, 2024, considering their existing obligations for governance and client behaviour surveillance.

Sebi directed the stock exchanges to bring the provisions of this circular to the notice of stock brokers and also disseminate the same on their websites.

It also directed them to amend their bye-laws, and ensure that brokers notify the obligation/ requirement on the stock brokers to follow the standards adopted by the ISF, and issue a joint notice which indicates the date of applicability of the circular to various stock brokers based on the criteria.

The provisions of this circular shall come into force in a risk-based, staggered manner to ensure smooth adoption, and effective implementation for all the stock brokers by providing enough time for stock brokers, based on their size, for making necessary changes, Sebi said.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The coal sector has registered a growth of 10.2 per cent among all eight core industries of the economy in May, the government said on Thursday.

The index of coal industry has reached 184.7 points during May as compared to 167.6 points during the same month last year.

"The coal sector has demonstrated highest growth of 10.2 per cent (provisional), following the electricity industry among the eight core industries for the month of May, 2024 as per the Index of Eight Core Industries (ICI) (Base Year 2011-12) released by Ministry of Commerce & Industries," the coal ministry said in a statement.

The driving force behind growth can be attributed to a considerable rise in coal production during May.

This increase in production underscores the sector's capacity to meet growing demand of energy and manufacturing industries.

SBI announces initiatives to mitigate risks in agri loan portfolio

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country's largest lender SBI on Thursday announced 11 new initiatives -- including enhancement of its digital banking features and opening of 35 new Agricultural Centralised Processing Cells -- to mitigate risks in its agricultural loan portfolio.

On the occasion of the 69th Foundation Day, State Bank of India announced these initiatives to widen the bank's accessibility to address the banking needs of its potential customers, the lender said in a statement.

SBI has enhanced its digital payment

experience, with the introduction of two exciting features like tap-and-pay on the BHIM SBI PAY app and end-to-end digital loans against mutual funds on the YONO app, it added.

The bank has also announced an initiative, which is a fully digital end-to-end journey for SBI Surya Ghar Loan, it said, adding that the users can opt for credit to install solar rooftops under the central government's PM Surya Ghar Scheme, offering loans for up to 10 KW capacity.

The entire process will be managed on SBI's digital platform from applicant registration on the MNRE/REC portal to



loan disbursement.

Acknowledging the significant contributions and global presence of the Indian diaspora in shaping the nation's growth story, SBI opened a second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala, Punjab.

To enhance its service to NRI clients, its Chairman Dinesh Khara inaugurated the second Global NRI Centre (GNC) in Patiala on Bank Day.

SBI's dedicated GNCs reflect the bank's unwavering commitment to strengthening its ties with the global Indian community.

"These centres serve as hubs of

excellence, providing specialised services to NRI customers. With a network of 434 specialised NRI branches in India, foreign offices in 29 countries, and partnerships with 45 exchange houses and 5 banks in GCC countries, SBI is well-equipped to offer comprehensive services to its NRI clientele worldwide," the statement said.

In another move, SBI has launched comprehensively redesigned High Court branches aimed at enhancing services for the legal community.

This initiative underscores SBI's commitment to providing tailored financial solutions that cater specifically

to the unique needs of lawyers and legal professionals, it added.

The redesigned branches are equipped to offer top-tier services, including financial management, transaction facilitation, and personalised financial advice.

With regard to home loans, the bank has made processing such loans more transparent. Home loan borrowers will now receive automated email and SMS notifications regarding the status of their loan application at various processing stages. This initiative aims to enhance customer satisfaction and convenience, it said.

Rupee falls 1 paisa to close at 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee pared its initial losses and settled for the day on an almost flat note at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, resisting pressure from elevated crude oil prices.

Forex traders said a positive trend in domestic equities, wherein benchmark indices touched all-time high levels, and significant foreign fund inflows supported the rupee and restricted the fall.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.52 and hit the intraday high of 83.48 and a low of 83.56 against the American currency during the session.

It finally settled at 83.50 (provisional) against the dollar, 1 paisa lower than its previous close.

On Wednesday, the rupee settled 1 paisa lower at 83.49 against the US dollar.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on softness in the US dollar amid weak economic data and rise in risk appetite in global markets," said Anuj



Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

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

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.15 per cent lower at 105.24.

Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.47 per cent lower at USD 86.93 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, Sensex breached the historic 80,000-mark and

Nifty scaled a fresh lifetime high. The 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 62.87 points, or 0.08 per cent, up at its all-time high of 80,049.67 points.

The broader NSE Nifty settled 15.65 points, or 0.06 per cent, higher at a fresh peak of 24,302.15 points.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 5,483.63 crore, according to exchange data.

Meanwhile, according to an official of S&P Global Ratings, a sovereign rating upgrade for India in the next 24 months is possible if the central government is able to prudently manage its finances and bring down the fiscal deficit to 4 per cent of GDP.

S&P Global Ratings Director, Sovereign Ratings, YeeFarn Phua, said the trigger for an upgrade would be the government (Centre + states) deficit falling below 7 per cent of the GDP, and a lot of this would have to be driven by the Central Government.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

To tap the potential of the country's air cargo sector, the focus should be on further improving processes as well as ensuring faster turnaround time, a senior government official said on Thursday.

The government is working on developing logistics hubs. Piyush Srivastava, Senior Economic Advisor at the Ministry of Civil Aviation, said the air cargo sector has a bright future and the number of freighters in the country is expected to rise.

Currently, Indian carriers have around 18 freighters. There will be a focus on further improving the ease of doing business and faster turnaround time in the air cargo sector, he said while speaking at the conference organised by the ACFI (Air Cargo Forum India) in the national capital.

While passenger traffic has recovered after being hit by the coronavirus pandemic, air cargo is yet to fully recover to the pre-Covid levels.

In 2023-24, the air cargo handled in the country was a little over 3.36 million tonnes.



Surendra Kumar Ahirwar, Joint Secretary at DPIIT, a lot of movement is happening on the logistics side, including the skilling of people.

He also said there is sub-optimal utilisation of existing air cargo facilities and emphasised the need for developing hubs as part of the logistics infrastructure.

According to ACFI President Yashpal Sharma, the air cargo sector accounts for nearly 10 per cent of domestic carriers' revenues.

Citing market research reports, he said the country's air freight market is estimated to grow to USD 16.37 billion by 2027.

Also, the plans to establish air transport shipment hubs at major airports are expected to drive the industry's growth, he added.

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

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Office space leasing absorption in Kolkata surged 33 per cent year on year to 0.4 million square feet in the April-June quarter of 2024, according to the CBRE India Office Figures Q2 report.

The key sectors driving absorption in Q2 2024 were technology (40 per cent), BFSI (21 per cent), and flexible space operators (10 per cent).

"The office space leasing absorption in April-June 2024 was 0.4 million square feet against 0.3 million square feet in the YoY period, a CBRE official said.

Another real estate consultant, Knight Frank India, also said that Kolkata's office market saw a significant increase in office leasing volume, with 0.7 million square feet of office space transacted in H1 2024 (January-June 2024).

This represents a 23 per cent growth compared to H1 2023, according to Knight Frank India's report "India

Real Estate: Residential and Office" (January-June 2024).

Average office space rents increased by 6 per cent year-on-year (YoY) during H1 2024, it said.

Knight Frank also reported that Kolkata's residential real estate market experienced strong homebuying demand, with 9,130 residential units sold in H1 2024, marking a 25 per cent YoY growth in sales volume.

The continued stamp duty rebate and new launches across various price segments contributed to the market's sustained upward sales momentum. However, the state government withdrew the stamp duty and 10 per cent rebate in circle rate effective July.

According to CBRE, pan-India office leasing remained robust, with gross office leasing reaching 32.8 million square feet during Jan-Jun'24, a 14 per cent increase year-on-year across nine cities.

Healing hands, caring hearts



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

India among most active countries for Meta's Threads

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India is one of the most active countries for Threads, which has notched over 175 million monthly active users globally, according to social media giant Meta.

The update assumes significance as it marks the completion of nearly one year since Meta officially launched rival to Twitter (now X).

"With a 175 million actives, we're seeing Threads become a place where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. India is one of the most active countries for Threads globally," the release said.

