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HARDIK PANDYA TO LEAD INDIA IN T20IS AGAINST SRI LANKA
12 SPORTS

Spiralling Terror in Jammu claims four Army personnel

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A Captain of the Indian Army, along with three other soldiers, was martyred during a fierce gunfight with a group of suspected foreign terrorists in Jammu Dassa forest area, which shares its boundaries with Basantgarh in Udhampur, Anantnag, Keshwan in Kishtwar, and Pogal Paristan in Ramban district, late Monday night. It is suspected the joint team of security forces was lured into the deep forest area where they were ambushed by the well-entrenched group of the foreign terrorists. Kashmir Tigers, a proxy outfit of the Jaish-e-Mohammad, has claimed responsibility for the attack. The gruesome attack comes close on the heels of another deadly ambush on the soldiers near Badnota village of Machhedri in the Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on July 8 in which five soldiers were martyred and five others were injured. The Indian Army, however, maintained that a joint operation with J&K Police was launched in the general area of Urabaggi, 10 km North of Doda. At about 8.40 pm on Monday, the search party was able to establish



Security forces personnel during an encounter with terrorists in Doda forest area, in Doda district of Jammu and Kashmir, on Tuesday

contact with the terrorists hiding in the area, which is a thickly forested and mountainous area with restricted visibility due to low clouds and rain. In the initial volley of fire, four Indian Army personnel were injured, who later succumbed to their injuries. Additional troops and equipment have been

inducted to flush out the terrorists and the use of drones and other technical resources is being ensured. The bravehearts have been identified as Captain Brijesh Thapa, son of Col (Retd) BK Thapa, Naik D Rajesh, Sepoy Bijendra & Sepoy Ajay. Union Defence Minister Rajnath Singh spoke to Indian Army Chief General

Upendra Dwivedi, who apprised him of the ground situation and ongoing operation in Jammu and Kashmir's Doda on Tuesday. In a post on X Defence Minister said, "Deeply saddened by the loss of our brave and courageous Indian Army Soldiers in a counter-terrorist operation in Urrabaggi, Doda (J&K). My heart

goes out to the bereaved families. The nation stands firmly with the families of our soldiers who have sacrificed their lives in the line of duty. Singh said the Counter Terrorist operations are underway, and our soldiers remain committed to eliminating the scourge of terrorism and restoring peace and order in the region.

MoD marches on self-reliance in manufacturing

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Sustaining the momentum in achieving self-reliance in defence manufacturing and minimising import by defence public sector undertakings (DPSU), the Ministry of Defence has notified the fifth Positive Indigenisation List (PIL) consisting of 346 items. It means Indian industry will manufacture these items. Giving details of the list, officials said here on Tuesday the items include strategically-important Line Replacement Units/Systems/ Sub-systems/Assemblies/Sub-assemblies/Spares and Components and raw materials, with import substitution value worth ₹1,048 crore. The items will only be procured after the timelines of indigenisation as indicated in the list available on the Srijan portal. The Ministry of Defence had launched the Srijan portal in 2020. On this portal, DPSUs and Service Headquarters (SHQs) offer defence items to the industries, including MSMEs and start-ups, for indigenisation.



Security personnel and locals near the residence of Jitan Sahani, father of former Minister Mukesh Sahani, after he was found dead, at Ghanshyampur in Darbhanga district, on Tuesday

Spate of political murders

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PATNA/CHEENNA/NEW DELHI

In two separate ghastly murder incidents that have sent shock waves across Bihar, Tamil Nadu, and the political circles of the national Capital days ahead of Parliament Session, former State Minister Mukesh Sahni's 70-year-old father was found stabbed to death at his native home in Darbhanga district. Meanwhile, in southern India, a senior functionary of Naam Tamilar Katchi was hacked to death in Madurai, Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday. The killing of Balasubramanian, who is Madurai district deputy secretary of the NTK, comes days after the murder of Bahujan Samaj Party state chief K Armstrong in Chennai. Jitan Sahani, father of Mukesh Sahani, was allegedly found murdered at

his ancestral home in Bihar's Darbhanga district, police said on Tuesday. His body, with several stab injuries and cut marks on his chest and stomach, was found inside his room at his house in Biraul area this morning. A former Bollywood technician who heads a fledgling outfit Vikasheel Insaan Party (VIP), Sahni was away in Mumbai when the information reached him, party sources said. Upon arriving in Patna, on way to Darbhanga, Sahni told reporters at the airport that he was telephoned by Union Home Minister Amit Shah and RJD president Lalu Prasad. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, in whose Cabinet he had served for about a year-and-a-half, called Sahni to offer condolences and ensure speedy investigation.



Two arrested in NEET leak case

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Tuesday arrested two persons, including a key accused in the NEET-UG paper leak case, who allegedly stole the paper from a National Testing Agency's trunk in Hazaribagh in Jharkhand. With the two arrests, the total number of persons arrested in connection with cases pertaining to leakage, impersonation and other irregularities in the medical entrance exam has now reached 14. The CBI has arrested Pankaj Kumar alias Aditya, a 2017-batch civil engineer from the National Institute of Technology Jamshedpur, who allegedly stole the NEET-UG paper from the NTA trunk in Hazaribagh officials said. Kumar, a resident of Bokaro, was arrested from Patna. According to officials, the CBI has also arrested one Raju Singh who allegedly helped Kumar in stealing the paper and passing them on to other gang members, adding that Singh was arrested from Hazaribagh. Earlier this month, the CBI arrested the main accused, Rakesh Ranjan alias Rocky, from Bihar's Nalanda. Rakesh Ranjan is believed to be one of the key players in the NEET paper leak. The CBI set a trap and conducted raids at four locations in Patna and Kolkata to arrest Ranjan. The CBI has been utilising advanced investigative techniques to track down and apprehend those involved.

Government convenes all-party meet ahead of Monsoon session of Sadan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has convened an all-party meeting on July 21 ahead of the Monsoon session of Parliament which will start next Monday during which the full fledged annual Budget of the third term of the Narendra Modi-led NDA Government will be presented. The traditional "halwa" ceremony, marking the final stage of the Budget preparation process for Union Budget 2024, was held in North Block on Tuesday, in the presence of Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The customary ceremony begins with the Finance Minister stirring the "halwa" in the kadhai and then serving it to the colleagues in the Ministry. It is a tradition performed every year ahead of the Budget and it marks the final stage of preparing the plan for the upcoming financial year. Meanwhile, the Opposition parties under the INDIA Bloc too have convened a meeting of their Parliamentarians the same evening and another on July 22 morning ahead of the resumption of Parliament to discuss the strategy to raise the issues during the three-weeks-long Monsoon cum



The Union Minister for Finance and Corporate Affairs, Nirmala Sitharaman, commences final stage of Union Budget 2024 with halwa ceremony, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

Budget session. The meeting has been called by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju, the Ministry said in a statement. This will be Leader of Opposition and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's first time at the customary session-eve meeting of the floor leaders from all parties if he attends it. Another large party in the Opposition ranks, Trinamool Congress, has regretted it won't attend the meet. The Monsoon session is scheduled to begin on July 22 and will conclude on August 12. The Union Budget will be presented on July 23. Finance Minister Sitharaman

will become the first Finance Minister in India's history to deliver seven consecutive Budgets. She will surpass the record previously held by Morarji Desai, who presented six consecutive Budgets between 1959 and 1963. While P Chidambaram is in the second spot, having presented the Budget on nine occasions, but in breaks which includes first in 1997, during the United Front Government led by Prime Minister HD Deve Gowda. Former President Pranab Mukherjee presented eight Budgets during his time as Finance Minister.

EC releases SOPs for EVMs

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Acting on a Supreme Court judgment, the Election Commission (EC) on Tuesday released a technical Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for checking and verifying the burnt memory of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), with expanded choices for candidates. It specifies that if the results of a mock poll tally with the VVPAT slips, then there is no tampering. The technical SOP includes the selection of EVMs from any polling station in an Assembly constituency, the mix and match of EVM units (BU-CU-VVPAT) from any polling station, connecting BU-CU-VVPAT in any sequence and the option of casting up to 1,400 votes in a mock poll in any sequence. In its letter to the Chief Electoral Officers, Chairman-cum-Managing Directors of Bharat Electronics Limited and Electronics Corporation of India Limited, the EC said the candidates would have the choice of selecting EVMs from any polling stations in the constituency and also any combination of the Ballot Units (BUs), Control Units (CUs), and VVPATs up to 5 per cent of the total. They would also be able to decide in which order they want the BU, CU, and VVPAT to be connected. The



order in which the units are connected does not have an impact on how they work. According to the SOP, the checking would be done by authorised and trained engineers from BEL and ECIL. The entire process would be carried out under CCTV cameras and in the presence of candidates or their representatives. On April 26, the Supreme Court had ordered the EC to facilitate checking and verification of the burnt memory or microcontrollers of up to 5 per cent of the Electronic Voting Machines (ballot units and control units) and Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trails of an Assembly constituency or Assembly segment of a Lok Sabha constituency on the written request of the candidates who come in

second and third in that seat. The EC wrote, "There can be varied technical methods to verify the fidelity of a firmware burnt into a microcontroller within confines of a research laboratory or a secured manufacturing environment. Checking and verification of any firmware burnt (fused) into the memory of a microcontroller can be verified in a public process by giving a vast number of ransom test vectors as inputs and evaluating the intended outcome(s)." The poll body said the eligible candidates can give choices of polling stations or serial numbers of machines from within the Assembly segment or constituency, subject to a maximum of five per cent EVMs used in that segment or seat to undergo check and verification

process. This will ensure the EVMs are picked up from across the constituency as per choice of the applicant without the involvement of a third party or officials in selecting or leaving out any particular machine. The choice to mix and match EVM units from any polling station in the assembly constituency has also been offered. If any applicant candidate selects any specific unit — ballot unit, control unit or VVPAT — of a particular polling station, he/she is not bound to choose other units of the same set used at that polling station. At least one ballot unit, one control unit and one VVPAT or paper trail machine makes up for one EVM. Instead, the applicant candidate can mix and match and give his choice of other units from remaining polled units used at other polling stations in the assembly constituency or assembly segment to make a set. Polled units are those which were used in the elections to cast votes. All EVM units will undergo self-diagnosis. Several electrical parameters will be checked, including the fidelity of the burnt memory and only self-diagnosed units will thereafter go for further check and verification.

Top babus tasked to push Modi's 100-day agenda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top bureaucrats of all Central Government Ministries and departments have been directed to identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned in the first 100 days of the Government and implementation of action points, as envisioned by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In a communication to all secretaries, Cabinet Secretary Rajiv Gauba also said the 'whole of the Government' approach has to be adopted by the Ministries and departments in formulating and implementing their policies



Rajiv Gauba File photo

and schemes and concerted steps should be taken for India to become the third largest economy in the shortest possible time. He said Modi has emphasised that all Ministries and departments should identify at least one impactful project to be commissioned, one project to be grounded and

one scheme or initiative to be launched during the first 100 days of the new Government. "Ministries/departments to take steps for implementation of action points in 100 days' agenda prepared by them, after obtaining necessary approvals," the letter said. The secretaries were told that each Ministry and department will formulate initiatives and ideas for implementation as part of 'Panch Pran' (five resolutions) announced by the Prime Minister during his Independence Day address on August 15, 2022. "Each Ministry/ department to effect qualitative improvements in their grievance redressal systems to make them more sensitive,

accessible and meaningful. 'Ease of Living' for citizens is a high priority for government. Ministries/departments to make sustained efforts for reducing compliance burden and decriminalising minor offences," the letter said. The Cabinet Secretary said a comprehensive exercise to be undertaken by all Ministries and departments to simplify rules and regulations and processes to ensure that these are consistent with the spirit of laws and policies. This may be ensured also while framing new rules and processes, he said. He said Ministries and departments should revamp their websites to ensure that they are user friendly, taking into account the global best practices.

Controversial IAS officer Puja Khedkar grounded

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Relieving her from its district training programme, the Maharashtra Government on Tuesday ordered controversial trainee Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer Dr Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar — who is under scanner for alleged misuse of power and privileges — to return to the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie. Acting on a letter received from the LBSNAA which recalled Puja "for further action", the Maharashtra Government kept her district



training programme on hold and directed her to join the academy on or before July 23. "It is informed that the Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie has decided to keep your district training programme on hold

and immediately recall you for further necessary action. Therefore, you are hereby relieved from the district training programme of the State Government of Maharashtra. You are instructed to join the academy at the earliest but not later than July 23, 2024 under any circumstances," Maharashtra's additional chief secretary (P) Nitin Gadre stated in a letter issued to Puja. Puja's recall to LBSNAA came on the heels of her transfer to Washim from Pune, amid allegations of manipulation of disability and OBC certificates for getting into the civil services.

Harela symbolises peace, prosperity and nature's conservation: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has said that global warming is a subject of concern and contemplation for everyone. He said that nature has bestowed everything on Uttarakhand and it is our responsibility that the natural resources are used judiciously.

The CM participated in a plantation drive in the name of martyrs at Maldevta here on Tuesday on the occasion of Harela. He said that the festival of Harela symbolises

year the theme of Harela in Uttarakhand is 'Ghar Ghar Hariyali, Laya Samridhi Aur Khushali'.

Dhama said that the State government has taken a target to plant 50 lakh saplings during Harela. The campaign will end on August 15 and the State government will take the help of social organisations, NGOs and self help groups for the success of the campaign.

Dhama appealed to the

number one spot in the country in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

The CM appealed that plantation should be done in the schools, colleges, local bodies and government and private institutions.

He appreciated the effort of women of Kot village of Rudraprayag in development of 'Singlas forest' under the guidance of environmentalists.

In the programme the CM planted saplings in the memory of Kathua (Jammu and Kashmir) martyrs and the forest personnel who lost their lives in the Binsar fire incident.

Speaking on the occasion Forest minister Subodh Uniyal said that a target to plant 1.64 crore saplings has been taken on Harela. The minister said that forest wealth is an important source of livelihood in the State. He said the global warming and melting of glaciers are a matter of grave concern. Rajya Sabha MP Naresh Bansal, MLA Umesh Sharma Kau, principal secretary RK Sudhanshu, Head of Forest Force (HoFF) Dhananjai Mohan, district magistrate of Dehradun Sonika and others were present on the occasion.



happiness, peace, prosperity and environmental conservation. This festival connects life with nature, Dhama said and added that every one of us should take a pledge that we will conserve nature and provide a clean environment to our coming generation. He said that this

people of the State to protect the planted trees. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had started 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Nam' campaign on world environment day and crores of saplings have been planted in the campaign till date. The CM said that Uttarakhand is at

MDDA plants 4,000 saplings on Harela

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Mussoorie Dehradun Development Authority (MDDA) planted about 4,000 plants and saplings on the occasion of Harela festival on Tuesday. The MDDA team under the supervision of vice chairperson Banshidhar Tiwari carried out A plantation drive in various parts of the city including near Haridwar Bypass, Doon Vihar and Jakhan. The chief secretary Radha Raturi along with her husband and ex director general of police Anil Raturi also joined the team in the drive in Doon Vihar. The officials said that the whole MDDA team carried out a plantation in the Vigilance road near Haridwar Bypass in a joint association with senior superintendent of police, Vigilance, Dharendra

Gunjyal and others. Tiwari said on the occasion that the MDDA aims to promote greenery in the city and has been encouraging people and organisations to participate in plantation drives and subsequently protect the plants. He said that the MDDA has set the target of planting one lakh plants and saplings in this monsoon. The MDDA has included several schools, NGOs and resident welfare societies in this initiative to ensure maximum plantation



in areas that fall under the authority. Tiwari stated that besides plantation, the MDDA and the associated agencies will ensure proper care and protection of the planted saplings too.

MCD plants 3,000 saplings on Harela

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) in association with Vardaan Sanstha planted 3,000 saplings for 30 days. They will mostly plant saplings and plants of fruits and will ensure they are protected well till they grow



on the occasion of Harela.

Addressing the plantation programme on the MCD's land at Danda Lakhond, the Dehradun municipal commissioner Gaurav Kumar said that plants and trees are required to keep the environment clean like food is must to give a human body proper nutrition. He said that trees and plants absorb the impurities of the environment and give us pure air which is the essence of life on earth. Everyone should plant as many trees as possible while ensuring their protection till they grow into a healthy tree. The general secretary of Vardaan Sanstha Anil Chandola also informed the organisation has commenced a plantation campaign under which they will plant saplings at 30 different places in Dehradun

into a healthy tree, he added.

Guv and minister plant saplings to mark Harela

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The governor lieutenant general (retd) Gurmit Singh and Women Empowerment and Child Development (WECD) minister Rekha Arya planted saplings at an Anganwadi Centre in celebration of Harela on Tuesday. The trees were planted as part of the 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Nam' programme. During the event, Singh emphasised the significance of the Harela festival in promoting a connection with nature and the importance of trees. He said that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged everyone to



plant a tree in memory of their mothers, a call that is being embraced by many. Further, Arya expressed her delight in celebrating the Harela festival with her

Anganwadi sisters and highlighted the campaign's wide-reaching success. She emphasised the parallels between the life-giving nature of trees and plants and the guidance provided by mothers and was pleased to see widespread participation in the campaign. The Harela festival not only provides an opportunity to connect with nature but also teaches us how to enhance the environment around us, she said.

Health Dept plants 90 saplings on Harela

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Health department planted 90 saplings at Ranipokhri on Tuesday to mark the occasion of Harela. Regarding this, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sanjay Jain stated that the Harela Festival

is a celebration of the folk culture of Uttarakhand, which also emphasised our responsibility towards nature and environmental protection. He said that they had planted the saplings with the intention of public welfare and in alignment with the principle of "Sarve Santu Niramaya". Trees were also planted at the district hospital and Char Dham transit hospital in Rishikesh to commemorate the Harela festival.



Kandwal emphasises importance of planting trees

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chairperson of the Uttarakhand State Commission for Women (USCW), Kusum Kandwal emphasised the importance of planting trees for environmental protection and providing clean air. She said this during the tree tree plantation and national clean air programme organised for the occasion of Harela in Rishikesh.



for Harela, the folk festival of Uttarakhand, symbolising greenery, happiness and prosperity. She urged everyone to pledge to continue the tradition of nature conservation and maintain greenery on this occasion. She emphasised the importance of collective efforts in conserving the environment and acknowledged the initiatives taken by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama for nature conservation. Kandwal urged enthusiastic participation in these efforts.

Speaking at the event, Kandwal highlighted the significance of not only planting new trees but also preserving old ones. She said that

the Chipko movement led by Gaura Devi is an example which all should follow. Kandwal extended her wish-

Shri Venkateshwara University inks academic agreement with Brazil

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Meerut-based Shri Venkateshwara University signed an academic agreement with Brazil on the subjects of Agriculture, Biotechnology, Veterinary Science, Animal Husbandry and Dairy Industry and Pharmacy on Tuesday. This information was jointly given by the High Commissioner of Brazil in India Angelo Di Queiroz and the pro-chancellor of Shri Venkateshwara University Rajeev Tyagi after agreeing on the 'Joint Academic Agreement' at the Brazilian

Embassy in New Delhi. Lauding the agreement, the Venkateshwara group chairman Sudhir Giri said that under this agreement, teachers and students of both the countries would jointly work together for advanced technological innovations in the form of seminars/workshops and regular classes in each other's country. Speaking on the occasion, Angelo Di Queiroz said they were happy to be associated with a reputable educational group of India.



NDUSSL launches tree plantation drive to mark Harela

PNS ■ LALKUAN

Under the programme 'Ek Ped Ma Ke Nam' hosted by Nainital Dugdh Utpadak Sahkari Sangh Limited (NDUSSL) to mark Harela festival on Tuesday, its chairman Mukesh Bora planted a

fruit-bearing tree in its dairy premises in Lalkuan. With this, the tree plantation programme was launched under the aegis of Uttarakhand Dairy Federation Limited.

work to ensure the survival and growth of the saplings being planted. The general manager of the Uttarakhand Cooperative Dairy Federation Limited Anurag Sharma was also present on the occasion.



Slew of decisions taken in core committee meeting of Ma Naina Devi Nainital Vyapar Mandal

PNS ■ NAINITAL

After the registration of Ma Naina Devi Nainital Vyapar Mandal and receipt of registration certificate under the Society Act, a meeting of the first core committee was held in Boat House Club on Tuesday presided over by the founder president of Vyapar Mandal Puneet Tandon. The traders associated with the organisation said that many important decisions were taken at the meeting. As per the decision, the life insurance of the traders associated with the Vyapar Mandal will be ensured under the group life insurance of Rs eight lakh. For this group life insurance, no annual fee or premium would be taken from

any member as of now and as far as possible, the Vyapar Mandal would try to maintain it from its own funds, said senior functionaries. It was also decided that to ensure financial strength of the Vyapar Mandal, the membership fee would be taken regularly from the date of registration of the organisation in May 2024. It was further decided that along with the ordinary fee, financial contribution would also be made continuously by all the core committee members for strengthening the organisation though this proposal is put for 21 core committee members and is voluntary.

UGB celebrates Harela across U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Uttarakhand Gramin Bank (UGB) celebrated the Harela festival with tree plantations across the State on Tuesday. The main event was held in the Garhi Cantt,

ment with the Ek Ped Ma Ke Nam, which was initiated by the Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the World Environment Day, the bank undertook this extensive initiative to promote environmental sustainability. About 40 saplings were planted in the Garhi Cantt event. Among the senior UGB officers present on the occasion



Dehradun while about 290 branches across 13 districts of the State participated in the drive. The senior UGB officers said that in align-

included the chairman Hari Har Patnaik and general managers Amita Raturi and Bharti Naudiyal.

Information memorandum for notice inviting e-tender for evaluation study of "DR. AMBEDKAR FOUNDATION (DAF) CHAIRS" and "TO ASSESS THE SUPPORT PROVIDED BY DAF TO THE DR. AMBEDKAR CHAIRS". Includes objectives, important information on date and time schedule, and contact details.

GRIHUM HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED (FORMERLY KNOWN AS POONAWALLA HOUSING FINANCE) LIMITED. DEMAND NOTICE UNDER SECTION 13(2) OF THE SARFAESI ACT, 2002. Includes details of the secured asset and amount due in Rs.

CHANGE OF NAME. I, Prince Chauhan S/o Atma Ram Chauhan R/o Rudrakshpuram Sunderwala Dehradun Raipur (of) Chakrata Uttarakhand-248008 changed my name to Siddharth Chauhan. PD(604)A. I, Sudhir Nain S/o Shri Umed Singh r/o House No. 126-127, Ground Floor, Pocket-7, Sector-24 Rohini Delhi-110085 have changed my name Sudhir Kumar to Sudhir Nain for all purpose. PD(605)A.

THE PIONEER CLASSIFIEDS PUBLIC NOTICE. In my husband's army record my name is mistakenly recorded as PRIYANKA KANDERI whereas my correct name is PRIYANKA as mentioned in other all documents. Priyanka W/o Army No- JC 533640M Subedar Vikram Singh R/o Vill- Baidanu, Post Langasu, Tehsil Karanprayag, District Chamoli Uttarakhand. I, Phayola Devi Mother of Army No. 4104609R RFN Himanshu, 15 Garhwal Rifle, resident of Bairai village, Tehsil Narendra Nagar, District Tehri Garhwal, Uttarakhand, my name is Phyonia Devi wrongly recorded in the army records of my son, whereas my correct name is Phayola Devi. In future I should be known by my correct name.

मेरे पति के सैन्य अभिलेखोंनुसार, मेरा गलत नाम खराडे प्रिती मनोहर दर्ज है, सही नाम प्रिती दादा पिपरे आधार नं.917232262863 W/o आर्मी नं. 21011196K लांस नायक पिपरे दादा बाबूराव, ग्राम बसरवाडी शिऊर, पोस्ट जमखेड, तह. जमखेड, जिला अहमदनगर, महाराष्ट्र 413201 है।

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Will not use Kedarnath Dham name and picture in Buradi temple: Rautela

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Kedarnath Dham Trust, Delhi, has clarified that it is constructing Kedarnath temple and not a Dham in Delhi. Addressing a Press conference here on Tuesday the founder and

Rautela said that some people are misleading the public on the issue in order to gain political mileage.

He said that the trust wants to clarify that Baba

faith for crores of people across the world and it will continue to remain so in the future as well. "We are only constructing Kedarnath temple that is a temple of Lord Shiva in Buradi and it is not the first time that the temple of Baba Bholenath is being constructed in the country," he said.

Rautela added that being one of the 12 Jyotirling, there cannot be any replica of Kedarnath. He however gave many examples where the names of Jyotirling were used in temples constructed elsewhere in the country. Similarly, he said that there is a temple in Mumbai named Badrinath and there are many Vaishno Devi temples in different parts of the country.

Teerth Purohitis suspend agitation following CM's assurance

Kedarnath Dham name will not be used in Buradi: Dhama

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Following the assurance given by chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama, the Teerth Purohitis in Kedarnath have suspended their agitation on the proposed Kedarnath temple in Buradi in Delhi. The CM assured the president of Kedar Sabha, Rajkumar Tiwari that the

Dham for the last three days. The local shopkeepers and other people were also supporting the agitation. Suspending the agitation, a member of Kedar Sabha said that the Teerth Purohitis are satisfied with the assurance given by the CM that the picture and the name of the



name of Kedarnath Dham will not be used in the temple in Buradi. He also assured that the picture of the Kedarnath Dham will also not be used by those constructing the temple in Buradi. Following the assurance the Teerth Purohitis and the stakeholders suspended their agitation.

The Teerth Purohitis and the stakeholders were holding a protest in Kedarnath

Kedarnath Dham will not be used by those constructing the temple in Buradi. He said that the Teerth Purohitis have full faith in CM Dhama because he supported their cause when they were protesting against the Devasthanam board. However, the Teerth Purohitis warned that they will resume the agitation if those constructing the temple use the name of Kedarnath Dham in the temple in Buradi, Delhi.

Congress demands Shila's return to Kedarnath from Buradi in Delhi

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Uttarakhand Congress has demanded that chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama should use his authority to ensure that the Kedarnath Dham Trust, Delhi, which is planning to construct a Kedarnath temple in Buradi in Delhi removes the word Dham from its name and return the Shila (rock) transported from Kedarnath.

The CM carried the Shila. "The sacred Shila is the spiritual property of the people of Uttarakhand and we will not allow its commercial use," he said.

Godiyal added that the Kedarnath Dham Trust, Delhi, is using the picture of Kedarnath Dham located in high Himalayas and has

structure. He said that the interests of the Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) are getting hurt and it should take action against those who are misusing the name of Kedarnath. Godiyal said that all the teerth purohitis and stakeholders are agitated over the upcoming Kedarnath Dham in Delhi and the Congress party is standing



Interacting with the media-persons here on Tuesday, the former Pradesh Congress

Committee (PCC) president Ganesha Godiyal said that CM Dhama was the chief guest in the foundation laying ceremony of the temple in question in Buradi where the organisers

claimed that those who are not able to go to Kedarnath Dham in Uttarakhand can attain the same blessings of Lord Shiva by paying obeisance in the upcoming Kedarnath Dham in Delhi. He said that the CM has said that some people are misleading the public on the issue and claimed that there are some wolves in the hide of lions. Godiyal claimed that it was CM Dhama who carried the Shila (rock) from Kedarnath to Buradi. He questioned under which authority

Mahara to undertake Kedarnath Bachao Yatra

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara will undertake a Kedarnath Bachao Yatra from July 24. He said that the religious sentiments of the followers of Sanatan Dharma have been hurt by those who are using pictures of Kedarnath Dham to seek donations for construction of a temple in Buradi in Delhi. Mahara said that he will start his Yatra from

Har ki Paldi in Haridwar and the foot march will end by offering prayers at Kedarnath Dham. He said that Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati has questioned about the disappearance of 230 kilograms of gold from Kedarnath and the government should give an answer on the subject.

Cong sinned, will face consequences in Kedarnath bypoll: BJP

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Sating that the Congress has incurred the sin of propaganda regarding Kedarnath Dham, the Bharatiya Janata Party said that the people will teach it a lesson in the Kedarnath Assembly bypoll. The BJP State president Mahendra Bhatt said that the controversy created over Kedarnath Dham is a result of the opposition's propaganda. "Every devotee in the world knows that the Dham established by Adi Shankaracharya cannot be tampered with. These temples

are in the Himalayan and it is not possible for anybody to lessen their importance in any way. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama and the party have already made it clear that the establishment of any other shrine in the name of Kedar Dham will not be allowed in any other place. Despite this, the Congress is incurring sin by spreading misinformation and rumours on this issue to gain political mileage. The Congress wants to affect the Kedarnath Yatra by doing so. Earlier, the

Congress had spread lies on registration, facilities and other aspects to sabotage the Char Dham Yatra. Considering this, the people of Kedarnath will certainly punish the Congress in the coming Assembly bypoll in the constituency. The Congress has objected to lord Ram's place and didn't like the assistance being provided to Jyotirmath. Now they are conspiring to affect the Char Dham Yatra by creating a new controversy," the BJP State president said.

RFID and Aadhaar card to be considered for simplifying Char Dham Yatra registration

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief secretary Radha Raturi reviewed the report of Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Rohtak on the carrying capacity of Char Dham and directed officials to prepare an action plan for a smooth and safe pilgrimage. In a meeting chaired by Raturi on Tuesday, Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) card based registration system and Aadhaar based registration were discussed to simplify the registration system of pilgrims. A detailed discussion was held on the study report prepared by the director of IIM Rohtak and his team regarding the carrying capacity and standard operating procedure of the Char Dham Yatra and to make the pilgrimage more convenient and safer for people.



During the meeting, the chief secretary directed that an attempt should be made to accurately assess the carrying capacity of the Char Dham for the action plan to be made for

a smooth and safe pilgrimage. In the action plan, special attention should be paid to issues like effective arrangements for medical and emergency services for the pilgrims, effective management and monitoring of the Yatra and strengthening the local economy while preserving the

local ecology. Raturi directed officials to accord priority to improvement in the condition of roads, traffic jams and arrangement for feedback from pilgrims in the action plan. In view of the safety and convenience of the Char Dham pilgrims, implementation of an SMS weather update

Police expect 60 per cent reduction in Doon traffic after staggered timings of schools

Timings of 21 schools in Doon to change from Friday

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

After the approval of the Dehradun district magistrate Sonika, the timings of 21 schools in Dehradun will change from Friday. The administration has asked to keep school timings between 7 AM to 1:45 AM to reduce congestion during peak morning hours. The police expect that this plan will reduce about 60 per cent traffic congestion during peak hours on weekdays.

The police sought objections from these schools regarding timing changes but nobody has raised any concerns so far, the Dehradun senior superintendent of police Ajai Singh said. He informed that these 21 schools are mainly situated in Dalanwala, East Canal Road, Rajpur Road, Nehru Colony, Subhash Road and Curzon Road where traffic is severely affected in morning and afternoon. Over 25,000 students study in these schools and most of them do not have sufficient parking space inside them.

The SSP said that most of these schools were built 15-20 years ago when traffic and parking was not a massive issue in the city due to which, most of these do not have ample parking space. The police made the plan of changing the timings after talking to the representatives of these schools regarding the traffic jam during peak hours. They responded positively and have raised no objection regarding the plan so far, he said. Singh stated that this strategic move aims to alleviate peak hour traffic in Dehradun, providing a smoother commute for residents and ensuring a safer and more efficient travel experience for students and their families. By staggering the school timings, the traffic load will get distributed more evenly throughout the morning and afternoon, reducing bottlenecks and

easing congestion. He said that the police plan to continuously monitor the impact of these changes and are open to further adjustments based on feedback from schools, parents and local citizens.

Nepali labourer dies under debris, another worker injured

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A Nepali labourer died and another got seriously injured after getting trapped under debris that fell from a mountain near Marwari bridge at Jyotirmath in Chamoli district in the wee hours of Tuesday. The officials said that some labourers lived in a small house near Marwari bridge near Badrinath national highway. Due to heavy rain in the area, debris fell over their house around 2 AM on Tuesday. The police were called at the spot where they found out that two labourers were buried under the debris and only their heads were visible. One of the labourers had died at the spot. Considering the seriousness of the situation, the police called the rescue team of the State Disaster Response Force (SDRF) at 2:30 AM. The team reached there amid heavy rainfall at night under the supervision

of sub inspector Vineet Devrani. He informed that it was quite challenging to rescue the trapped man amid heavy rainfall as debris started falling down soon after the SDRF team started the rescue operation. The SDRF constable Pradeep Lasiyal and constable Shekhar Nagarkoti showed presence of mind in such a difficult situation and stopped the falling of stones with the help of a mechanical excavator nearby. This helped in saving the life of the trapped labourer while keeping the whole rescue team safe, he said. The deceased labourer has been identified as Gum Bahadur (35) from Surkhet village in Nepal and the injured labourer was Dinesh Bahadur (22) from Kalikot in Nepal. He was taken to the community health centre in Jyotirmath for treatment.

ART centres to be established in local hospitals

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Anti-Retroviral Therapy (ART) centres will soon be established in Almora, Tanakpur, Srinagar and Karnprayag as per the directives of the chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama and Health minister Dhan Singh Rawat to facilitate the treatment of HIV positive patients, the Health secretary R Rajesh Kumar said. Kumar informed that during his recent inspection of the sub district hospital in Tanakpur, he observed that 50-60 HIV-positive patients from the area had to travel to the ART centre in Haldwani for medication. In response, he took the matter seriously and directed the linkage of ART services with the local hospital. All necessary formalities for this integration have been completed by the department. Once the ART centre is operational in Tanakpur, patients will no longer need to travel to Haldwani for medication, as that will be provided locally, he said. Kumar highlighted that HIV positive patients will

receive free medication at the ART centre. Additionally, he stated that currently, approximately 350 individuals from Chamoli and Pauri districts have to travel to ART centres in Dehradun every month to obtain medication. In light of this situation, he has mandated the establishment and operation of ART centres in the Government Medical College in Srinagar, Pauri district and the sub district hospital in Karnprayag, Chamoli district. Following this directive, ART centres have been successfully set up and are operational in both of these medical facilities. Additionally, an ART centre is set to be established soon in Soban Singh Jeena Medical College in Almora district. He informed that the ART centre in Almora will be enabling approximately 300 individuals to access ART services. Kumar emphasised that with the introduction of these centres, individuals will not suffer financial losses while also experiencing improvements in their health.

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Exam panel receives feedback on curbing lapses in exam process

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Laying down norms for any irregularities or lapses in the exam process, no normalisation of marks, infrastructure checks at exam centres and proper communication to candidates in case of schedule changes are among thousands of suggestions the Centre's high-level exam reform panel has received from stakeholders. According to sources, a majority of these suggestions have come from students.

"Some aspirants have suggested laying down clear norms in case of any lapses. Like the grace marks issue, aspirants want to know what will happen in a given scenario, what the options are and what formula will be used. There are also complaints about some centres being too far off and not having the required infrastructure," a source said.

"There are concerns about the normalisation process too. Some aspirants have suggested against it, some have asked for transparency in the process so scores are neither inflated nor



drastically reduced," the source added.

Headed by former ISRO chief R Radhakrishnan, the committee tasked with reviewing the National Testing Agency's functioning had sought suggestions, views and ideas from stakeholders, particularly students and parents, between June 27 and July 7 through the MyGov platform.

The panel has received over 37,000 responses from students, parents, coaching insti-

tutions, school teachers, academic institutions and even career counsellors among others. It is supposed to submit its report within two months. In the line of fire over alleged irregularities in the medical entrance examination NEET and PhD entrance NET, the Centre last month set up the panel to ensure transparent, smooth and fair conduct of examinations through the National Testing Agency (NTA).

While NEET is under the scanner over several irregularities, including alleged leaks, UGC-NET was cancelled as the Ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam had been compromised. Both matters are being probed by the CBI. Two other exams - CSIR-UGC NET and NEET PG - were cancelled at the last moment as a pre-emptive step. The panel also includes former AIIMS Delhi director Randeep Guleria, Central University of Hyderabad Vice-Chancellor B J Rao, Professor Emeritus in the Department of Civil Engineering at IIT Madras K Ramamurthy, People Strong co-founder and Karmayogi Bharat board member Pankaj Bansal, IIT Delhi Dean of Student Affairs Aditya Mittal and MoE Joint Secretary Govind Jaiswal. The committee has also been tasked with examining the existing security protocols related to the setting of the papers and other processes for various examinations and making recommendations to enhance the robustness of the system.