Among the other major takeaways are creation of 50 million topic tags on Threads till date, globally.

popular tags and topics on Threads are centred around film, TV and OTT content, celebrity-related conversations and sports.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced that Threads has over 175 million monthly active users as the social media giant asserted that Threads was launched with the belief that "everyone has something valuable to say".

"It's been a year now, and we're seeing it become a place where people feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and ideas. In fact, India is one of the most active countries for Threads globally," the release said.

Among the other major takeaways are creation of 50 million topic tags on Threads till date, globally.



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

former cricketers like Akash Chopra and Suresh Raina, experts like Riddhima Pathak and international cricketers like AB de Villiers sharing their passion for the game," Meta said.

The T20 Cricket World Cup, IPL, and Women's Premier League 2024 have been some of the moments that have sparked cricket conversations on Threads this year, it further said, adding that over 200 creators shared updates about the concluded IPL season on Threads. Threads scaled highs immediately after it was unveiled in July 2023 — it snapped up 100 million user sign-ups within a week of its launch.

The initial euphoria, however, wore off and according to industry watchers, the app struggled subsequently with steady decline in engagement metrics.

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AI-powered ROI calculator introduced

PNS ■ Mumbai

Jaro Education, a name in online higher education and upskilling, recently introduced a game-changing tool: The AI-powered ROI (Return on Investment) calculator for upskilling.

This innovative feature is designed to help working professionals make informed choices about their upskilling journey. This is one of the first innovations of its kind launched by any online higher education and upskilling company in India.

In today's fast-paced world, staying updated with the latest skills is more important than ever, according to the company.

Office leasing in Gurugram

PNS ■ New Delhi

Leading real estate developer M3M has leased 220,000 sq ft in Gurugram to Flexible workspace provider Incuspaze in their boutique office project - M3M Urbana Premium on the Golf Course Extension Road, people aware of the deal said.

"M3M is looking at Office leasing as a major drive this year and aims to lease 20 lakh sq ft of Grade-A office space in the most sought after locations in Gurugram. As part of this focus, we have signed a mega deal with Incuspaze - a leading flexible workspace provider where 2,20,000 sq ft space has been provided on lease to them," said Sudeep Bhatt, president M3M.

RONALDO VS MBAPPÉ: CLASH OF GENERATIONS AT EURO 2024

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

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

He said he was driven to tears against Slovenia not at the prospect of elimination but because his main motivation these days is "making people happy" and he had a penalty saved in extra time.
"I'm moved by all that football means - by the enthusiasm I have for the game, the enthusiasm for seeing my supporters, my family, the affection people have for me. "It's not about leaving the world of football. What else is there for me to do or win?" Ronaldo heads into Friday's game having failed to score in

eight straight matches at major tournaments - Portugal's last four at the 2022 World Cup and its four games at Euro 2024 - and with growing concerns about whether he deserves what appears to be a guaranteed spot in the team under Roberto Martinez. Things haven't been straightforward for Mbappé, either, at Euro 2024. He sustained a broken nose in France's group opener against Austria and has since been wearing a vision-limiting protective facemask during games. Mbappé has scored one goal and that was from the penalty spot against Poland - it's the only goal scored by a France player at these Euros. "He will have to get used to it," France coach Didier Deschamps said of Mbappé and his mask, "because, to protect (his nose), he will have to wear it for a few weeks - or even a few months." Few would have predicted the top scorer at the last World Cup (Mbappé) and the record scorer in men's international soccer (Ronaldo) to have just one goal between them heading into the quarterfinals. But no one will be surprised if

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

So, I think we can all look forward to seeing each other again." Kroos has played a key role in lifting the pre-tournament gloom surrounding the German team and turning it to optimism that the hosts can go on to win Euro 2024. It would be a fitting sendoff for a player who has already signed off on a glittering club career by winning the



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

AP ■ BERLIN
Germany great Toni Kroos hopes the next game isn't his last. Heavyweights Germany and Spain clash at the European Championship on Friday, when the winner will advance to the semifinals. Kroos is ending his playing career after Germany's last game

at Euro 2024. He hopes that will be the final in Berlin's Olympiastadion. But he knows it could be as soon as Friday if Spain - the most impressive team so far - knocks out the host nation in Stuttgart. "I'm not nostalgic at all," Kroos said Wednesday at potentially his last press conference as a player. He said he wasn't assuming Spain "will be my last game.