India protests Zelenskyy's remarks against PM Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow, India has conveyed to Kyiv its displeasure over the remarks, diplomatic sources said on Monday. It is learnt that India's disappointment over the comments by Zelenskyy was communicated to Ukraine's mission in Delhi. New Delhi's views on the comments (by Zelenskyy) were conveyed to Kyiv, the sources said. There was no official word on the matter yet. Last Tuesday, the Ukrainian president described Modi's visit to Moscow as a "huge" disappointment and a "devastating blow" to peace efforts. In a social media post on, Zelenskyy specifically referred to Russia's missile attacks on Ukraine including on a children's hospital in Kyiv. "A Russian missile struck the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, targeting young cancer patients. Many were buried under the rubble," Zelenskyy said. "It is a huge disappointment and a devastating blow



to peace efforts to see the leader of the world's largest democracy hug the world's most bloody criminal in Moscow on such a day," he said. Modi visited Moscow on July 8 and 9 in his first trip to Russia since its invasion of Ukraine.

In his summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Modi, delivering an unambiguous message, said a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace talks do not succeed amidst bombs, guns and bullets. In his televised opening remarks, Modi said the killing of innocent children is heart-wrenching

and very painful in a reference to the strike in the children's hospital in Kyiv. "Let's take war, any conflict or terrorist acts: any person who believes in humanity feels pain when people die, and especially when innocent children die. When we feel such pain, the heart simply explodes, and I had the opportunity to talk about these issues with you yesterday," Modi told Putin. The Ohmادتy Children's Hospital in Kyiv was hit after Russia unleashed a barrage of missiles on cities across Ukraine on July 8. At least 38 people, including two in the hospital, were killed in the strikes.

UP provides 84 per cent rural homes with tap water

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Government on Tuesday informed the Centre that more than two lakh rural households in the State have been provided with tap water connection with water-scarce Bundelkhand region having an average of 90 per cent coverage.

The Government made a presentation before the Jal Shakti Ministry in which these findings were shared.

According to the presentation, 2,23,86,760 rural families (84.19 per cent) have been provided with tap connections under the 'Har Ghar Nal Se Jal' scheme as of Monday. The Jal Jeevan Mission aims to provide tap water connection to all rural households in the country by this year. Till now, about 77.55 per cent rural households have been provided with tap water connections, according to the official data.

All districts of Bundelkhand have over 90 per cent coverage, according to the State Government.

In the Bundelkhand region, Mahoba district leads with 99.64 per cent coverage, followed by Lalitpur (99.4 per cent), Banda (99.01 per cent), Jhansi 98.92 (per cent), Chitrakoot (98.76 per cent), Hamirpur (98.75 per cent) and Jalaun (94.37 per cent).

Union Minister of Jal Shakti CR Patil commended the Uttar Pradesh Government for its outstanding work in implementing the Jal Jeevan Mission in the review meeting.

During the review meeting, he emphasised the need for awareness among villagers about the importance of water conservation, stressing that every drop of water is precious and must be saved.

The Union minister encouraged the Uttar Pradesh Government to launch a separate campaign to promote water conservation. Patil praised the state's efforts in overcoming challenges to achieve significant progress especially in the Vindhya and Bundelkhand regions.

Principal Secretary to Namami Gange and Rural drinking water department, Anurag Srivastava also shared the data of Vindhya region. In Vindhya region, Mirzapur has 97.43 per cent coverage and Sonbhadra has 77.11 per cent coverage.

India inaugurates Asia's first CEPI 'Pre-clinical Network Facility'



ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Joining a network of pre-clinical hi-tech labs that include counterparts in the USA, Europe, and Australia, India can now boast to house Asia's pioneering 'Pre-clinical Network Facility' set up under the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) at the Regional Centre of Biotechnology, Faridabad. It was inaugurated by Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh on Tuesday. The facility is equipped to handle BSL3 pathogens and features one of the largest small animal facilities in the country, capable of housing around 75,000 mice along with other species for experimental purposes. This infrastructure will support high-impact research and development efforts related to epidemic preparedness and vaccine development.

BSL-3 laboratories are used to study infectious agents or toxins that may be transmitted through the air and cause potentially lethal infections. Researchers perform all experiments in a biosafety cabinet. In addition, Dr. Jitendra Singh inaugurated the "Genetically Defined Human Associated Microbial Culture Collection" (Ge-HuMic) facility. This new repository will provide microbial cultures to research institutions, universities, and industries, fostering national and international research collaborations. The facility will also offer genetically characterized specific pathogen-free animals, including cryopreserved

embryos and sperm, supporting researchers across India, said the Minister.

The Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), a part of the Biotechnology Research and Innovation Council (BRIC), has played a key role in facilitating over a dozen agreements and MoUs with the private sector. These agreements focus on vaccine development for Nipah Virus, Influenza, and other respiratory diseases, further advancing innovative research and translational science in the country.

Speaking at the 14th Foundation Day of THSTI, Dr. Jitendra Singh praised the institute's accomplishments over a short span of 14 years, noting its critical role during the COVID-19 pandemic. He acknowledged the contributions of Dr. M.K. Bhan established the facility and emphasised the Department of Biotechnology's progress despite resource constraints. Dr. Singh highlighted the importance of the institute's contributions to vaccine development and its alignment with the Prime Minister's vision for a TB-free India. He also addressed contemporary health challenges, including lifestyle-related metabolic diseases and the global adoption of kangaroo mother care practices.

The event was attended by Dr. Rajesh Gokhale, Secretary of DBT, Dr. K. Shrinath Reddy, former President of the Public Health Foundation of India, and Dr. Kathikeyan, Director of THSTI among others.

WHO urges Southeast Asia to expand rehabilitation services

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Asserting that approximately 590 million people in the South-East Asia Region require rehabilitation services - particularly for conditions such as low back pain, vision loss, fractures, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) - the World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday urged countries in the region to accelerate access to rehabilitative and assistive technology services. These measures are crucial for enhancing quality of life and fostering community participation.

Additionally, the WHO called for the integration of basic rehabilitation into routine health services and the expansion of innovative care models to ensure equitable access, particularly for those in remote and underserved areas. "Rehabilitation services encompass a wide range of essential support systems, from physical therapy for injury recovery to counselling for mental health and addiction recovery. These services are not merely about medical treatment; they are about restoring dignity,

hope, and the ability to participate fully in society," said Saima Wazed, Regional Director, WHO South-East Asia.

Emphasising the urgency of the situation, she added, "The last 20 years' trends depict that the need for rehabilitation is increasing in South-East Asia region, and will further elevate in coming years, given the increasing prevalence of conditions associated with ageing and non-communicable diseases (NCDs)." Rehabilitation is a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment.

Primary healthcare facilities often lack sufficient rehabilitation services and benefit packages offer inadequate coverage. Additionally, there is a significant shortage of healthcare professionals in this field. "People and communities must be engaged and empowered, with a focus on increasing health literacy and enhancing demand for rehabilitation services, including assistive technologies," said Wazed.

Govt urges retailers to ensure pulse prices are affordable

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Department of Consumer Affairs organised a meeting with Retailers Association of India (RAI) on Tuesday to discuss the price scenario in respect of pulses and compliance to the stock limits for Tur and Chana prescribed in the Removal of Licensing Requirements, Stock Limits and Movement Restrictions on Specified Foodstuffs (First and Second Amendments) Order, 2024 dated 21.06.2024 and 11.07.2024. The meeting was chaired by Nidhi Khare, Secretary, Department of Consumer Affairs. RAI has more than 2300 members and has about 6,00,000 outlets in the country. The meeting was attended by representatives of RAI, Reliance Retail, D Mart, Tata Stores, Spencer's, RSPG, V Mart among others.

During the meetin, the Secretary, informed that prices of Chana, Tur and Urad in major mandis had declined by up to 4 percent in past one month, but retail prices have not seen similar decline. She



pointed out the diverging trends between wholesale mandi prices and retail prices, which seems to suggest that retailers are deriving higher profit margin. She also pointed out that sowing progress for Kharif pulses are robust.

The Government has undertaken numerous efforts in facilitating enhanced production of Tur and Urad in major Kharif pulses producing States, including distribution of good quality seeds to farmers through NAFED and NCCF and the Department of Agriculture is in continuous engagement with the State Agriculture Departments to provide all necessary support.

Considering the current price scenario and Kharif outlook,

Khare asked retail industry to extend all possible support to the Government in its efforts to keep prices of dals affordable to the consumers.

She informed that stock positions of all stockholding entities, including that of big chain retailers are being closely monitored to ensure that the prescribed limits are not breached. Breach of stock limits, unscrupulous speculation and profiteering on the part of market players would invite stern actions from the Government. Retail industry participants assured that they would make necessary adjustments in their retail margins and maintain at nominal level to ensure availability of prices at affordable prices to the consumers.

SC to hear Haryana's plea against removal of barricades at Shambhu border

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court will on July 22 hear the Haryana Government's plea challenging a high court order giving it a week to remove barricades at the Shambhu border near Ambala where farmers have been camping since February 13.

A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan on Tuesday agreed to list the matter for next Monday after senior additional advocate general Lokesh Sinhal, appearing for the state Government, said the issue requires urgent consideration. The appeal filed through advocate Akshay Amritanshu against the July 10 order of the high court said it is limited to

the impugned direction that the Haryana should open the Shambhu border within a week on an experimental basis so the general public is not inconvenienced.

The Haryana Government had set up the barricades on the Ambala-New Delhi national highway after the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha announced that farmers would march to Delhi in support of various demands, including a legal guarantee of minimum support price (MSP) for crops.

"It is humbly submitted that though the petitioner is most concerned about any inconvenience of any kind caused to general public, the present SLP



has been filed on an urgent basis..." the plea said. The state Government said the high court while dealing with the issue did not pass any orders on its affidavit where it had specifically pleaded that the barricading can only be removed if the farmers shift their dharna from the National Highway.

It said the affidavit before the high court spoke of the likelihood of tension, annoyance, obstruction, sabotage of public or private property, injury to persons lawfully employed and risk to damage to human life and property, disturbance of public peace and public order within Haryana/Punjab by the agitators.

"Despite the categorical submission regarding law and order issue that may arise, the threat to life and property and despite a plea to shift the agitators out of the National Highway, the high court has on an 'experimental basis' directed for opening of the Shambhu Border without passing any directions against the agitators," it said. The Haryana

Government said law and order is a state subject under the Constitution and it is entirely the state's responsibility to assess ground realities, threat perception, likelihood of breach of peace and violation of law.

It pointed out that the high court order records that 400-500 trolleys and 50-60 other vehicles with a gathering of around 500 agitators are still at site at Shambhu Border but no directions have been passed to these "illegally agitating groups" to vacate the highway, to stop causing inconvenience and to stop creating law and order issues.

On July 12, while hearing a related matter, the top court asked the Haryana

Government to remove the barricades and questioned its authority to block the highway. "How can a state block a highway? It has a duty to regulate traffic. We are saying open it but regulate," the bench had said on June 12 after the counsel informed the bench about the state's intention of filing an appeal in the apex court.

The top court had made the observations while hearing a plea of the Haryana Government challenging a March 7 Punjab and Haryana High Court decision to set up a committee headed by a former high court judge to probe the death of a farmer during a clash between the protesting farmers and Haryana security personnel in February.

India's e-mobility R&D roadmap proposes Aadhaar for batteries

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's e-mobility R&D Roadmap has suggested an Aadhaar number for batteries to keep a digital record of its material composition, usage history and end of life management as part of efforts to streamline the recycling process. The suggestion is part of the eMobility R&D Roadmap for India, released by Principal Scientific Adviser to the Government Prof A K Sood, that lists out 34 research projects to become self-reliant and emerge as a global leader in providing innovative mobility solutions.

"This roadmap aims to fill critical gaps in the current research and development framework. While many iden-

tified projects are yet to achieve global success, some areas already demonstrate significant international accomplishments where India is yet to commence preparations," said Prof Karthick Athmanathan, a member of the Consultative Group of e-Mobility Advisory Committee.

The roadmap has listed 34 projects for research and development across four broad areas - energy storage cells, EV aggregates, materials and recycling, charging and refueling. Among the projects listed for R&D is development of a battery Aadhaar system that would help adopt efficient recycling procedures for batteries that are more beneficial to the environment. "It is a completely thought out



standardization of a 16-digit number, which will provide complete information about the battery pack. It will help us in the battery's second use, recyclability and everything during the life-cycle of that battery," said Abhijit Mulay, Deputy Director, Automotive Research Association of India (ARAI). A similar project called

the battery passport is underway in Germany with financial support from the federal Government in Berlin. In the Indian context, the roadmap suggested development of the battery Aadhaar standardized system or protocol to improve sustainability, efficiency and safety in manufacturing, usage and recycling by providing a detailed information about each battery's composition, usage history and end-of-life management.

The proposed Aadhaar numeric barcode for each battery would contain the data and description about the battery manufacturing year, lithium import, electrode materials, cell localization, manufacturing history, battery chemistry, battery capacity, manufacturing

location and battery potting. "This information will be more convenient to recyclers for streamlining the recycling process," Mulay said. Addressing the gathering earlier, Sood said India has set itself a goal to achieve energy independence by 2047 and 30 per cent electric vehicle penetration by 2030 as part of efforts to achieve net-zero emissions by 2070. The e-Mobility R&D Roadmap has assigned high priority to this project due to the significant need for digital data storage, transparency, traceability and localization of batteries. The roadmap stated that determination of these parameters will aid in second life applications as well as recycling and management of batteries.

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) has arrested four key accused involved in luring and trafficking Indian youth to foreign countries on the pretext of offering them jobs.

The accused arrested on Monday have been identified as Manjoor Alam alias Guddu of Delhi, Sahil and Ashish alias Akhil of Bahadurgarh (Haryana), and Pawan Yadav alias Afroz alias Afzal of Siwan (Bihar), according to a press statement issued by the agency.

They were part of an organised trafficking syndicate involved in luring and traf-

ficking Indian youth to foreign countries on the pretext of offering them lucrative jobs, NIA's investigations have revealed. The trafficked youth were forced to work in fake call centres at Laos, Golden Triangle SEZ, among other places in the South East Asian region, as part of the massive network being operated by foreign nationals through operatives based in various parts of India, Laos, and other countries," said the statement issued by the federal probe agency.

Through these call centres, the youth were coerced into carrying out illegal online activities such as investment scams, relationship scams, and cryp-

tocurrency scams, it said. The NIA, which had taken over the case from Delhi Police on June 19 this year, is continuing with its investigations to dismantle all such human trafficking syndicates. In May, the agency conducted extensive searches in 15 locations across six states and two Union territories, in collaboration with the respective state/UT police.

The searches led to the registration of eight new FIRs in human trafficking and cyber fraud cases. Subsequently, in June, the NIA charge sheeted five accused, including foreign nationals, in a similar case in Mumbai.

Cauvery row: K'taka Deputy CM appeals to TN to cooperate on Mekedatu project

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar on Tuesday made a passionate appeal to the Tamil Nadu government to cooperate with the implementation of the Mekedatu project across river Cauvery which, he said, would be more beneficial to the neighbouring State. He also expressed hope about "problems in releasing water to Tamil Nadu to get sorted out, if god permits" and the rains continue in the Cauvery catchment areas of Karnataka.

"One thing I would like to appeal to Tamil Nadu, for your interest and our interest. More than our interest it is your interest, this Mekedatu reservoir, you just permit us, whatever storage we will do, we will give you that water, we can't take back that water," Shivakumar said.

Speaking to reporters here, he said: "It is my humble appeal on behalf of the people of Karnataka, where all selections -- Tamilians, Kannadigs, Andhraits and people from North India -- are there. It is for Bengaluru for drinking water and it is for you (Tamil Nadu). Please permit us for Makedatu, don't object, we will cooperate in whatever way we can."

Mekedatu is a multi-purpose (drinking water and power) project proposed by Karnataka, which involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district.

Tamil Nadu has been opposing the project, raising apprehensions that the state would be affected if the project takes shape.

The project, once completed, is aimed at



ensuring drinking water to Bengaluru and neighbouring areas (4.75 tmcft); it also can generate 400 MW power, and the estimated cost of the project is Rs 9,000 crore (2019 rates), according to Karnataka officials.

A separate Project Division and two Sub-Divisions have already been set up to implement the ambitious 'Mekedatu Balancing Reservoir and drinking water project of Cauvery river valley', Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had said, presenting the state budget in February.

"A survey to identify land that will be submerged under this project and the counting process of trees have already been initiated," he had also said, adding, "action will be taken on priority to

commence the work early after obtaining remaining necessary clearances from the competent authorities."

Responding to a question regarding Tamil Nadu holding an all party meeting about getting Cauvery water for the state from Karnataka, Shivakumar said: "Tamil Nadu has every right to meet as we met, we don't object to their meeting, I don't want to comment on that."

He said: "At the same time from yesterday I'm getting good inflow, more than 50,000 cusecs inflow in Cauvery region, whatever is there we are allowing the water to go out of Harangi (dam), I think more than 20,000 cusecs was going out from Harangi and other places. If gods permit us, all our problems will be sorted out."

Asked if his government will honour the directive of the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) to release one tmcft of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu if rains continue at this rate, Shivakumar said: "of course, of course, we have to (release), we will. Whatever the inflow is coming, we are not holding it, we are leaving it to Mettur (in Tamil Nadu)."

Siddaramaiah had after an all party meeting on Sunday said the government was ready to release 8,000 cusecs of water from the Cauvery river every day to Tamil Nadu instead of one tmcft (11,500 cusecs).

The storage in the four reservoirs in the Cauvery basin stood at 63 per cent of the total capacity and, in this situation, the state was not in a position to release one tmcft water every day, the Chief Minister had said.

Bullet train project: Bridge over Kolak river completed, nine out of 24 bridges on route constructed

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

The National High-Speed Rail Corporation Limited (NHSRCL) has finished constructing a 160-metre bridge over the Kolak river in Gujarat's Valsad district as part of the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project, an official said on Tuesday.

With this, nine out of 24 river bridges on the 508-km corridor have been completed, the NHSRCL said in its latest update. The bridge between Vapi and Bilimora stations comprises four full-span girders of 40 meters each, it said.

Kolak River is seven kilometres from Vapi and 43 km from Bilimora railway stations. The river originates from Saputara hills near Valveri and meets the Arabian Sea, the NHSRCL said.

According to the NHSRCL, bridges have been constructed on the rivers Par and Auranga in Valsad, Purna, Mindhola, Ambika and Venganiya in Navsari, Mohar in Kheda and Dhadhar in Vadodara district.

Bridge construction on Narmada, Tapi, Mahi and Sabarmati rivers was underway, it said.

The Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train corridor will have 12 stations on its 508-km route, of which eight will be in Gujarat and four in Maharashtra. Stations will come up at Sabarmati, Ahmedabad, Anand, Vadodara, Bharuch, Surat, Bilimora and Vapi in Gujarat, and Boisar, Virar, Thane and Mumbai in Maharashtra.

The NHSRCL said the construction of stations was progressing rapidly, with the foundation work on all eight stations in Gujarat completed and the construction



of superstructures at an advanced stage. The stations will have modern and advanced facilities and amenities for passengers, and some were being developed as transport hubs through integration with all basic modes of transportation, such as autos, buses and taxis, for faster and hassle-free connectivity.

As of July 2, all civil contracts have been awarded, and 190 km of the viaduct and 321 km of pier work were completed, the NHSRCL stated in its update.

The land required for the project has been acquired in Gujarat, Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and Maharashtra. The first mountain tunnel of 350 metres near Zaroli village in Valsad has been completed, and work has commenced on

the country's first 7-km undersea rail tunnel, which is a part of 21 km long tunnel between BKC and Shilphata in Maharashtra, it said.

The government aims to run the bullet train's first phase between Surat and Bilimora in south Gujarat by 2026.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe launched the Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train project in Gujarat on September 14, 2017.

The 508-km route is expected to be covered in three to three-and-a-half hours.

The high-speed rail line being built using Japan's Shinkansen technology has been funded by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA).



98% crimes against women, children in Goa detected: CM in Assembly

PTI ■ PANAJI

The Goa police have achieved a 98 per cent detection rate in crimes against women and children this year, Chief Minister Pramod Sawant informed the state legislative assembly on Tuesday.

Sawant was responding to a Calling Attention motion moved by BJP MLA Michael Lobo, citing the murder of a senior citizen in his constituency, Calangute.

A senior citizen was killed by an assailant in his house in Candolim village on Sunday. The accused has been arrested from neighbouring Karnataka, the chief minister said.

During the discussion, he said police verification of all tenants has been made mandatory.

"There is 98 per cent detection of crime against women and children this year. There is awareness amongst victims to come forward to lodge complaints," he said.

The average detection has been 84 per cent for crimes against women and children since 2019, Sawant said.

Legislators from the opposition benches, including AAP MLA Venzy Viegas, demanded that CCTV cameras installed in public places and at private establishments be connected to local police stations.

The chief minister agreed to the suggestion and said measures would be taken to ensure that all CCTV cameras, including ones in private establishments, were connected to respective police stations.

T'gana CM urges DCs to undertake field visits to understand people's problems

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Telangana Chief Minister A Revanth Reddy on Tuesday said district Collectors should undertake field visits to understand people's problems. Speaking at a conference of district Collectors, Superintendents of Police and other officials, he said officials should make decisions with a humane touch and that they will not have job satisfaction if they are confined to "AC rooms."

The Collectors need to balance development and welfare in discharging their duties, an official release

quoted him as saying. Observing that the officials belong to different states, he said they can serve people better if they become part of Telangana's culture.

Noting that the government spends Rs 85,000 per month for every poor student, Revanth Reddy said the Collectors should see to it that the education system is not hurt in any way, it said.

The Collectors should supervise government schools and hospitals.

They should also ensure the transparent implementation of the six poll guarantees of the ruling Congress, he said.

He suggested taking up 'geo-tagging' to safeguard government lands against encroachments.

The Chief Minister also said steps should be taken to provide Arogya Sri health insurance scheme to all in the state, the release said.

He said a 'digital health profile' should be prepared for every citizen in the state.

Revanth Reddy said measures should be taken to incentivise doctors who work in rural areas.

The Collectors should take measures to see that proper medical treatment is available in tribal areas.

Andhra Pradesh CM Naidu leaves for New Delhi

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Tuesday embarked on his second visit to New Delhi after the TDP-led government came to power after the recently held assembly elections.

Following a Cabinet meeting at the Secretariat today, the

chief minister left for New Delhi. Speaking to reporters at the Secretariat, Information & Public Relations Minister K Parthasarathy said that he doesn't exactly know the agenda of the CM's visit to New Delhi but noted that he is going for the betterment of the southern state.

"I am not sure of the exact agenda, but the CM is going

for the betterment of the state and also to bring financial help for Andhra Pradesh," said Parthasarathy. However, there is no clarity as to how many days Naidu would stay in New Delhi.

Naidu's first visit to New Delhi was in the first week of July after he took oath as the chief minister for the fourth time.

Preventive detention orders should be passed with extreme care: HC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court has urged authorities to pass preventive detention orders with extreme care and caution as a casual approach may deprive a person of his "most precious" fundamental right, his freedom and liberty.

A division bench of Justices Bharati Dangle and Manjusha Deshpande on July 2 quashed a preventive detention order passed against a man in October 2023, noting he was not given an opportunity to file a representation against the order, and directed that he be released.

The court said it was incumbent on the authority passing the detention order to act in a responsible manner, as it has an effect of depriving a person of his liberty, the most cherished value.

"The authority is expected to act with care and caution and see that the detention of the person is in larger interest and strictly for the purpose, which the detention law aims to achieve," the HC said.

The bench noted that when a statutory enactment confers an extraordinary power on the executive, such as to detain a



person without recourse to the ordinary laws of land, then such a power has to be exercised with extreme care. "Any casual approach may deprive a citizen of his most precious fundamental right, his freedom and liberty," the court said.

The exercise of the power to detain a person preventively shall be balanced against injustice to the person, who is detained, it said.

Rakesh Jejurkar was detained in October 2023 to prevent him from smuggling goods, abetting smuggling of goods and engaging in transport or concealing smuggled goods in future.

The Government of India's joint secretary passed the order under provisions of the Conservation of Foreign Exchange and Prevention of Smuggling Activities Act.

It was alleged that the detainee was a habitual offender and was a key player in the smuggling of Areca nuts from Dubai to India.

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safeguards provided under Articles 22 (4) and (5) (a person cannot be kept in preventive detention for more than three months and when a person is detained then he shall be given the earliest opportunity to make a representation against the order) must necessarily be adhered to.

The petitioner claimed the detaining authority was not clear in the order as to what activity the authorities intended to prevent.

The court set aside the petitioner's detention order and directed for him to be released.

5 pilgrims dead in collision on Mumbai-Pune Expressway



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Five pilgrims died and more than 30 were injured after their bus collided with a tractor on the Mumbai-Pune Expressway, police said on Tuesday.

The deceased were warkaris (devotees of Lord Vitthal) who were on their way to Pandharpur for the Ashadhi Ekadashi celebrations from their hometown Dombivli near Mumbai, police said.

The bus collided against the tractor and fell into a gorge around midnight. DCP Vivek Pansare told reporters that a total of 42 passengers from Dombivli were on their way to Pandharpur when their bus hit a tractor near Adne village. The injured were rushed to a nearby of hospital, he said, adding the condition of three of them is serious.

'State-sponsored terrorism' taking place in Tripura, claims Cong

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Tuesday slammed the BJP over the violence in Tripura, claiming that "state-sponsored terrorism" was taking place there ahead of the panchayat polls and the state was appearing to be treading down a "distressing path, echoing the turmoil witnessed in Manipur".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge has deputed Lok Sabha MPs Tariq Anwar and Gaurav Gogoi as the AICC Observers to Tripura with regard to the recent violence and attacks on party workers and offices by the ruling party after declaration of panchayat elections in the state.

Addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters here, Congress leader Ajoy Kumar dubbed the BJP cadres as "congenial rioters" and claimed his party workers are facing continuous unjust and violent situations in Tripura.

"In Tripura, under the current BJP administration, life for the Congress workers unfolds in a daily struggle against targeted violence and intimidation simply for their political affiliation. The state has witnessed a disturbing breakdown of law and order, with the ruling party turning a blind eye to these atrocities," Kumar said.



The Congress leader said "state-sponsored terrorism" was being carried out in Tripura. During the recent Lok Sabha elections, over 1,000 incidents of violence and electoral violations were reported, painting a grim picture of the deteriorating democratic norms in Tripura, he said. "Shocking, no substantial actions have been taken against the perpetrators, highlighting a stark disregard for justice and fairness under the current regime," Kumar said.

"The plight of Congress workers serves as a poignant reminder of the challenges faced by political dissenters in maintaining their democratic rights amidst an environment marred by unchecked aggression and impunity" he

added. Kumar said the lead-up to the 2023 Tripura Assembly elections revealed the stark reality of violence that has gripped the state.

"Workers of the Congress and our alliance partners endured unimaginable atrocities. Both state and AICC leadership faced targeted violence and attacks," he claimed.

Hundreds of our dedicated workers were brutally beaten and their properties vandalized at the hands of the ruling regime, the Congress leader alleged.

"These reprehensible acts underscore a distressing erosion of democratic values and principles, where dissent is met with aggression and suppression. The rampant use of force and intimidation

tactics by the ruling establishment not only undermines the electoral process but also threatens the very foundation of a fair and free democracy in Tripura," he said.

Kumar said the "BJP's track record is marred by incidents of communal violence, a tactic for which they are unfortunately renowned."

"A glaring example is Manipur, where historically, the Meiteis and Kukis have coexisted as brethren for generations. However, over the past year, Manipur has been engulfed in flames of discord and unrest," Kumar said.

"Similarly, Tripura appears to be treading down a distressing path, echoing the turmoil witnessed in Manipur. The rising tensions and communal strife in these regions underscore a worrisome trend exacerbated under BJP rule," he added.

The recent events surrounding the panchayat elections in Tripura have unveiled a distressing narrative of democratic erosion and violence, the Congress leader alleged.

"Allegations against the BJP affiliates describe a calculated campaign to stifle opposition voices, employing intimidation tactics ranging from physical assaults on the Congress candidates to the destruction of party offices

and private residences," Kumar said.

In light of these developments, it is imperative for authorities to uphold the rule of law impartially and ensure the safety and rights of all citizens, regardless of political affiliation, he added.

Kumar said the upcoming panchayat elections "should serve as a testament to the democratic values enshrined in our constitution, free from fear and coercion."

As the panchayat poll dates draw near, the BJP's aggression against the Congress party workers intensified, the Congress leader alleged and listed the recent incidents of violence in the state.

The "nefarious hands" of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) struck again as they orchestrated an attack on Badal Shil (49), the CPI (M) candidate for South Tripura Zilla Parishad, in Rajnagar, South Tripura, July 12, Kumar said.

"Shil's grievous condition compelled his transfer to GBP Hospital in Agartala, where he tragically passed away due to the inflicted injuries," he added.

Kumar said these incidents highlight a disturbing trend of political intimidation and violence orchestrated against the opposition members as electoral preparations escalate in the region.

TN Home Secretary, others transferred in bureaucratic reshuffle



PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Tamil Nadu Government on Tuesday effected a bureaucratic reshuffle, transferring among others, Principal Home Secretary P Amudha, IAS.

She has been replaced with Dheeraj Kumar, currently Additional Chief Secretary to Government, Information Technology and Digital Services Department. Kumar has been allotted the Home, Prohibition and Excise Department.

Amudha has been posted as Principal Secretary, Revenue and Disaster Management Department.

The government also transferred a number of other senior officials, including

Greater Chennai Corporation Commissioner Dr J Radhakrishnan and posted him as Additional Chief Secretary, Cooperation, Food and Consumer Protection Department, vice Dr K Gopal. Senior IAS officer Kumar Jayant has been transferred and posted as Additional Chief Secretary to Government, Information Technology and Digital Services Department, according to a Public (Special A) Department order.

J Kumaragurubaran, Secretary, School Education Department succeeds Radhakrishnan in the city civic body.

Similarly, many district collectors were also transferred.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Cycle of terror

Terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir continue unabated, resulting in a heavy toll on lives

In yet another tragic incident four security personnel lost their lives in Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), underscoring the persistent instability in the region. Four Indian Army soldiers, including a Major, were killed in action during an encounter with terrorists in Doda district. This incident highlights the ongoing challenges faced by security forces and raises concerns about the broader implications for peace and security in the area. Despite tall claims to restore order, the frequency and intensity of attacks remain alarming. The recent fatalities among security personnel are not isolated incidents but part of a broader pattern of violence that has plagued Jammu and Kashmir in recent times. The shift of terror incidents and targeted killings to Jammu, which had been peaceful for two decades, represents a significant and concerning development. Since 2021, following the abrogation of Article 370, Jammu has seen a troubling rise in terror attacks and targeted killings, leading to an alarming escalation in violence that has destabilized the region. The counter-terrorism strategies that proved effective in Kashmir may not be suitable for Jammu's unique geopolitical and social landscape. Although past strategic lessons can provide some guidance, the new wave of terror in Jammu requires a new counter-terrorism approach.



A notable change is the decline in stone-pelting and social unrest in Kashmir; however, the militancy and terrorist groups that remained active have now relocated to the Jammu region. These groups often receive support from across the border, complicating the security landscape. Despite significant military operations aimed at curbing militancy, the resilience of these groups remains a significant hurdle. The socio-political environment in Jammu and Kashmir also plays a crucial role in perpetuating violence. Historical grievances, political disenfranchisement, and socio-economic challenges contribute to a fertile ground for militancy. Many local youths, feeling marginalised, are drawn into the cycle of violence, further complicating the security situation. Addressing these underlying issues is vital for any long-term solution to the conflict. The loss of security personnel is not just a statistic; it represents the human cost of the ongoing conflict. Each casualty not only affects the families of the deceased but also has a profound impact on the morale of security forces operating in the region. The high casualty rate raises questions about the effectiveness of current strategies and the need for a re-evaluation of approaches to counter-terrorism and internal security. Following the abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, there was a glimmer of hope, but that now appears to be diminishing. Jammu and Kashmir seems to be slipping back into its previous cycle of violence and persecution. To address the unabated violence in Jammu and Kashmir, a multi-faceted approach is essential. This includes not only robust security measures but also concerted efforts towards political dialogue and community engagement.

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PICTALK



A vendor sells Capsicum at Azadpur Mandi, in New Delhi

Bypoll results indicate a shifting voter preference



KALYANI SHANKAR

This outcome raises questions about the stability of the Govt, as the BJP grapples with internal and external pressures to maintain its coalition

The recent results of by-elections for 13 seats in various states are essential for understanding what people think of the major political parties. One month after the 2024 elections, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi won a third term, the INDIA bloc's significant victory in securing ten of the 13 seats has shifted the country's politics. This positive result for the INDIA bloc could weaken the ruling coalition's power. The BJP won 240 seats but fell short of the 272-majority mark in the recent Lok Sabha elections. As a result, the party had to seek the support of NDA allies, which could influence its policy decisions and lead to compromises to maintain the coalition. This situation raises concerns about the government's stability. A boost to the Opposition could create unpredictability within the ruling coalition. Despite securing 240 seats in last month's Lok Sabha polls, the BJP fell short of the 272-majority mark. It had to seek the help of the NDA allies. This reliance could sway the BJP's policy decisions. The BJP may have to compromise on specific issues to maintain the coalition. There is also a shadow of uncertainty over the government's stability. A substantial boost to the Opposition can shift the balance of power and create a sense of unease and unpredictability in the ruling coalition. The Election Commission conducts the by-polls when a legislative seat becomes vacant. There could be many reasons for a vacant seat. It could be death, resignation, disqualification, or expulsion of a sitting member. Elections are held to fill empty seats when a member of Parliament resigns or dies. Only voters from the area can vote, and there is no party vote. On Wednesday, by-elections were held for 13 assembly seats in Punjab (1), Himachal Pradesh (3), Uttarakhand (2), West Bengal (4), Madhya Pradesh (1), Bihar (1), and Tamil Nadu (1). The Congress,



TMC, AAP, and DMK are some of the parties that put forward candidates in the by-elections to test their strength. The INDIA bloc's win significantly boosted the Opposition. They have been a crucial test for the INDIA bloc as it faced the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in the first electoral battle after the Lok Sabha Elections 2024. The regional chieftains in the Opposition performed exceptionally well. Trinamool Congress, a key player in the INDIA bloc, secured all four seats in Bengal, a significant victory. At the same time, the surging Congress won two seats each in Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand, further strengthening its position in these states. The DMK won one seat, and AAP captured Jalandhar West. These diverse outcomes hint at potential shifts in power dynamics, adding a layer of uncertainty to the current political scenario. Also, the BJP securing only two seats and an independent candidate winning in Bihar add a layer of complexity. Typically, the party in power wins the by-election seat. The TMC, DMK,



THERE IS ALSO A SHADOW OF UNCERTAINTY OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S STABILITY. A SUBSTANTIAL BOOST TO THE OPPOSITION CAN SHIFT THE BALANCE OF POWER AND CREATE A SENSE OF UNEASE AND UNPREDICTABILITY IN THE RULING COALITION.

Congress, and Aam Admi Party controlled their states. For the TMC, the results were a shot in the arm just a month after it had bagged 29 parliamentary seats, up from 22 in 2019. In Uttarakhand and Bihar, things were different. The candidates from the ruling parties - BJP and JD(U) - lost. Congress won two out of the three by-elections in Himachal. After the results, the party has 40 members again in the 68-member house. This will bring stability to our government. Bye-elections are a crucial test for political parties and their popularity. Parties gauge public sentiment and assess their support base. They often use by-elections to test campaign strategies, influencing future elections. If the ruling party wins seats in the by-election, it could increase its overall number of seats and have more influence on the government's stability and decision-making. The BJP still needs to improve its performance despite investigating the reasons for its low number of seats in the Lok Sabha elections. This raises questions and potential strains within the party. There are speculations about

a possible strain between the RSS and the BJP, which could negatively affect the RSS's support for the party, adding to tension and uncertainty in the ruling coalition. The strong performance of the INDIA bloc shows that power dynamics may be shifting. Despite their differences, this success is because the opposition parties continued to work together. Some analysts think that both factors led to their success. The Opposition's strong showing could weaken the ruling coalition's power and strengthen the Opposition's position. The future is difficult to predict at this stage. Winning and losing are part of the game in a democracy. The impact of these events will be more precise in the upcoming assembly polls in Maharashtra and Haryana later this year. The INDIA bloc's strong showing in the by-elections could strengthen the Opposition's position in these forthcoming assembly polls. They will help determine whether the Opposition gains strength or weakens. (The writer is a popular columnist; views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

AP and Telangana resolve issues



It is heartening that the chief ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana have, putting aside their political affiliations, met each other recently to amicably resolve long standing issues that have arisen after the bifurcation of Andhra Pradesh. AP Chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu is has taken the initiative. Both the sides have agreed upon setting up high-level chief secretarial and ministerial dispute resolution committees that will address grievances. Contentious issues like water shar-

ing and power distribution are not easy to sort out but it is heartening that Naidu and Reddy have made a start. Both Andhra Pradesh and Telangana are claiming power payment "dues" from either side while Telangana appears keen to get more water allocation. Division of assets and liabilities running into a whopping 1.42 lakh crores, some that have been mentioned in the AP Reorganisation Act and a few that have not been stated, figured prominently in the chief ministers' meeting. Telangana's access to the long coastal corridor of AP may be an important issue. It's no wonder that allocation of some important landmark buildings of Hyderabad, that has exclusively become the capital of Telangana from June 2, have already occupied the attention of both chief ministers.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

words "NO REVENGE" to promptly bring back the situation under control. Even though Mandela was yet to become the President of the country, he led the nation in what a sane way guiding the society towards light by shedding all sorts of jingoism. Immediately after his release from prison Mandela said "I am not the only one who did not want revenge. Almost all my colleagues in prison did not want revenge, because there is no time to do anything else except to try and save your people". Yes, "Save your people" needs to be the only priority of a true leader, not "call of revenge". And Mandela indeed did walk the talk when Chris Hani got murdered rendering him to a statesman and torch-bearer of the society guiding all on the path of peace. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr had stated- "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that", "We must learn to live together as brothers or we will perish together as fools".