So, I think we can all look forward to seeing each other again." Kroos has played a key role in lifting the pre-tournament gloom surrounding the German team and turning it to optimism that the hosts can go on to win Euro 2024. It would be a fitting sendoff for a player who has already signed off on a glittering club career by winning the



Champions League and Spanish league with Real Madrid. "It's pretty difficult to plan a European Championship title but having it as a goal is of course the case," Kroos said. "I think it will be really difficult to finish more successfully than I left it with Madrid. And now of course I'm trying to do the same here." Kroos retired from the nation-

al team already in 2021, after Germany lost to England in the last 16 of the pandemic-delayed Euro 2020 tournament. But one of the first things Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann did after his appointment in September 2023 was ask the cool-headed midfielder if he'd consider returning to help Germany's title bid in its home tournament.

Fortunately for Germany - which was really struggling with two defeats and a draw from Nagelsmann's first four games - Kroos said yes. It's arguably the single biggest factor in the team's upturn as Kroos' experience and calmness under pressure gave confidence to the players around him. The 34-year-old returned to help Germany beat France and

the Netherlands in friendlies in March, and Greece before Euro 2024, then he helped Germany progress from the group stage with wins over Scotland and Hungary, and a draw with Switzerland. Kroos maintained a calm, assured presence in a turbulent win over Denmark in the last 16, helping Germany get further than it had in the last edition.



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

PTI ■ BENGALURU
At times, she misses the carefree pleasures her peers enjoy and occasionally experiences a sense of solitude, but all of that has been worth it for 14-year-old swimmer Dhinidhi Desingh, who is gearing up to fulfil her dream of competing at the Olympics later this month.
The Bengaluru swimmer, who studies in class ninth, is set to be the youngest member of the Indian contingent at the Paris Olympics.
"Sometimes I miss the fun generally kids of my age have. I do not go out much with friends and feel lonely. But then I wanted to swim and I wanted to go to the Olympics," Dhinidhi told PTI Bhasha in an exclusive interview at her residence.
"I am the one who chose this path for me. With that comes a lot of sacrifices but I do feel different, extraordinary and proud. At 14, I am going to the Olympics, so all the sacrifices are worth it," she added.
The Olympic cycle has been an underwhelming one for Indian swimming as none of the swimmers were able to breach either the 'A' or 'B' qualification time. But Dhinidhi has been on a roll, winning medals at the National Games and the senior National championships last year. Her performances this season made her the top-ranked Indian female swimmer with the Swimming Federation of India handing her one of the two Universality places and an opportunity of a lifetime.
"I knew that I had a chance (of making the Olympics) because I have been working really very

hard but it was surprising that I got this chance so early in my career. Being the youngest one in the Indian contingent is a big honour."
"I am super excited to be a part of the Indian Olympic contingent as I will get a chance to meet the greatest athletes," said Dhinidhi, who will compete in the women's 200m freestyle event.
Having got the opportunity to compete at the Olympics at such a young age, Dhinidhi wants to soak in everything and gain experience.
"This is just the beginning and I have a long way to go. I am really excited to know what more I can do in 2028 and 2032."
"I want to experience the feeling of staying at the Olympic village. What kind of races are being held there as the competition in India is totally different from what we get at international level. I want to see the dedication, the focus and the preparation of world class athletes."
"I am not thinking about performance as it is just about learning this time. I am sure whatever learnings I have here, that will make me a better athlete."
She is excited to meet her idol - seven-time Olympic gold medalist swimmer Katie Ledecky.
"I made a greeting card last year for her. I used to think that whenever I get a chance to meet her, I will give this to her. I looked up at her from a very young age and luckily, I got this chance. Hopefully I can give it to her in Paris. I will be on the seventh moon if I get a chance to even see her," she said.

CANCELLATION / DIVERSION AND SHORT TERMINATION / ORIGINATION / RESCHEDULING/REGULATIONS OF TRAINS DUE TO PRE-NON-INTERLOCKING & NON-INTERLOCKING WORK		
In order to upgrade the infrastructure, Northern Railway will undertake Pre-Non-Interlocking and Non-Interlocking work in connection with Roza yard remodeling work on Shahjahanpur Jn. - Lucknow & Roza - Sitapur City Jn. double line section over Moradabad Division. To execute this work, suitable traffic blocks from 07.07.2024 to 05.08.2024. During this period the following trains will temporarily be affected as under:-		
CANCELLATION OF TRAINS		
Train No. & Train Name	Date(s) of Cancellation (from originating station)	
14617 Banmankhi Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Jansewa Express	27.07.2024 to 07.08.2024	
14618 Amritsar Jn. - Banmankhi Jn. Jansewa Express	25.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
12492 Jammu Tawi - Barauni Jn. Maur Dhawaj Express	26.07.2024 & 02.08.2024	
12491 Barauni Jn. - Jammu Tawi Maur Dhawaj Express	28.07.2024 & 04.08.2024	
15211 Darbhanga Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Jannayak Express	23.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
15212 Amritsar Jn. - Darbhanga Jn. Jannayak Express	25.07.2024 to 06.08.2024	
22423 Gorakhpur - Amritsar Jn. Jansadharan Express	22.07.29.07 & 05.08.2024	
22424 Amritsar Jn. - Gorakhpur Jansadharan Express	21.07.29.07 & 04.08.2024	
14603 Saharsa Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Jansadharan Express	26.07.2024 & 02.08.2024	
14604 Amritsar Jn. - Saharsa Jn. Jansadharan Express	24.07.2024 & 31.07.2024	
22551 Darbhanga Jn. - Jalandhar City Antyodya Superfast Express	27.07.2024 & 03.08.2024	
22552 Jalandhar City - Darbhanga Jn. Antyodya Superfast Express	28.07.2024 & 04.08.2024	
22453 Lucknow Jn. - Meerut City Jn. Rajiya Rani Express	31.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
22454 Meerut City Jn. - Lucknow Jn. Rajiya Rani Express	01.08.2024 to 06.08.2024	
14235 Varanasi Jn. - Bareilly Express	31.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
14236 Bareilly - Varanasi Jn. Express	01.08.2024 to 05.08.2024	
14307/14308 Prayagraj Sangam - Bareilly - Prayagraj Sangam Express	01.08.2024 to 05.08.2024	
15043 Lucknow Jn. - Kathgodam Express	21.07, 22.07, 24.07, 25.07, 26.07, 28.07, 29.07, 31.07 & 01.08, 02.08, 04.08, 05.08.2024	
15044 Kathgodam - Lucknow Jn. Express	22.07, 23.07, 25.07, 26.07, 27.07, 29.07, 30.07 & 01.08, 02.08, 03.08, 05.08.2024	
15904 Chandigarh - Dibrugarh Express	31.07.2024 & 04.08.2024	
15903 Dibrugarh - Chandigarh Express	29.07.2024 & 02.08.2024	
15119 Banaras - Dehradun Express	23.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
15120 Dehradun - Banaras Express	24.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