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

ALCARAZ TRIUMPHS AGAIN
Madam — Winning is a habit, and Alcaraz has mastered the art, clinching the Wimbledon men's singles title for the second time against all odds. Spectators at the Centre Court were treated to vintage tennis in a packed stadium. Alcaraz set the ball rolling, winning the first two sets rather comfortably. The final lasted for 147 minutes, with the defending champion establishing a 5-4 lead and serving for the championship point. However, he committed a couple of double faults, and the set went to a tie-break. The number three seed secured his second Wimbledon title and fourth Grand Slam win with a straight-set victory. Djokovic could not recover from the fierce serve-and-volley game of the Spaniard. Alcaraz played calculated tennis on his fourth match point, ultimately winning the tie-break, set, match, and Championship.

C K Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Cultivating civic sense: The path to a better society



GURDEEP KAUR

A lack of civic sense results in numerous societal issues, but it can be instilled through awareness and the enforcement of stringent punitive measures

Citizens are one of the four essential elements that define a country, and a responsible citizenry is undoubtedly an asset to any nation. Today, our country boasts state-of-the-art facilities, with concerted efforts being made to upgrade infrastructure, services, logistics, and public transport. Additionally, inclusive and integrated policies are being formulated, and comprehensive citizen-centric actions are being implemented. While the government's efforts are commendable, there is also a need for citizens to shoulder the responsibility of maintaining public goods and ensuring resources are accessible to all, especially the marginalised. Civic sense is the act of considering others in society and having a sense of responsibility towards public goods. It can be described as "a set of perceptions and attitudes that guides an individual's independent actions or actions within a group for the benefit of many and harm towards none." Conversely, a lack of civic



sense signifies disregard for fellow beings, depriving others of a fair chance of accessing what is due to them. Civic sense involves inculcated socially and ethically good behavior, conduct, and approach. Patriotism is deeply rooted among Indians, and we have a strong affinity for our civilizational values and ethos. However many of us are not adept at it, and civic rules are often flouted in some way or another. Examples of this lack of civic sense include vandalism, mishandling public property, disobeying laws, infringing traffic rules, evading taxes, prejudice, intolerance, indiscipline, sectarianism, and insensitivity towards the beliefs and prac-

tices of other social and religious groups. These behaviors create law and order problems and are rooted in disregard for social norms and appropriate behavior. Despite significant improvements in literacy rates in our country over the past few decades, people often remain casual regarding their societal responsibilities. Examples of this include dumping household waste on streets; destroying public property and so on. Such uncivil behavior is rampant and alarming, detrimentally impacting the collective well-being of society. It not only translates into social conflicts but also triggers a vicious cycle, where such behavior, often being an easier way out, is quickly emulated by many, making the problem difficult to address. India witnessed 461,312 road accidents in 2022, resulting in the tragic loss of 168,491 lives. Many of these accidents could have been avoided had people not flouted traffic rules. Similarly, problems arising from adulteration, corruption, and exploitation can be mitigated through a mindful

approach that prioritizes common interest over self-interest. Civic sense is crucial for quality of life and plays an important role in building the reputation of the country. Inculcating civic virtues is not a choice but is essential for addressing both perennial and new problems. Education plays a significant role in civilising people, but the fact that even well-educated individuals living in metropolitan cities often behave in an unruly and uncivilised manner makes it imperative that the desire to perform constructive and positive roles should come "from within." Elders need to set good examples for the young to emulate. Spreading awareness, rewarding good practices, and enforcing stringent punitive actions against law violations can be effective strategies for inculcating civic sense among the people.

(The writer is Assistant Professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, Delhi; views are personal)

FIRST COLUMN

THE TRUE MEANING OF SUCCESS

Strive for achieving success that is based on contentment, humility, peace and respect



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us want to be successful, but not everyone knows what success looks like. The concept of "success" can be a real subject of contention because everyone has their definition of success. Success has different meanings to different people, however, to define it in simple words, it can be said that success is very largely a matter of adjusting one's self to the ever-varying and changing environments of life, in a spirit of harmony and poise. So, is it simply the completion of the next task, another job well done, a promise kept, an exam passed, a medal won or a mountain climbed? Whatever we believe success to be, there is no doubt that it will have a profound influence on our lives.

The great philosopher Lao Tzu said - "When you are content to be simply yourself and don't compare or compete, everyone will respect you." However, what we see today in the so-called modern society is something way too different. If we were to follow the trends of the current world, then success would be measured by acquisition i.e. the more you have the more successful you are. Nowadays even our education systems are geared to producing people whose character and skills are shaped and developed to make more. Similarly, economic growth is the yardstick for national success based on the production and selling of more. And amidst all this, we continue to avoid the connection between the philosophy of more and the unprecedented levels of unhappiness, abuse and breakdown of human relationships worldwide.

Some of us say that because we have more telephones there is more communication between more people in more countries every day than at any other time in history. But communication of what? Electronic symbols, packets of data, cold information? This is far from human communication. We seldom nourish each other at the level of mind and spirit over a telephone. Do we? Off lately we have developed more intimate relationships with our techno-toys than we do with each other. So what exactly does it mean to be successful? At what level, in what context and by whose standards? If we were to live in this question for long enough it would challenge us at the deepest level. It would invite us to



review and probably revise our core values. But we don't want that challenge because it means we might have to change how we think and what we do. So we live instead in avoidance and denial while going with the flow of traditional belief, and then we wonder why both contentment and fulfillment are so elusive. Just imagine for a moment that every school student in the world spent one year discussing and debating the question, "What is success?" inside out, and upside down. What would our children tell us? Would we have the patience and the faith to listen and to learn from them?

Instead of imposing our inherited beliefs, definitions and conditions, would we have the humility to facilitate their discussion and allow them to tell us? Or do we intuitively know they would be wiser than us and therefore pull the carpet from under our comfortable feet? Would we be threatened if their wisdom defined success as a simpler, more considerate, caring, sharing, spiritual state of being and giving, and not a material state of acquisition, accumulation and possession? Would success be less and not more for them? If we were to give ourselves the time to explore this question, we would likely arrive at the fairly obvious insight that success is not a material thing, it is not something that can be possessed, it is a state of being. We might call it contentment, or happiness, or even peace because these are the deepest and most meaningful symptoms of success, but only when they are not dependent on anything outside ourselves. So, let us engage our energies in achieving success that is based on a strong foundation of values like contentment, humility, peace, and respect and inspire the next generation to do so.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist for publications; views are personal)

Imam Husain dared fighting terrorism

The tragic events of Karbala, where Husain and his followers were mercilessly slain, serve as a poignant reminder of the values of justice and unwavering faith in the face of oppression



HASAN KHURSHID



John Bradshaw once said, "Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God." Can man stand up to these conditions? "Man can but not necessarily with ease", Imam Husain, the grandson of Prophet Mohammad announced from the battlefield of Karbala (Iraq), on the fateful day of 10th Muharram, 61 A.H. (October 10, 680 A.D.). The pre-Islamic period in Arabia is known as the "age of ignorance". Scudding away from the noble attributes of human principles, the Arabs were treading the path of retrogression and abhorrence. Suffering from the worst evils and vices, these Arabs known as Bedouins (uncivilised rustics) were highly tentative of wrecking vengeance, group quarrels, and tribal animosities leading to bloody warfare that lasted for generations. In the pre-Islamic period, these Arabian Bedouins used to bury their newly born daughters alive out of ego. They had no sense of equality, humanity, decency and brotherhood. In this crucial moment, the Prophet of Islam Hazrat Mohammad brought the message of peace, tolerance, humanity, forbearance, liberty, equality, and brotherhood, assisting to weak and securing justice for the persecuted. The Prophet gradually started transforming the heartless brutes to humanise and turn towards peaceful life. The most notorious among them were the Bedouin tribals of "Bani-Omayya" (Omayyads). Omayyads did not tolerate the sojourn of humanity and peace. They violently opposed the Prophet's teachings. Omayya's grandson, Abu Sufiyan, son of Herb, unfurled the flag of revolt against Islamic teachings. They started a campaign of persecution on the Prophet, who was forced to migrate from his home in Mecca to Medina. As such, the year of the Prophet's flight from Mecca to Medina is marked as the beginning of the Hijri era of the Islamic calendar. Still, the Prophet Mohammad was not given any respite or relief. Mohammad was compelled to fight battles many a time. In Medina, the



AFTER THE DEATH OF MUAWIYA, HIS SON ACCUSED YAZID ASCENDED TO THE CALIPHATE SEAT OF SYRIA. HE WAS A HARDCORE TERRORIST AND HAD SURPASSED ALL HIS ANCESTORS IN PRACTISING CRUELTY, VIOLENCE AND CORRUPTION

Prophet established the system for administering the "rule of law" in the light of Islamic jurisprudence, under the command of his son-in-law Hazrat Ali Murtaza. Notwithstanding the bravery of Ali, Omayyads suffered a thorough collapse. The shrewd Abu Sufiyan played a trick to subscribe to Islam outwardly and the Prophet mercifully granted a quarter to Abu Sufiyan and his men. On the contrary, Mohammad realised his duties as Prophet were preparing his two beloved grandsons, 'Hasan' and 'Husain', sons of Ali Murtaza and Fatima Zehra, as perfect specimens of his attainment and imparted to their young minds all the characteristics of his high morality. After the demise of the Holy Prophet Mohammad, the school of Islamic thought, philosophy, culture and administration was shifted to the 'Caliphate' with temporal and ecclesiastical powers.

The first three caliphs were: Abubakar, Umar and Usman. The last caliph Imam Ali Murtaza, was assassinated by the henchmen of the conspirator and hypocrite Muawiya son of Abu Sufyan while Hazrat Ali Murtaza was prostrating before Allah in the mosque. After Ali's assassination, Muawiya with the might of a sword, usurped the seat of the Caliphate in Syria and declared himself as the self-appointed caliph. Muawiya, the first ruler of the House of Omayyads displaced the democratic Islamic rule by oligarchical and barbaric despotic rule.

After the death of Muawiya, his son accused Yazid ascended to the Caliphate seat of Syria. He was a hardcore terrorist and had surpassed all his ancestors in prac-

tising cruelty, violence and corruption. Yazid was a libertine and sinner to the extent that the barest mention of his objectionable character is taboo in this civilised society. Yazid was the mammon of unrighteousness, whose lust for power prompted him to beat society into the mould he favoured. Yazid's criminal behaviour indicated the extreme occurrence of vulgar, and inhuman innovations in the established Islamic values.

On the contrary Imam Husain was recognised throughout the Arab world for his excellence of behaviour, wisdom, compassion and piety. When Yazid occupied the erstwhile seat of the Caliphate, deceitfully usurped by his father Muawiya, Yazid by terrorising the citizens sought their allegiance to accept him as leader of the faithfully. He then demanded allegiance from Hazrat Imam Husain. Yazid was equipped with all the paraphernalia of power but so long, he didn't get the allegiance of Imam Husain, the grandson of the Prophet, he had no religious sanction to claim the Caliphate. He therefore demanded allegiance from Imam Husain to subscribe to him as the leader of the faithfully. When Yazid bargained hard for Imam Husain to choose between allegiance and death, Husain straightaway refused his allegiance, saying, "A person of my kind, can not accept the allegiance of a man of his (Yazid's) kind."

Husain knew that recognition of Yazid's immorality would permanently disfigure the "true faith" and a "pseudo-religion" would emerge in the guise of Islam. Had he encountered no opposition, Islam was bound to acclimatise to

the paralysing atonality from Yazid's degenerated symphony. Imam Husain was mercilessly assassinated in the desert of Karbala along with 71 family members and companions on the 10th of Muharram, 61 Hijri (October 10, 680 A.D.), after being kept hungry and thirsty for three days. Their heads were severed from the bodies and were mounted on lancers. Among the slain martyrs was Husain's six-month-old infant son, Ali Asghar, the buoyancy of whose innocent blood floated the sinking ship of Islam.

Ali Asghar's moon-like innocent severed head was too mounted on a lancer. Asghar's little body among 71 others was too trampled through the hoofs of office horses of Yazid's cavalry. The tents of Husain's household were torched. Daughters and grandchildren of Prophet Mohammad's extended family and the only surviving, ailing son office Imam Husain, were taken captives and paraded from Karbala to Syria, on bare backs of camels, where they appeared before accused Yazid, the wild beast in human form. 10th Muharram is universally observed by right-thinking and kind-hearted people irrespective of caste, religion or faith. "Never in the fight of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few", said Churchill. The event of Karbala, taking place on 10th Moharram, 61 Hijri, teaches us: Never to support injustice and oppression, no matter, how powerful the oppressor might be. No matter, what incentive, what threat you might be given.

(The writer is a legal journalist and author. The views expressed are personal)

Indian tourism industry: The challenges, resilience, and future prospects

As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the Indian tourism industry has high hopes for increased support and strategic initiatives

Tourism has always been a significant contributor to the economic growth and GDP of nations worldwide, and India is no exception. Indian tourism has consistently shown remarkable growth, even though it has not been a primary focus of government policies. There have been improvements in infrastructure and connectivity, but these efforts have been limited.

The Indian Tourism and Hospitality industry, faced unprecedented challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sharp decline in both domestic and international travel led to a significant downturn. Despite these challenges, the industry began to show signs of recovery in 2023. According



DIVYA BHATIA

to the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), 2023 saw 152 million domestic flyers, an increase of almost 24% from 123 million in 2022, and nearly 6% more than the 144 million in 2019. International travel also showed signs of revival, with 63.9 million international travellers to and from India in 2023, close to the 64.2 million seen in 2019, and 35% more than the 47 million in 2022. Consulting firm McKinsey & Company pro-

jects that India will become the fourth-largest domestic travel market in terms of spending by 2030. Additionally, aviation analytics firm OAG indicates that India is now the third-largest domestic aviation market, after the U.S. and China. The WTTC reported that this sector contributed INR 19.13 trillion (\$230 billion) to the Indian GDP in 2023, marking a nearly 10% increase over 2019 levels. Employment in the industry also saw an 8% rise, reaching 43 million jobs. This highlights the sector's resilience and its vital role in the national economy. They projects that the Indian tourism industry will continue to grow, with contributions to the GDP expected to reach INR 21.15 trillion (\$253 billion) in 2024. Jobs in the

industry are also projected to increase by 2.45 million, accounting for one in every 11 jobs in India.

Despite positive indicators, the tourism industry has been largely overlooked in recent government budgets. This lack of support is concerning given the sector's significant contributions to the economy and employment. Substantial investments and strategic initiatives are essential to fully capitalize on the industry's potential and ensure sustained growth. As the Union Budget 2024 approaches, the tourism industry remains hopeful for greater support and investment from the government.

Industry Perspectives
Jyoti Mayal, President, The Travel Agents Association of

India (TAAI) feels that the allocation for overseas promotion and publicity has been drastically reduced to just Rs. 3 crore, down from Rs. 100 crore in the previous year. She says, "The industry eagerly anticipates increased budget allocations to enhance infrastructure, marketing, and skill development. Investments in connectivity, heritage sites, and eco-tourism can propel growth. A focus on sustainable practices, waste management, and conservation efforts aligns with responsible tourism. Simplifying visa requirements and encouraging visa-free entry for tourists visiting India can significantly enhance foreign tourist arrivals".

Pradeep Shetty, President, Hotel and Restaurant Association Western India

(HRAWI) says that the tourism and hospitality, accounting for around 10 percent of India's GDP and should be declared a priority sector. "Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centers of project cost of Rs 10 crore and above is essential for attracting investments and accelerating growth in the hospitality sector. Abolition of the 18 percent GST category for hotels with room rates above Rs.7500/-, merging it with the 12 percent GST category, would boost both domestic and inbound tourism," he says.

Riaz Munshi, President, Outbound Tour Operators Association of India (OTOAI) says the outbound tourism sector is hoping for positive policy changes. "One key

expectation is the reduction of GST rates on outbound tour packages, making international travel more affordable. Additionally, better Tax Collected at Source (TCS) policies are hoped for as compared to current TCS rates, which are causing financial and administrative problems," says he.

Mr Rajiv Mehra, President, Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) feels that the adequate funding is needed for promote tourism on global map. He says, "Ministry of Tourism should be given separate substantial funds for marketing and promotion for participation in overseas travel marts along with industry stakeholders, organizing road shows and for MDA Assistance to tour operators".

Mr. Ajay Prakash, President, Travel Agents Federation of India (TAFI) feels that for all the lip service to the economic and social benefits of tourism, the industry remains sadly neglected. Mere infrastructure development is not enough - the sector needs specific incentives if it is to realize its potential. The travel and tourism industry puts forth its Wishlist every year before the Budget and, come the day, is invariably disappointed. "The highest GST slab should not exceed 10% and travel agents/tour operators should be eligible to claim a setoff. Aviation fuel must be brought under GST to make airfares more affordable," says he.

(The writer is a travel influencer and writes on travel & tourism; views are personal)

Bandaged Trump's rapturous GOP convention debut

PTI ■ MILWAUKEE

Donald Trump, wearing a white bandage partially covering his injured right ear, stole the show when he made his first public appearance on the opening night of the Republican National Convention here, days after surviving an assassination attempt.