14241 Prayagraj Sangam - Saharanpur Nauchandi Express	22.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
14242 Saharanpur - Prayagraj Sangam Nauchandi Express	23.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
13257 Danapur - Anand Vihar Terminal Jansadharan Express	01.08.2024 to 04.08.2024	
13258 Anand Vihar Terminal - Danapur Jansadharan Express	02.08.2024 to 05.08.2024	
15011 Lucknow Jn. - Chandigarh Express	31.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
15012 Chandigarh - Lucknow Jn. Express	01.08.2024 to 05.08.2024	
15073 Singrauli - Tanakpur Tribeni Express	01.08, 03.08 & 06.08.2024	
15075 Shaktinagar - Tanakpur Tribeni Express	31.07, 02.08, 04.08 & 05.08.2024	
15076 Tanakpur - Shaktinagar Tribeni Express	30.07, 01.08, 03.08 & 04.08.2024	
15074 Tanakpur - Singrauli Tribeni Express	31.07, 02.08 & 05.08.2024	
15127 Banaras - New Delhi Kashi Vishwanath Express	31.07.2024 to 04.08.2024	
15128 New Delhi - Banaras Kashi Vishwanath Express	01.08.2024 to 05.08.2024	
12203 Saharsa Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Garib Rath Express	04.08.2024 & 05.08.2024	
12204 Amritsar Jn. - Saharsa Jn. Garib Rath Express	03.08.2024 & 04.08.2024	
15910 Lalgarh Jn. - Dibrugarh Avadh Assam Express	01.08.2024 to 04.08.2024	
15909 Dibrugarh - Lalgarh Jn. Avadh Assam Express	29.07.2024 to 01.08.2024	
15654 Jammu Tawi - Guwahati Amarnath Express	02.08.2024	
15653 Guwahati - Jammu Tawi Amarnath Express	31.07.2024	
12588 Jammu Tawi - Gorakhpur Superfast Express	03.08.2024	
12587 Gorakhpur - Jammu Tawi Superfast Express	04.08.2024	
15623 Bhagat Ki Kothi - Kamakhya Express	30.07.2024 & 06.08.2024	
15624 Kamakhya - Bhagat Ki Kothi Express	26.07.2024 & 02.08.2024	
15531 Saharsa Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Jansadharan Express	21.07, 28.07 & 04.08.2024	
15532 Amritsar Jn. - Saharsa Jn. Jansadharan Express	22.07, 29.07 & 05.08.2024	
12407 New Jalpaiguri - Amritsar Jn. Karmabhoomi Express	24.07, 31.07 & 07.08.2024	
12408 Amritsar Jn. - New Jalpaiguri Karmabhoomi Express	19.07, 26.07 & 02.08.2024	
15655 Kamakhya - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra Express	21.07.2024 & 28.07.2024	
15656 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Kamakhya Express	24.07.2024 & 31.07.2024	
04379 Roza Jn. - Bareilly Mail Express	23.07.2024 to 06.08.2024	
04380 Bareilly - Roza Jn. Mail Express	22.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
05459/05460 Sitapur Jn. - Shahjahanpur - Sitapur Jn. Unreserved Spl.	22.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
04305 Balamau Jn. - Shahjahanpur MEX Special	21.07.2024 to 05.08.2024	
04306 Shahjahanpur - Balamau Jn. MEX Special	23.07.2024 to 07.08.2024	
04337/04338 Sitapur City - Shahjahanpur - Sitapur City Exp. Special	22.07.2024 to 06.08.2024	

DIVERSION OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Train Name	Diverted (Via)	Date(s) (from originating station)	
20504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Ghaziabad Jn. - Kanpur Central - Lucknow	05.08.2024	
15529 Saharsa Jn. - Anand Vihar Terminal Jansadharan Express	Sitapur - Pilibhit Jn. - Bareilly City - Ramganga	24.07.2024 & 31.07.2024	
15530 Anand Vihar Terminal - Saharsa Jn. Jansadharan Express	Ramganga - Bareilly City - Pilibhit Jn. - Sitapur	24.07.2024 & 01.08.2024	
15621 Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal Express	Sitapur - Pilibhit Jn. - Bareilly City - Ramganga	25.07.2024 & 01.08.2024	
15622 Anand Vihar Terminal - Kamakhya Express	Ramganga - Bareilly City - Pilibhit Jn. - Sitapur	27.07.2024 & 03.08.2024	
14009 Bapudham Motihari - Anand Vihar (T) Champaran Satyagrah Exp.	Sitapur - Pilibhit Jn. - Bareilly City - Ramganga	21.07, 23.07, 25.07, 28.07, 30.07 & 01.08, 04.08.2024	
14010 Anand Vihar (T) - Bapudham Motihari Champaran Satyagrah Exp.	Ramganga - Bareilly City - Pilibhit Jn. - Sitapur	22.07, 24.07, 27.07, 29.07, 31.07 & 03.08.2024	
SHORT TERMINATION/ORIGINATION OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Train Name	Short Terminate at/ Short Originate from/	Train Cancelled between Stations	Date(s) (from originating station)
12369 Howrah Jn. - Dehradun Kumbha Express	at Lucknow	Bareilly - Moradabad - Laksar Jn. - Haridwar Jn. - Dehradun	31.07, 01.08, 03.08 & 04.08.2024
12370 Dehradun - Howrah Jn. Kumbha Express	from Lucknow	Dehradun - Haridwar Jn. - Laksar Jn. - Moradabad - Bareilly	01.08, 02.08, 04.08, 05.08.2024
12327 Howrah Jn. - Dehradun Upasana Express	at Lucknow	Bareilly - Moradabad - Laksar Jn. - Haridwar Jn. - Dehradun	02.08.2024
12328 Dehradun - Howrah Jn. Upasana Express	from Lucknow	Dehradun - Haridwar Jn. - Laksar Jn. - Moradabad - Bareilly	03.08.2024
04319 Lucknow - Shahjahanpur Express Special	at Balamau Jn.	Masit - Karna - Hardoi - Kaurah - Behtagokal - Todarpur - Anji Shahabad - Aigawan - Kahilia - Roza Jn. - Shahjahanpur	06.07.2024 to 05.08.2024
04320 - Shahjahanpur - Lucknow Express Special	from Balamau Jn.	Shahjahanpur - Roza Jn. - Kahilia - Aigawan - Anji Shahabad - Todarpur - Behtagokal - Kaurah - Hardoi - Karna - Masit	07.07.2024 to 06.08.2024
RESCHEDULING OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Train Name	Rescheduling of Trains (Originating Station)		
12392 New Delhi - Rajgir Shramjivi Express	Train will be Rescheduled to depart from New Delhi at 14:10 hrs. instead of 13:10 hrs. (60 minutes late) on 05.08.2024		
20504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Train will be Rescheduled to depart from New Delhi at 12:40 hrs. instead of 11:25 hrs. (75 minutes late) on 03.08.2024		
20508 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani Express	Train will be Rescheduled to depart from New Delhi at 12:40 hrs. instead of 11:25 hrs. (75 minutes late) on 04.08.2024		
13151 Kolkata - Jammu Tawi Express	Train will Rescheduled to depart from Kolkata at 01:45 hrs instead of 11:45 hrs. (120 minutes late) on 02.08.2024 & 03.08.2024 and 15:45 hrs instead of 11:45 hrs (240 minutes late) on 04.08.2024		
13152 Jammu Tawi - Kolkata Express	Train will Rescheduled to depart from Jammu Tawi at 22:30 hrs instead of 20:30 hrs. (120 minutes late) on 01.08.2024, 00:30 hrs. instead of 20:30 hrs. (240 minutes late) on 02.08.2024 & 03.08.2024 and 02:30 hrs. instead of 20:30 hrs. (360 minutes late) on 04.08.2024		
12332 Jammu Tawi - Howrah Jn. Himgiri Express	Train will Rescheduled to depart from Jammu Tawi at 01:45 instead of 22:45 (180 minutes late) on 01.08.2024 & 05:45 instead of 22:45 (420 minutes late) on 04.08.2024		
REGULATION OF TRAINS			
Train No. & Train Name	Regulation of Train at Station		
13151 Kolkata - Jammu Tawi Express	Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes Enroute from 19.07.2024 to 22.07.2024		
12204 Amritsar Jn. - Saharsa Jn. Garib Rath	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes Enroute on 20.07.2024 & 21.07.2024		
20504 New Delhi - Dibrugarh Rajdhani	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes Enroute on 23.07.2024		
15044 Kathgodam - Lucknow Express	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes Enroute on 23.07.2024		
14009 Bapudham Motihari - Anand Vihar (T) Champaran Satyagrah Express	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes on 07.07.2024, 11.07.2024 & 60 minutes on 09.07.2024 Enroute		
15621 Kamakhya - Anand Vihar Terminal Express	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes Enroute on 11.07.2024		
13307 Dhanbad Jn. - Firozpur Cantt Jn. Gangasutlej Express	Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes Enroute on 04.08.2024		
15119 Banaras - Dehradun Express	Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes Enroute on 05.08.2024		
15652 Jammu Tawi - Guwahati Lohit Express	Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes Enroute on 31.07.2024		
13005 Howrah Jn. - Amritsar Jn. Mail Express	Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes Enroute on 04.08.2024		
12326 Nangal Dam - Kolkata Gurumukhi Express	Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes Enroute on 03.08.2024		
13151 Kolkata - Jammu Tawi Express	Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes Enroute on 01.08.2024		