Trump on Monday entered the convention hall to roaring applause from thousands of delegates and holding his fist aloft towards the end of the first day of the four-day convention being held at the Fiserv Forum in Milwaukee, a city in the US state of Wisconsin.

The former president entered the convention arena here with a fist raised and to the strains of a live performance of "God Bless the USA".

He then slowly walked through cheering delegates who pumped their fists and called out "Fight! Fight! Fight!"

He then greeted key political allies and members of his fam-



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump and Republican vice presidential candidate Sen. JD Vance, R-Ohio, attend the first day of the Republican National Convention, Monday.

ily, including three of his children, but not his wife Melania. The former US president escaped an assassination bid when a bullet grazed his ear at

a campaign rally in Pennsylvania on Saturday. Supporters on the convention floor and standing in the stadium sang along to a live rendition of "God Bless the USA" with singer Lee Greenwood. Trump was accompanied by his newly-announced running mate Senator JD Vance.

Trump, 78, wore a subdued look as the room around him erupted and chants of "USA" rang out. On Monday, delegates from across the country nominated him as the Republican presidential nominee for the November 5 general election against incumbent Democratic President Joe Biden. It was the third consecutive time that Trump has received the Republican Party's nomination. Trump will deliver his acceptance speech on Thursday.

The delegation from Florida put him over the top, with Eric Trump, the second son of Trump, awarding the state's delegates to his father.

Several lawmakers and other officials spoke, including Representative Marjorie Taylor Greene, Senator Tim Scott, and Representative Byron Donalds. The Democratic party would

formally nominate Biden as its candidate at its convention in Chicago in August.

Earlier in the day, Trump announced that Senator Vance, 39, would be his running mate. He was welcomed by the crowd with a thunderous applause. The choice reflects Trump's belief that Vance is an effective communicator who can sell Trump's populist agenda — particularly to working-class voters in states like Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where presidential elections can be decided by thousands of votes.

"He is consistent with Trump's appeal to working men and women," Ohio Governor Mike DeWine said of Vance. "Also, someone who shares his desire to expand the base of the Republican Party," DeWine was quoted as saying by CNN.

Trump survived an attempt on his life on Saturday when a young shooter fired multiple shots at him at a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, injuring his right ear.

Sikh Republican Party leader recites 'ardas' at RNC

Milwaukee (PTI): Indian-American Sikh Republican Party leader Harmeet Kaur Dhillon on Monday recited 'ardas' at the Republican National Convention here in the presence of the party's presidential nominee Donald Trump.

Amidst tight security, the four-day Republican National Convention began on Monday with delegates and officials coming to the US state of Wisconsin to greet Trump like a hero for the first time since a gunman on Sunday opened fire at the former president during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania, grazing his ear.

Dhillon, a Republican Party leader and Civil Rights Attorney discussing the attack on Trump said: "These last 48 hours have been some of the most intense, yet more prayerful of our lives, the heinous attack on President Trump and his supporters made all of us pause and seek answers in comfort."

A video posted on social media platform X by the California Republican Party, showed Dhillon, 55, as saying at the Fiserv Forum: "I come from a family of Sikh immigrants and I'm honoured to share with you, my fellow Republicans and guests tonight, a prayer from my faith and tradition prac-

tised by over 25 million worldwide."

"We recite the Ardaas (Sikh prayer) before any new endeavour, giving thanks to God and asking for his protection and help to uphold the values of humility, truth, courage, service, and justice for all," she added.

"Dear Waheguru, our one true God, we thank you for creating America as a unique heaven on this Earth, where all people are free to worship according to their faith. We seek your blessings and guidance for our beloved country. Please bless our people with wisdom as they vote for the upcoming election and please bless with humility, honesty, skill and integrity all those who conduct the election," she said after offering the 'ardas'. Dhillon, who has also served as the vice chairwoman of the California Republican Party and also co-chairs the Women for Trump organisation, thanked God for protecting Trump's life, and also mentioned the leader's "tireless and uplifting spirit".

Dhillon was born in a Sikh family in Chandigarh and immigrated to the US. She has experience working on matters involving intellectual property, unfair competition, civil rights, employment discrimination and others, and also has her law firm.

Israeli strikes across Gaza kill more than 30

PTI ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

Israeli strikes in the central Gaza Strip overnight into Tuesday killed 24 people, including women and children, according to hospital records, in deadly violence that continues to rage as Israel and Hamas weigh the latest cease-fire proposal. The deaths in Nuseirat and Zawaida, which included 10 women and four children, came days after Hamas said cease-fire talks meant to wind down the nine-month-long war would continue even after Israel targeted the militant group's top military commander, Mohammed Deif, whose fate remained unclear. Israel says another senior Hamas militant was killed in that strike which, according to local officials, killed 90 Palestinians, including children.

International mediators are working to push Israel and Hamas toward agreeing to a deal that would bring a halt to the devastating fighting and set free roughly 120 hostages held by the militant group in Gaza. The strikes late Monday and early Tuesday hit four residential homes, according to emergency workers. An Associated Press journalist saw the bodies of the dead, some wrapped in blue blankets and a floral sheet, as they were ferried to Al Aqsa hospital in Deir al-Balah. Clouds of smoke from Israeli strikes could be seen rising above the city.

The military said it "conducted targeted raids on terror targets" in central Gaza, without elaborating. It did not immediately provide additional details on the targets.

In southern Gaza, nine people were killed in two separate strikes overnight Monday, according to medical officials and Associated Press journalists.

Four people were killed in a blast that struck a house in eastern Khan Younis while five other people were killed in a strike on a street in southernmost Rafah, accord-

ing to ambulance workers who transported the bodies to Nasser Hospital.

An AP journalist counted the bodies at the hospital before a funeral was held at its gates.

The military said that air force planes struck some 40 targets in Gaza over the past day, among them observation posts, Hamas military structures and explosives-rigged buildings. The war in Gaza, which was sparked by Hamas' October 7 attack, has killed more than 38,600 people, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

The war has sparked a humanitarian catastrophe in the coastal Palestinian territory, displaced most of its 2.3 million population and triggered widespread hunger. Hamas' surprise attack killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took roughly 250 people hostage. About 120 remain in captivity, with about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities.

Violence has also surged in the West Bank during the war and on Tuesday a Palestinian stabbed an Israeli policeman, wounding him lightly, before another officer opened fire, killing the assailant, who was identified as a 19-year-old from Gaza.

Meanwhile, hospital officials say an Israeli airstrike killed 17 Palestinians on Tuesday in a military-declared "safe zone" outside the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis. Officials at Nasser Hospital said the strike hit near a gas station in Muwasi, an area packed with tent camps housing thousands of Palestinians who have fled Israeli offensives in other parts of Gaza. The site lies in a humanitarian "safe zone" where the Israeli military has told evacuating Palestinians to take refuge. The strike raises to at least 59 the number of people killed in southern and central Gaza by strikes overnight into Tuesday.

Oman mosque shooting leaves 5 dead, dozens injured

Dubai (AP): A rare shooting by multiple attackers at a Shiite mosque in Oman killed five people and wounded many more including a police officer, authorities said on Tuesday. Pakistan's government said four of its nationals were dead and 30 hurt. The Royal Oman Police said in a statement mentioned no motive or suspect and said the shooting occurred on Monday night in the Wadi Kabir neighbourhood of the capital, Muscat. The state-run Oman News Agency said three attackers were killed. It reported 28 wounded of "different nationalities".

The shooting occurred on the eve of Ashoura, a remembrance of the 7th century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein, that gave birth to their faith.

The day falls in the Islamic month of Muharram, one of the holiest months for Shiite Muslims.

Biden acknowledges 'mistake' in Bull's-eye comment on Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

President Joe Biden told NBC News in an interview Monday that it was a "mistake" to say he wanted to put a "bull's-eye" on Republican nominee Donald Trump, but argued that the rhetoric from his opponent was more incendiary while warning that Trump remained a threat to democratic institutions. The remark in question came during a private call with donors last week as Biden had been scrambling to shore up his imperiled candidacy with key party constituencies. During that conversation, Biden declared he was "done" talking about his poor debate performance and said it was "time to put Trump in the bull's-eye," saying Trump has gotten far too little scrutiny on his stances, rhetoric and lack of campaigning. The NBC interview — during which, at times, Biden grew defensive under questions about his fitness for office — came as the president and his reelection team pre-

pared to resume full-throttle campaigning after a brief pause following the weekend assassination attempt on Trump. The president and his campaign let loose a flurry of criticism after the GOP nominee announced freshman Sen JD Vance of Ohio as his running mate. "He's a clone of Trump on the issues," Biden told reporters as he headed to Nevada for a series of speeches and campaign events. "I don't see any difference."

He expanded on that during the NBC interview, telling Lester Holt that Vance has the same policies as Trump when it comes to abortion, taxes and climate change, adding, "He signed onto the Trump agenda, which he should, if he's running with Trump."

Once Vance was tapped as Trump's vice-presidential pick, the Biden campaign hit send on a fundraising solicitation signed by the president, and his team issued a blistering statement saying he picked the freshman senator because he would "bend over backwards

to enable Trump and his extreme MAGA agenda." For her part, Vice President Kamala Harris phoned Vance to congratulate him and left him a voicemail message, according to a person familiar with the matter.

And to NBC's Holt, Biden made it clear that he would keep up his focus on Trump. While he acknowledged his "mistake," Biden nonetheless said he is "not the guy who said I wanted to be a dictator on day one" and he wanted the focus to be on what Trump was saying. It's Trump, not Biden, who engages in that kind of rhetoric, Biden said, referring to Trump's past comments about a "bloodbath" if the Republican loses in November.

"Look, how do you talk about the threat to democracy, which is real, when a president says things like he says?" Biden said. "Do you just not say anything because it may incite somebody?"

The NBC interview, scheduled before the attempt on Trump's life at a rally in Pennsylvania,

had been part of Biden's broader strategy to prove his fitness for office after angst grew among Democrats because of his disastrous June 27 debate performance. Asked by Holt if he has weathered the worst of it from his own party, Biden responded that 14 million Democratic voters selected him through the primaries and added, "I listen to them." His mental acuity is "pretty damn good," Biden added, but he said the question of his age was "legitimate" to ask.

Yet Biden grew visibly testy when asked whether he was eager to "get back on the horse" by participating in another debate against Trump, even before their next scheduled one in September. "I'm on the horse. Where have you been?" a defensive Biden said. He rattled off his recent travels across the country and a lengthy press conference last week in Washington where he parried questions from nearly a dozen reporters. He said he is "demonstrating to the American people that I have

command of all my faculties, that I don't need notes, I don't need teleprompters" — although Biden has used notes and teleprompters in recent appearances, which is not unusual.

As for a potential repeat of his rocky debate, Biden said, "I don't plan on having another performance on that level."

The Biden campaign recalibrated some of its political plans in the immediate aftermath of the assassination attempt on Saturday, pulling advertising off the air and hitting pause on messaging. The White House also scrapped Biden's planned Monday visit to the Lyndon B. Johnson library, where he had been slated to deliver remarks on civil rights.

Biden also spoke privately to Trump after the assassination attempt, a call that the president described in the NBC interview as "very cordial."

"I told him how concerned I was and wanted to make sure I knew how he was actually doing," Biden said.

Welsh leader to resign over campaign donation scandal

AP ■ LONDON

The leader of Wales' government, First Minister Vaughan Gething, said on Tuesday he will resign after several members of his government quit over a campaign donation scandal.

Gething said that "I have this morning taken the difficult decision to begin the process of stepping down as leader of the Welsh Labour Party and, as a result, First Minister."

The announcement came after four members of Gething's semiautonomous government quit, demanding he resign.

Gething, the son of a Welsh father and a Zambian mother, made history in March when he was elected to head the Cardiff-based administration, becoming the first Black leader of a government in the UK.

He has faced criticism for accepting 200,000 pounds (USD 255,000) in donations during his leadership campaign from a recycling company whose owner had been found guilty of environmental

offenses and breaching health and safety regulations. His leadership has crumbled since the Welsh nationalist party Plaid Cymru ended a cooperation arrangement with Gething's minority Labour government in April. The following month Gething lost a non-binding no-confidence vote in Wales' parliament, the Senedd. In a resignation statement, Gething said he had "hoped that over the summer a period of reflection, rebuilding and renewal could take place under



my leadership. "I recognise that this is not possible," he added.

Wales, which has a population of about three million, is one of four parts of the United Kingdom, along with England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The British government in London is responsible for defence, foreign affairs and other UK-wide issues, while administrations in Cardiff, Edinburgh and Belfast control areas such as education and health.

Thailand to launch controversial \$13.8 bn digital money handout

AP ■ BANGKOK

Thailand's prime minister has said that eligible businesses and individuals can register from August for digital cash handouts, a controversial programme that will cost billions of dollars and is meant to boost the lagging economy. The government announced in April the widely criticised ambitious plan, named the Digital Wallet, meant to give 10,000 baht (about \$275) to 50 million citizens in digital money to spend at local businesses.

Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin posted on the social platform X on Monday, saying the registration will begin Aug 1 and that he has given instructions to ensure the smooth implementation of the program.

The "Digital Wallet" was a major campaign promise of the ruling Srettha's Pheu Thai party ahead of last year's general election. The government says that this scheme will cause an "economic tornado," and Srettha has said the stimulus and subsequent consumption are expected to boost gross domestic product growth by 1.2 to 1.6 percentage points.

However, economists have criticised the programme, calling it an ineffective way to contribute to sustainable economic growth compared to other measures. In addition, its financing has faced several hurdles, delaying its planned implementation. At first, the government said the state Bank for Agriculture and Agricultural Cooperatives would cover some of the funding needed. However, after warnings by financial

experts, it was announced that the project's funding would come out of the 2024 and 2025 fiscal budgets.

Deputy Minister of Finance Julapan Amornvivat said at a news conference on Monday the budgetary funding became possible after the plan's estimated cost dropped from 500 billion baht (\$13.8 billion) to 450 billion baht (\$12.4 billion), asserting that all estimated 50 million people will still be part of the program as only up to 90% of those eligible utilised them in previous handouts.

Julapan added that the Digital Wallet committee has agreed to exclude tens of thousands of shop owners and cash recipients who have a record of committing fraud in past programmes. The plan also has certain limitations, such as excluding certain goods that are yet to be decided, and earlier proposals suggested oil, services, and online purchases should be among them.

Julapan said the Commerce Ministry would handle the exclusions set to be announced next week after the detailed plan is submitted to the Cabinet. Thailand has in recent years suffered from a sluggish economy that appears to have deteriorated with no clear sign of growth. This month, the World Bank's Thailand Economic Monitor projected GDP growth of 2.4% for the year 2024.

The ruling Pheu Thai party had initially suggested digital wallet payments for all Thais 16 and older, but later this was limited to only lower-income Thais, defined as people with yearly incomes not exceeding 840,000 baht (about \$23,000) and savings in financial institutions not totalling more than 500,000 baht (\$13,700)

Shiite Muslims commemorate mourning day of Ashura with processions in Iran

Tehran (AP): Iranian Shiite Muslims on Tuesday commemorated Ashura, a remembrance of the seventh century martyrdom of the Prophet Muhammad's grandson, Hussein, that gave birth to their faith. Over 1,340 years after Hussein's death, Tehran and other cities across the country were adorned with symbols of Shiite piety and repentance. Red flags represented Hussein's blood, black funeral tents and clothes indicated mourning, and processions of chest-beating and self-flagellating men expressed fervour. Some sprayed water over the mourners in the intense heat. Many Iranian people also travelled to the Iraqi city of Karbala, where Hussein is entombed in a gold-domed shrine, to mourn there. Iranian state TV broadcast live from there, showing people at the shrine. Shiites represent over 10 per cent of the world's 1.8



Shiite Muslims touch a horse, that symbolizes the horse that carried Imam Hussein during the battle of Karbala, during a Muharram procession, in Lahore, Pakistan, Tuesday.

billion Muslims and view Hussein as the rightful successor to the Prophet Muhammad. Hussein's death in battle at the hands of Sunnis at Karbala, south of Baghdad, ingrained a deep rift in Islam and continues to this day to play a key role in shaping Shiite identity.

UK gurdwara attack being treated as 'religiously aggravated': Police

PTI ■ LONDON

The gurdwara attack in southeast England last week in which a 17-year-old boy was arrested and charged with multiple offences, including threats to kill, is being treated as "religiously aggravated", the local police have said.

The Kent Police said the boy appeared before Maidstone Crown Court where he was further charged with attempted grievous bodily harm along with assault occasioning actual bodily harm, using or threatening unlawful violence, threats to kill, threatening a person with a bladed weapon and possessing a bladed article in a public place.

He was bailed by the court over the incident at Sri Guru

Nanak Darbar Gurdwara in Gravesend last Thursday and was "immediately detained by officers for a mental health assessment".

"This is an isolated incident and our initial enquiries suggest it is not terrorism-related," said Chief Superintendent Angie Chapman, North Kent Divisional Commander for Kent Police.

"We are treating it as religiously aggravated. It was upsetting for local people and our officers will remain on patrol in the area for reassurance and engagement with the community. I would like to thank the local community for their ongoing support and assistance while this investigation continues," she said. He will next appear before Medway Youth Court on Thursday after a mental

health assessment.

Earlier, investigators from the Kent and Essex Serious Crime Directorate charged the boy, who cannot be named as a minor, over what the local police referred to as a "disturbance" at the gurdwara in Gravesend on July 11 evening. The Gurdwara, one of the largest outside India, held an "All Sangat Meeting" at its Lecture Theatre on Sunday to reassure the community after it stated that 'Guru Granth Sahib Ji' was not present in the Darbar Hall at the time of the attack.

Two women suffered cuts and bruises in an assault outside the building shortly afterwards.

"Nobody was seriously injured during the incident and the constables recovered a bladed weapon," the police

said. According to the gurdwara's management team, the suspect was spotted by its security team and police were called immediately. "A person has been arrested by Kent Police on suspicion of attempted murder, after entering the gurdwara and creating an incident in one of the Darbar Halls.

We can confirm that the incident happened after Sukhasan and 'Guru Granth Sahib Ji' were not present in the Darbar Hall," the gurdwara said in a statement in the aftermath.