Rajawat stuns Gemke, enters second round of Canada Open

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

Moreeng appointed as USA women's cricket team coach



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



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

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

Manchester United manager Erik ten Hag signs contract extension until 2026

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON
Tvesa Malik Sandhu was unable to hold on to her early gains and finished at even-par 73 to be tied-24th at the end of the first round of the Aramco Team Series London here. Fellow Indian Diksha Dagar, who will play in the Major Evian Championships next week, shot 2-over 75 to be tied-46 at the Centurion Club, while Pranavi Urs carded a disappointing 7-over 80 and looks unlikely to make the cut. Tvesa, who lost a play-off last week and missed out on a maiden win on the Ladies European Tour (LET), began well from the 10th tee. She had a bogey on 12th but it was followed by an eagle, her third in her last three rounds. She



had eagles in the second and third rounds of last week's Swiss Ladies Open. She added a birdie on the 18th to turn in 2-under. She dropped three shots on the second, third and seventh but got one back with a birdie on

the eighth to close at 73. Diksha had three birdies, three bogeys and a double-bogey. Ireland's Leona Maguire led the individual standings, while her team comprising Solheim Cup winner, England's Liz Young, Spain's Marta Sanz Barrio and amateur Yana Wilson, was joint leader after day 1 at 14-under. Leona's team shared the lead with Team Nuria Izturiz and Team Georgia Hall. Leona sits at the top of the leaderboard after producing a bogey-free first round. The two-time LPGA winner rolled in back-to-back birdies on her fifth and sixth holes, before making three on the trot from holes 8 to 10 before adding further birdies on the 13th and 15th for her round of seven-under par.

Bopanna-Ebden move to second round

PTI ■ LONDON
India's Rohan Bopanna and his Australian partner Matthew Ebden moved into the second round of the Wimbledon men's doubles event with a smooth win over Robin Haas and Sander Arends here. Bopanna and Ebden sailed past their Dutch opponents 7-5, 6-4 in an hour and 11 minutes in a rain-interrupted match on Wednesday. The second seeds, who are the current Australian Open champions, will face Germany's Hendrik Jebens and Constantin Frantzen in the second round. The Indo-Australian pair had reached the semifinals of the season's third Grand Slam last year. Earlier on Wednesday, India's Sumit Nagal and his Serbian partner Dusan Lajovic were ousted in the first round by



Spaniards Pedro Martinez and Jaume Munar. Martinez and Munar won 6-2, 6-2 in one hour and seven minutes. India will have further representation in men's doubles first round through N Sriram Balaji and Yuki Bhambri later on Thursday. Balaji will partner Britain's Luke Johnson and will face fourth seeds Mate Pavic of Serbia and Marcelo Arevalo of El Salvador. On the other hand, Bhambri and France's Albano Olivetti will take on the Kazakh duo of Alexander Bublik and Alexander Shevchenko.

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

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

ation," she said. "At the end of the (day), it's a game. It's sport." The 19-year-old Todoni is from Romania and was making her Grand Slam debut. "I do think I could have played cleaner at some moments," Gauff said. Five years ago, Gauff beat Williams - a five-time Wimbledon champion - 6-4, 6-4 in the first round and eventually reached the last 16, all in her Grand Slam debut. Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz trailed 6-5 in the first set Wednesday before coming back to beat Aleksander Vukic 7-6 (5), 6-2, 6-2, setting up a third-round meeting with No. 29 Frances Tiafoe after the American eliminated Borna Coric 7-6 (5), 6-1, 6-3. When told by the on-court interviewer that Tiafoe said he's "coming after you," the 21-year-



old Spaniard replied with a smile: "I'm going for him." "We played a really good match

Meadows. In other results, four-time Grand Slam champion Naomi Osaka was eliminated in the second round by No. 19 Emma Navarro by a score of 6-4, 6-1, while No. 1 Jannik Sinner got past 2021 runner-up Matteo Berrettini 7-6 (3), 7-6 (4), 2-6, 7-6 (4) at Centre Court in an all-Italian contest. "I knew that I had to raise my level today," Sinner said. "He is a grass-court specialist. ... I'm very happy how I handled the situation." No. 11 Danielle Collins completed her first-round match - a 6-3, 7-6 (4) win over Clara Tauson. It had been suspended Tuesday night at 4-4 in the second set. No. 20 Beatriz Haddad Maia advanced to the third round by beating Magdalena Frech 7-5, 6-3.