Sri Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara opened its doors to the congregation in November 2010 and is a well-known place of worship in Kent that offers regular "langar seva" for the local community.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa attack: 8 soldiers, 10 terrorists killed

PTI ■ PESHAWAR
At least eight soldiers of the Pakistan Army and 10 terrorists were killed when a group of 10 terrorists attacked a major military cantonment in the restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the army said on Tuesday. All 10 terrorists who launched the daring attack were also eliminated after they attempted to enter the Bannu Cantonment on Monday, with security forces effectively thwarting the move, the statement said. The terrorists' failed attempt forced them to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the cantonment, leading to the collapse of a portion of the wall and damaging the adjoining infrastructure. Eight soldiers were killed in the ensuing operation and all the terrorists were "sent to hell", the statement added.



"This timely and effective response by the security forces prevented major catastrophe, saving precious innocent lives," the statement said, adding that the heinous act was undertaken by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, which operates from Afghanistan and has used Afghan soil to orchestrate acts of terrorism inside Pakistan in the past as well. Pakistan has consistently raised its concerns with the interim Afghan government, asking

them to deny persistent use of Afghan soil by the terrorists and take effective action against such elements, the statement said, adding that the Pakistani side will take all necessary measures as deemed appropriate against these threats emanating from Afghanistan. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Chief Minister Ali Amin Gandapur condemned the attack and said the sacrifices of the Pakistan Army in the war against terror would not go to waste.

Move to ban Imran's party finds little support among ruling PML-N's allies

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD
The Pakistan government's controversial move to ban jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party has attracted flack from across the political spectrum with the stakeholders calling the move undemocratic, which could have far-reaching ramifications if executed. The Pakistan government on Monday decided to ban Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) on charges of illegally receiving foreign funds, involvement in riots and alleged involvement in "anti-state" activities. The government led by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party has also threatened to slap treason charges on 71-year-old Khan as well as on former president Arif Alvi, 74, among others. Besides the PTI, which has called the move an act of "desperation" and a "sign of panic" within the federal administration, leaders from other parties including the Pakistan Peoples

Party, Awami National Party, Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam, and Jamaat-i-Islami have criticised the decision. The PPP led by former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has distanced itself from the controversial move, saying the party was not consulted on the move to ban the Khan-founded party. PPP Information Secretary Shazia Atta Marri also said the party, a key ally of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) led government in the centre, would hold consultations on the government's decision to ban the PTI. The decision was announced by Federal Information Minister Attaulah Tarar, who in a press conference on Monday, said the PTI and Pakistan "cannot co-exist" and the matter to ban the party would go to the federal cabinet and the Supreme Court. The move drew a strong reaction from the PTI which in return has also demanded invoking Article 6 of the Constitution against those who undertook the unconstitutional steps even though

there is a Constitution in the country. The party also called on allies of the ruling coalition government, including the PPP and the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P), to clarify their position on the move. PPP's Senator Sherry Rehman confirmed Marri's remarks about not being consulted and noted that the party had no idea that such a move by the Centre would be taken, Geo News reported. Responding to a question regarding their alliance with the PML-N, the senator acknowledged that the government's move should not come as a surprise to them as they are allies. "We have also worked with allies before where every step is taken with careful due consideration about its repercussions. I have no idea on what level this whole issue was discussed by the government," she said. When asked if the banning of the PTI would achieve anything, Rehman answered in the negative and said: "My personal opinion is that this won't achieve

anything [...] Even though the PPP was subjected to various tactics in the past it still stands strong today." "In the view of that you can't stop anything or anyone via ban or censorship, there are other ways to make someone mend their ways," the PPP leader said. The PPP's move to distance itself from the PML-N government's decision is significant as the party is a key ally of PM Shehbaz-led administration and enjoys a key position politically and parliamentarily as none of the parties managed to secure a simple majority in the February 8 polls. The party's support is therefore essential to the survival of the Centre as the PTI-backed independent candidates — who emerged as the largest single group in the general elections — got a major boost via the Supreme Court ruling declaring them eligible for reserved seats. The development has deprived the ruling coalition of a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly.

Violent clashes over govt jobs injures many in B'desh

AP ■ DHAKA
Police fired tear gas and charged with batons during violent clashes between a pro-government student body and student protesters overnight, leaving dozens injured at a public university outside Bangladesh's capital, authorities and students said on Tuesday. The violence spread early Tuesday at Jahangir Nagar University in Savar, outside Dhaka, where protesters demanded an end to a quota reserved for family members of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971, allowing them to take up 30 per cent of governmental jobs. While job opportunities have expanded in Bangladesh's private sector, many find government jobs stable and lucrative. Each year, some 3,000 such jobs open up to nearly 400,000 graduates. Protesters argue such quota appointments are discriminatory and should be merit-based. Some even said the current system benefits groups supporting Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Some Cabinet ministers criticized the protesters, saying they played on students' emotions. Hasina said on Tuesday war



veterans — commonly known as "freedom fighters" — should receive the highest respect for their sacrifice in 1971 regardless of their current political ideologies. "Abandoning the dream of their own life, leaving behind their families, parents and everything, they joined the war with whatever they had..." she said during an event at her office in Dhaka. Meanwhile, protesters gathered in front of the university's official residence of the vice-chancellor early Tuesday when

He said up to 15 police officers were injured. More than 50 people were treated at Enam Medical College Hospital near Jahangir Nagar University as the violence continued for hours, said Ali Bin Solaiman, a medical officer of the hospital. He said at least 30 of them suffered pellet wounds. On Monday, violence also spread at Dhaka University, the country's leading public university, as clashes gripped the campus in the capital. More than 100 students were injured in the clashes, police said. On Tuesday, protesters blocked railways and some highways across the country, and in Dhaka, they halted traffic in many areas as they vowed to continue demonstrating until the demands were met. Local media said police forces were spread across the capital to safeguard the peace. Swapon, a protester and student of Dhaka University who only gave his first name, said they only want the "rational reformation of the quota system." He said after studying for six years, if he can't find a job, "it will cause me and my family to suffer." Protesters say they are apolitical, but leaders of the ruling

parties accused the opposition of using the demonstrations for political gains. A ruling party-backed student activist, who refused to give his name, told The Associated Press the protesters with the help of "goons" of the opposition's Bangladesh Nationalist Party and Jamaat-e-Islami party vandalized their rooms at the student dormitories near the Curzon Hall of the Dhaka University. The family of the veterans' quota system was halted following a court order after mass student protests in 2018. But last month, Bangladesh's High Court nullified the decision to reinstate the system once more, angering scores of students and triggering protests. Last week, the Supreme Court halted the High Court's order for four weeks and the chief justice asked protesting students to return to their classes, saying the court would issue a decision in four weeks. However, the protests have continued daily, halting traffic in Dhaka. The quota system also reserves government jobs for women, disabled people and ethnic minority groups, but students have only protested against jobs reserved for veterans' families.

N Korean diplomat in Cuba defected to S Korea in November, Seoul says

AP ■ SEOUL
South Korea's spy agency said Tuesday that a senior North Korea diplomat based in Cuba has fled to South Korea, the latest in a series of defections by members of the North's ruling elite in recent years. The National Intelligence Service said media reports on the defection of a North Korean counselor of political affairs in Cuba were true. A brief statement by the NIS public affairs office gave no further details. South Korea's mass-circulation Chosun Ilbo newspaper reported earlier Tuesday that diplomat Ri Il Kyu fled to South Korea with his wife and children in November. Chosun Ilbo cited Ri as telling the newspaper in an interview that he had decided to defect because of what he called disillusionment with North Korea's political system, an unfair job evaluation by Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry, and the ministry's disapproval of his hopes to visit Mexico to treat his neural damage. He said that hospitals in Cuba didn't have the necessary medical equipment to treat his health problem due to international sanctions. Other South Korean media outlets carried

similar reports later Tuesday. Ri defected before South Korea and Cuba established diplomatic ties in February, an event that experts say likely posed a political blow to North Korea, whose diplomatic footing is largely dependent on a small number of Cold War-era allies like Cuba. The Chosun report said Ri had been engaged in efforts to block Cuba from opening diplomatic ties with South Korea until his defection. The report said Ri won a commendation from leader Kim Jong Un for his role in negotiations with Panama that led to the release of a ship detained in 2013 for allegedly carrying banned items like missiles and fighter jet parts. The report said Ri was then a third secretary of the North Korean Embassy in Cuba. The South Korean government says the number of highly educated North Koreans with professional jobs escaping to South Korea has steadily increased in recent years. But it's still unusual for a member of the North's ruling elite to come to South Korea. About 34,000 North Koreans have defected to South Korea to avoid economic hardship and political suppression since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. A majority of

them are women from the North's poorer northern regions who arrived in South Korea since the mid-1990s, when North Korea suffered a devastating famine that was estimated to have killed hundreds of thousands of people. In 2016, Tae Yongho, then a minister at the North Korean Embassy in London, defected to South Korea. He told reporters in Seoul that he decided to flee because he didn't want his children to live "miserable" lives in North Korea and he fell into "despair" after watching North Korean leader Kim execute officials and pursue development of nuclear weapons. North Korea has called him "human scum" and accused him of embezzling government money and committing other crimes. Tae was elected to South Korea's parliament in 2020. In 2019, North Korea's acting ambassador to Italy, Jo Song Gil, arrived in South Korea. Also in 2019, North Korea's acting ambassador to Kuwait arrived in South Korea with his family. In 2021, lawmakers cited the NIS as telling them the diplomat changed his name to Ryu Hyunwoo after arriving in South Korea.

Some EU officials boycott meetings over Orbán's visits to Russia, China

AP ■ BUDAPEST
Some European Union leaders protested on Tuesday what they see as Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán's misuse of the bloc's rotating presidency, with many including those in the EU's executive commission boycotting an informal meeting hosted by Hungary in response to Orbán's actions. Officials are angry that Orbán, a nationalist populist who is seen as having the warmest ties with Russian President Vladimir Putin among EU leaders, made unannounced trips to Moscow and Beijing earlier this month on what he called a "peace mission" aimed at brokering an end to Russia's war in Ukraine. Orbán said he was seeking the quickest path to peace in Ukraine and portrayed himself as uniquely positioned to communicate with both warring parties. He also met last week with former US President Donald Trump at his Mar-a-Lago compound and expressed confidence that Trump would quickly "solve" the conflict. But Orbán's EU partners were startled by the appearance that he was acting on behalf of the 27-member bloc during his meetings with Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, and worried that he was undermining EU unity on support for Ukraine. Hungary holds the rotating presidency of the EU

Council from July to December 2024. In response, some nations including Sweden, Finland and the Baltic countries, as well as the Commission, said their top officials would boycott meetings in Budapest and send civil servants instead. But not all EU members joined the boycott. The energy ministers of Austria, Belgium and Bulgaria attended an informal meeting on energy on Tuesday in Hungary's capital, with one downplaying the boycott. "I think that we have a good representation," Vladimir Malinov, Bulgaria's caretaker energy minister, said as he entered the meeting. "Having in mind that this is an informal meeting, it's not an issue. Maybe on the formal level we will have much more high representation." The boycott prompted mixed reactions from Hungarian officials, with some employing the kind of bellicose tone that has characterised Orbán's government when it comes to the EU. Kinga Gal, a top EU lawmaker from Orbán's Fidesz party, said the Commission's boycott is "clearly a part of von der Leyen's election campaign," a reference to Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, who hopes to be elected to another five-year term on Thursday. "We have become used to (von der Leyen) using the EU institutions, especially against Hungary for

political blackmail and pressure," Gal wrote on the social media site X on Monday. "This is unacceptable and goes against the very essence of European cooperation." Hungary's finance minister, Mihaly Varga, was more subdued, saying in Brussels on Tuesday that Hungary's EU presidency "remains committed to sincere cooperation with all member states and institutions." Varga said ministers "are free to decide to take part in our events or not. But I am absolutely sure that there will be a high-level participation in the events." Speaking from outside the same Brussels meeting, Elisabeth Svantesson, Sweden's finance minister, said she was "both angry and quite sad" about how the Hungarian presidency has gone so far. "That Mr. Orbán went to Putin in Moscow is an insult not only to Ukraine, but to all other 26 member states, and that's what I will tell today in the meeting," she said. During a media briefing on Tuesday, Stefan de Keersmaecker, a Commission spokesperson, said that by sending lower-level officials to Hungary's meetings, the body wanted to "mark our disapproval" with Orbán's uncoordinated trips and the message they sent concerning the war in Ukraine. The visits, he said, "have indeed harmed the indispensable image of unity in the European Union."

New hotline aims to prevent Chinese-Philippine sea clashes

Manila (AP): A recently signed agreement will open a direct line of communication between the presidential offices of China and the Philippines to help prevent any new confrontation from spiralling out of control in the disputed South China Sea, according to highlights of the accord seen by The Associated Press on Tuesday. China and the Philippines have created such emergency telephone hotlines at lower levels in the past to better manage disputes, particularly in two fiercely disputed shoals where the Philippines has accused Chinese forces of increasingly hostile actions and China says Philippine ships have encroached despite repeated warnings. The territorial disputes, however, have persisted since last year, sparking fears of a larger armed conflict that could involve the United States, which has repeatedly warned that it's obligated to defend the Philippines, a key Asian treaty ally, if Filipino forces come under attack in the disputed waters. US Gen. Charles Brown Jr., chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, met Philippine military chief Gen. Romeo Brawner in Manila on Tuesday and discussed ways to further boost defence ties, enhance the militaries' ability to operate jointly and ensure regional stability, the Philippine military said. During a confrontation between Chinese and Philippine forces at the Philippines-occupied Second Thomas Shoal in August 2023, the Philippine government said it was unable to reach Chinese officials through an established "maritime communication mechanism" for several hours. That emergency telephone hotline was arranged after Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. met Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing in January 2023. Chinese and Philippine officials dealing with the territorial disputes held talks in Manila on July 2, following a violent confrontation at the Second Thomas Shoal in which Chinese coast guard personnel reportedly wielded knives, an axe and improvised spears and Philippine navy personnel were injured. The Chinese forces also seized seven

Philippine navy rifles, said Brawner, who demanded China return the firearms and pay for damages. Both sides "recognised the need to strengthen the bilateral maritime communication mechanism on the South China Sea" and signed an arrangement "on improving Philippines-China maritime communication mechanisms", the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said in a statement after the talks in Manila, but did not provide a copy or details of the agreement. A copy of the agreement's highlights, seen by the AP, said it "provides several channels for communication between the Philippines and China, specifically on maritime issues, through the representatives to be designated by their leaders". The hotline talks could also be done "through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Foreign Affairs counterparts, including at the foreign minister and vice foreign minister levels or through their designated representatives", it said, and added without elaborating that

Philippine officials were "in discussions with the Chinese side on the guidelines that will govern the implementation of this arrangement". There was also a plan to set up a new communication channel between the Chinese and Philippine coast guards "once the corresponding memorandum of understanding" between them is concluded, according to the agreement. During the talks in Manila, China and the Philippines agreed on two other confidence-building steps to intensify "cooperation between their respective coast guard authorities" and the possible convening of a maritime forum between Chinese and Philippine scientists and academic leaders. "Both sides recognised that there is a need to restore trust, rebuild confidence and create conditions conducive to productive dialogue and interaction," the Philippine department of foreign affairs statement said. It added that China and the Philippines "affirmed their commitment to de-escalate tensions without prejudice to their respective positions".

Scientists confirm moon cave discovery

Cape Canaveral (US) (AP): Scientists have confirmed a cave on the moon, not far from where Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed 55 years ago, and suspect there are hundreds more that could house future astronauts. An Italian-led team reported Monday that there's evidence for a sizable cave accessible from the deepest known pit on the moon. It's located at the Sea of Tranquility, just 250 miles (400 km) from Apollo 11's landing site. The pit, like the more than 200 others discovered up there,



was created by the collapse of a lava tube. Researchers analysed radar measurements by NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter, and compared the results with lava tubes on Earth. Their findings appeared in the jour-

nal Nature Astronomy. The radar data reveals only the initial part of the underground cavity, according to the scientists. They estimate it's at least 130 feet (40 metres) wide and tens of yards (metres) long, probably more. "Lunar caves have remained a mystery for over 50 years. So it was exciting to be able to finally prove the existence" of one, Leonardo Carrer and Lorenzo Bruzzone of the University of Trento, wrote in an email. Most of the pits seem to be located in the moon's ancient lava plains, according to the scientists.

There also could be some at the moon's south pole, the planned location of NASA's astronaut landings later this decade. Permanently shadowed craters there are believed to hold frozen water that could provide drinking water and rocket fuel. During NASA's Apollo programme, 12 astronauts landed on the moon, beginning with Armstrong and Aldrin on July 20, 1969. The findings suggest there could be hundreds of pits on the moon and thousands of lava tubes. Such places could serve as a natural shelter for

astronauts, protecting them from cosmic rays and solar radiation as well as from micrometeorite strikes. Building habitats from scratch would be more time-consuming and challenging, even when factoring in the potential need of reinforcing the cave walls to prevent a collapse, the team said. Rocks and other material inside these caves — unaltered by the harsh surface conditions over the eons — also can help scientists better understand how the moon evolved, especially involving its volcanic activity.

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ADMISSION NOTICE -2024
MASTER IN HOSPITAL AND HEALTH ADMINISTRATION (MHHA) COURSE
Online applications are invited through University website for admission to Master in Hospital and Health Administration (MHHA) Session, 2024 at the Department of Master in Hospital and Health Administration, University Centre of Excellence in Research (UCER), BFUHS, Faridkot from 18/07/2024 to 17/08/2024, along with requisite fee:
Receipt of Application/Fee Through University Payment Gateway
Rs 5000/-18% GST (Rs.5900/-) and for SC candidates Rs.2500+18% GST (Rs.2950/-)
The Selected candidates will pay the tuition fee (40,000/-) in the shape of Demand Draft in favor of Registrar, BFUHS payable at Faridkot or through online University gateway.
Note: For Eligibility/Detail/Fee/Prospectus visit University website i.e. www.bfuh.ac.in
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AWS' KUMARA RAGHAVAN SEES HUGE POTENTIAL IN STARTUPS

NEW DELHI: The Indian startup ecosystem is mature, with multiple tailwinds that are poised to escalate India to become the third largest economy in the world, said AWS' Kumara Raghavan. In a conversation with PTI, Raghavan, Head, Startups, Amazon Web Services (AWS) India, and South Asia, discussed the vibrant Indian startup scene, noting its strength and innovation potential. "We are the 5th

largest economy, we are trending towards becoming the 3rd largest... factors that will contribute to it are labor addition, infrastructure growth, and efficiency improvements, where technologies like GenAI will play their part, a large developer ecosystem, the ability to build products in the country and serviced all over the world, then there are regulatory tailwinds as well," he said.

Sensex, Nifty close at record high levels for 3rd day in a row

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark stock indices Sensex and Nifty settled at record high levels in their third straight day of gains on Tuesday following buying in FMCG, telecom and select IT shares and FII inflows. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 51.69 points or 0.06 per cent to settle at a new lifetime high of 80,716.55. During the day, it advanced 233.44 points or 0.28 per cent to hit a fresh record high of 80,898.30. The NSE Nifty went up by 26.30 points or 0.11 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,613. Intra-day, it rallied 74.55 points or 0.30 to hit a new record peak of 24,661.25. Sensex and Nifty have been on a record-breaking run since Friday as foreign investors have turned buyers in the Indian equities ahead of the presentation of the Union budget for 2024-25. Encouraging quarterly results by blue-chips have also



supported the rally despite high valuation concerns, according to analysts. Among Sensex shares, Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, Tech Mahindra, Infosys, Mahindra & Mahindra, ICICI Bank, ITC and Asian Paints were the biggest winners. On the other hand, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Reliance Industries, NTPC, UltraTech Cement and Power Grid were among the laggards. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,684.78 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Shanghai settled higher, while Hong Kong ended lower

Gold rallies ₹550; silver jumps ₹400 amid strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rallied by Rs 550 to Rs 75,700 per 10 grams in the local market on Tuesday on the back of fresh buying by jewellers as well as strong trends in the international markets. According to All India Sarafa Association, the precious metal rates had closed at Rs 75,150 per 10 grams on Monday. In the national capital, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity quoted higher at Rs 75,700 per 10 grams and Rs 75,350 per 10 grams, respectively. Traders attributed the rise in gold prices to a pick-up in demand by local jewellers and retailers in the domestic market. In addition, silver prices also jumped by Rs 400 to Rs 94,400 per kg. It had ended at Rs 94,000 per kg in the previous session. "Gold and silver prices witnessed a sharp recovery on the back of rate cut expectations. "No major data points were



This week, traders will keep an eye on important data points like US retail sales, industrial production and a few housing numbers, which could provide clarity on overall economic health, Modi added. On the overseas front, spot gold at Comex was traded at USD 2,436 per ounce, registering a gain of USD 28 per ounce from previous day. According to Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, gold prices traded higher amid ETF demand and speculative buying as the global gold prices hovering near the record high. "...Decline in the treasury yields and US dollar index also supported the spot gold prices," Parmar added. Additionally, silver was also quoted higher at USD 30.77 per ounce. In the previous session, it had finished at USD 30.68 per ounce. "Gold continues to trade positive, supported by a steady US dollar and easing bond yields as focus remains on an early rate cut by the Federal Reserve.

Govt likely to scale down fiscal deficit target to 5% or less in Budget: ICRA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government is likely to lower fiscal deficit to 4.9-5 per cent of the GDP for this financial year in the upcoming Budget aided by revenue buoyancy. The government had pegged the fiscal deficit estimate at 5.1 per cent for the current fiscal year when it presented the interim Budget in February. "The union government is likely to set a fiscal deficit target at 4.9-5 per cent, lower than projected 5.1 per cent of GDP, without compromising the capital expenditure target of Rs 11.1 lakh crore," ICRA Chief Economist Aditi Nayar told PTI. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is set to present the full Budget on July 23. This will be her seventh Budget in a row. This budget aims to set the foundation for India's journey towards becoming a developed nation (Viksit Bharat) by 2047. The government achieved a fiscal deficit of 5.6 per cent of the GDP during the previous financial year.



"There is also a high likelihood of reducing the net market borrowings for the current financial year by Rs 35,000-Rs 55,000 crore vis-à-vis the interim Budget estimate of Rs 11.8 lakh crore, which would augur well for yields, along with the demand boost for G-secs owing to their inclusion in the J P Morgan Government Bond Index," she said. The incremental revenue receipts of Rs 1.2 lakh crore can be split to increase the revenue spending and facilitate fiscal consolidation, she said, adding, the government could utilise it for spurring consumption by providing

some income tax sops. She further said that reducing the absolute size of the fiscal deficit will be quite difficult over the next 3-4 years, with the decline in the fiscal deficit-to-GDP ratio largely dependent on the increase in nominal GDP. If the government continues with capex at 3.4 per cent of GDP over the medium term (in line with the FY2025 Interim Budget), then incremental fiscal consolidation would require a sustained compression in the revenue deficit, she said. Notably, she said, the government has 'on-budgeted' a large portion of previously off-budget capex; this should be considered while determining the endpoint of the awaited fresh fiscal consolidation roadmap beyond FY26. Assuming that capex of about 1 per cent of GDP has been brought on budget, the government could consider further reducing its fiscal deficit target to 4 per cent of GDP over the medium term, from the expected sub-4.5 per cent of GDP in FY'26, she added.

Incuspaze takes on lease 1.15 lakh sq ft office space in B'luru to start coworking centre

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Coworking firm Incuspaze has taken on lease a 1.15 lakh square feet area in Bengaluru to open a new centre as part of its strategy to expand business amid a rise in demand for flexible workspace. In a statement, the company said it has expanded its portfolio in Bengaluru with leasing of 1.15 lakh sq ft office space at Whitefield, a major hub for the tech industry. "The new facility will accommodate 1,800 seats," Incuspaze said. "Our new facility is designed to foster creativity and collaboration among businesses," said Sanjay Choudhary, founder and CEO of Incuspaze. Incuspaze said it aims to expand its portfolio in southern India, with a focus on Bengaluru, Chennai and Hyderabad. Since its inception in 2016, Incuspaze has 44 centres across 18 cities



and a total portfolio of 3 million square feet. The company embraces the 'space-as-a-service' model, integrating technology with real estate to deliver innovative solutions tailored for enterprises, MSMEs, and startups. "Bengaluru is India's most active office market, accounting for the highest absorption of 23 per cent in pan-India during H1 2024. While the IT-ITeS sector accounts for nearly half of the city's absorption, flex spaces account for 5.4 per cent of the total absorption in H1 2024," Vestian CEO Shrinivasa Rao said. Flex spaces nearly account for 16 per cent of the total absorption in pan-India during the same period.

Rupee rises 3 paise to close at 83.58 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and settled for the day 3 paise higher at 83.58 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, on firm domestic markets and sustained inflow of foreign capital. Forex traders said a decline in crude oil prices favoured the rupee, while a strong US dollar capped sharp gains. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.59, and touched an intraday high of 83.53 and a low of 83.60 against the dollar during the trading session. It finally settled at 83.58 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 10 paise to 83.61 against the US dollar. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading marginally higher by 0.11 per cent at 104.29. "The US dollar gained on positive US markets and a surge in US treasury yields on



rising expectations that Donald Trump may be re-elected as the President of the United States in the upcoming elections in November," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading 0.68 per cent lower at USD 84.27 per barrel. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on the strong US dollar and weak Asian currencies. However, a decline in crude oil prices and continued foreign inflows may support the rupee at lower levels," Choudhary said, adding that any intervention by the RBI may also support the local unit. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 51.69

Telecom Ministry to work on actionable plan on issues identified by panels: Scindia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The telecom ministry will work on actionable plan with defined timelines on issues that have been discussed with telecom operators and other players in the sector, Union minister Jyotiraditya Scindia said on Tuesday. The minister held meetings with three of the six committees set by his ministry. The meeting with the committee on telecom operators was attended by telecom chiefs including Reliance Jio Chairman Akash Ambani, Bharti Airtel Founder and Chairman Sunil Bharti Mittal, and Vodafone Idea MD and CEO Akshaya Moondra. "We've identified a rather deep agenda for these committees. Now the members of these committees and us will be working together," Scindia said. Industry body Cellular Operators Association of India (COAI) Director General S P Kochhar was also part of the meeting. Scindia said there are varied schedule for the first presentation of these committees that will be over the next couple of weeks. "Then we will be taking on each individual issue, delving into the details and devising an action plan, timelines and actionable items, so that we can take our sector forward," Scindia said. He said the six committees

are the backbone of the Indian communication sector. "By forging these committees we hope to take the sector forward realising Prime Minister's goal of creating not only a Atmanirbhar (self-reliant) Bharat but a telecom superpower within India that we will hopefully transcend our boundaries in days to come," Scindia said. The minister also met representatives of internet service providers and infrastructure committee as well as those of academia and R&D committee. On Monday, Scindia held meetings with three advisory groups on satellite, communications and electronics ecosystem and original equipment makers to prepare a roadmap for achieving self-reliance and global leadership in the sector. The meetings were attended by Nokia India Country Head Tarun Chhabra, Samsung President and CEO Southwest Asia J B Park, Cisco System India Managing Director Harish Krishnan, STL Managing Director and CEO Ankit Agarwal, Tejas Non-Executive Chairman N G Subramaniam, Viasat India Managing Director Gautam Sharma, and Hughes Communications India CEO, President and Managing Director Shivaji Chatterjee, among others.

NAREDCO pitches for raising tax exemption limit on home loan interest to ₹5 lakh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realtors' body NAREDCO on Tuesday suggested that the tax exemption on interest on self-occupied property loans should be increased to Rs 5 lakh in the upcoming budget from Rs 2 lakh currently to boost housing demand amid a rise in housing prices and mortgage rates. Builders also sought some tax incentives to boost demand and supply of affordable homes. NAREDCO noted that under Section 24 of the Income Tax Act, the deduction allowed on interest on loans for self-occupied property is limited to Rs 2 lakh. "Given the rising property prices and interest rates, NAREDCO proposes

increasing this limit to at least Rs 5 lakh," the association said in a statement. The realtors' body mentioned that currently the annual value of property held as stock-in-trade and not let out is considered nil for up to two years from the end of the financial year in which the construction completion certificate is obtained. After this period, the notional income is taxed. It suggested that this provision should not apply to real estate developers holding stock due to weak market conditions and recommended increasing the time limit from two to five years. G Hari Babu, President of NAREDCO, said these recommendations, if implemented, will not only provide much-needed relief to developers but also



stimulate demand in the housing sector. Ramani Sastri - Chairman & MD, Sterling Developers, said, "This year, the demands go beyond the usual expectation of single-window clearance and industry status, which could unlock financial advantages and streamline project approvals. There is an express need for more tax sops for both homebuyers as well as investors." The government should raise

the deduction limit for interest payment on home loans from the existing Rs 2 lakh a year to Rs 5 lakh, which will add momentum to housing demand, he added. "The budget should offer a degree of personal tax relief, either by ways of lower tax rates or by readjusting tax slabs, which is the need of the hour," Sastri said. In his wishlist, Dhruv Agarwala, Group CEO, Housing.Com and

PropTiger.Com, said the demand and supply for affordable homes have shown fluctuating trends over the last three years across major tier I and tier II cities. "In response, the upcoming budget should focus on revitalising both demand and supply for homes in the Rs 15-75 lakh per unit price bracket. Introducing interest subsidy programmes could incentivise potential homebuyers effectively," he said. To boost supply, Agarwala said the government could strategically deploy its extensive land banks in partnership with private developers, offering land and capital at concessional rates. "Implementing tax incentives for developers engaging in these affordable projects

could further stimulate activity in this sector. It's noteworthy that substantial demand persists within the Rs 15-75 lakh price category, necessitating focused governmental action in the upcoming budget," he observed. Agarwala said this approach would not only catalyse growth in the real estate sector but also stimulate approximately 200 ancillary industries, substantially boosting job creation across these sectors. "Moreover, longstanding sector demands, such as granting industry or infrastructure status and raising tax exemption limits on home loan repayments, should be considered to sustain long-term growth in the housing sector," he added.

Auto industry needs 2 lakh skilled people by 2030 to meet 30% EV adoption target: SIAM

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian automotive industry will need up to 2 lakh skilled people by 2030 to meet the government's vision of 30 per cent electric vehicle adoption, the Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers said on Tuesday. A total talent investment of Rs 13,552 crore is expected for hiring and training the workforce. "As we look ahead, one of the major constraints the auto industry will face is the dearth of skilled electric vehicle capable manpower," Society of Indian Automobile Manufacturers (SIAM) President Vinod Aggarwal

said while addressing a workshop on empowering EV-ready workforce in the Indian auto industry. Aggarwal, who is also MD & CEO, Volvo Eicher Commercial Vehicle Ltd, pointed out the need for specialised domain skills in the areas of battery technology, powered electronics and motor design. "To keep the pace of global trends and make our auto industry a globally competitive industry, there is an urgent need that our workforce be equipped with new skills by upskilling, rescaling and skilling them," he added. Detailing the gap, SIAM Vice President Shailesh Chandra said, "By 2030, India will need nearly one to two



lakh people with specific skills to meet the government's mission of 30 per cent EV adoption." The talent need will be spread across multiple blue-collar and white-collar professionals, ranging from technicians in manufacturing and testing to PhD scientists and engineers in R&D, he added. "The talent requirements will

also span across multiple disciplines like electrical and mechanical, chemical and electronics engineering," added Chandra who is also MD, Tata Motors Passenger Vehicles Ltd & Tata Passenger Electric Mobility Ltd. According to the 'SIAM EV Skill Gap Study' report in order to achieve 100 per cent localisation of EV components, India needs to

add 30,000 EV-ready workers per year till 2030, up from a current rate of 15,000 per year. The report pointed out that 43 per cent of technical competencies between Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) and EV have minimal overlap and therefore would require fresh skilling of talent. On the other hand, 27 per cent of technical competencies have a high overlap between ICE and EV and may require re-skilling of existing talent. "The estimated hiring cost would be Rs 7,671 crore, while the training cost would be around Rs 5,881 crore. The total talent investment is expected to be around Rs 13,552 crore," the report said.

Graphisads launches G Force

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Graphisads Limited, Glazing advertising Company and Outdoor Media owner, has entered into a groundbreaking partnership with the prestigious Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Lucknow to unveil "G Force," an innovative accelerator programme. This initiative aims to cultivate and empower aspiring entrepreneurs within the Media sectors through a dynamic collaboration of industry expertise and academic leadership.

Balaji has explosive game, we can't be written off just like that: Bopanna

PTI ■ PARIS

As if a fine wine, Rohan Bopanna is all fired up for his last hurrah at the Olympic Games. Not the one who would rail against circumstances or crib about not having the strongest of partners, the veteran Indian tennis player says his comrade N Sriram Balaji has enough firepower and the scratch pairing is potent enough to test the big teams in Paris. Had Bopanna been ranked outside the top-10, India would not have any representation in the men's doubles event at the Paris Olympics, starting July 26. The 44-year-old had to make a choice between Balaji and Yuki Bhambri and after consulting his coaches -- Scott Davidoff and Balachandran Mannikath -- he eventually settled for the more "athletic and agile" Balaji. "I really believe that when we go out there, we genuinely have a chance to win every match, whoever we play against. It's not like we're just going to be written off, I feel," Bopanna told PTI in an exclusive interview. Bopanna has reason to have that confidence in Balaji's ability to rise to the occasion. He had a chance to test Balaji at

the French Open where Bopanna was pushed along with Matthew Ebden by the Tamil Nadu player and his Mexican partner Miguel Reyes-Varela. Not only this, Balaji had a consistent run on the ATP Tour where he scalped a few big names such as Americans Rajeev Ram and Austin Krajicek -- both top-10 players -- at the Houston ATP 250 event on clay. With his German partner Andre Begemann, Balaji also defeated Austria's top-50 players Alexander Erler and Lucas Miedler. Balaji also showed that he can quickly adapt to conditions when he was asked to do the singles duty during the Davis Cup tie against Pakistan on grass. The rival was not of the highest quality but Balaji showed that he was willing to come out of his comfort zone if the team demands. "The idea is to go prepared, at least believe in as a team. That is what we're trying to do. With Bala, he definitely has the firepower to do well," Bopanna said. He also gave his reason for picking Balaji over Bhambri. "I felt Balaji, depending on the surface we're playing with, which is the clay, would have been the ideal partner. Currently, even if you look at



(Matthew) Ebden, who I'm playing with, he's somebody who's more agile, more explosive on that surface. "And for clay, especially, I need a partner who would suit me

better in terms of going by the surface. If it was a hard court or a grass court, maybe Yuki would have been the preferred choice." Bopanna though admitted that

it was not an obvious but a difficult choice since he has not played with either of them on the Tour. "Balaji can move well on both flanks? I think he is, given on

the clay court, he's definitely more athletic, given the two of us. Between me and Bala, I definitely need a partner who's more athletic, more agile. "Bala has similar capabilities as

Matthew. Bala would be fast, quick, swift like Ebden. But Ebden comes with a lot of experience and Bala hasn't played at that level much." It also means that Bopanna has to be leader of the team all the time. On the Tour he has Ebden to pull the team out of the pit if Bopanna is having an off day. In the past Olympics, he had illustrious teammates like Leander Paes, Mahesh Bhupathi and Sania Mirza. In Paris, it will Bopanna, who has to do the heavy lifting. But did he have any choice? "There is nobody currently in the country who has played that kind of experience as Matthew Ebden. So, no matter who I played with on the country, it would be the same scenario." Due to the considerable gap in their rankings in the past, Bopanna could never play with Balaji on the Tour. But they have planned to compete in a couple of ATP events, starting with Hamburg Open, to prepare for the Olympics. "This is my time at home basically to rest, recover and then come back into the circuit. But I thought it'll be nice to get to know whoever the partner I'm playing with. Try and work and at least try and prepare better than what we have done before

maybe." As the discussion veered over Balaji's game and how he compliments him, Bopanna had a good things to say about his partner. "His serve is definitely a big strength. He's got a powerful shot there. Which definitely helps in the doubles game. No question on it." Bopanna also said that they don't just want to show up and get back. They consider themselves worthy of a medal. "Every athlete who goes into Olympics wants to win a medal, right? There is 100 percent that belief. Everybody wants to do better than the previous time. There's no question on it, right? That's how life is. You want to do better. You want to keep going higher and higher. "Nobody can tell you what can happen. But the preparation going into the games is what really matters. "This time I was even listening that they have a fantastic medical team there to help the recovery, help the sports science, which is the first time ever, which is amazing. This is what is the progress already for what athletes can get and really see and make a difference," he signed off. Tennis events at Paris Olympics start on July 27.

Olympic tennis players return to red clay of Paris' Roland Garros after Wimbledon's grass

AP ■ PARIS

The competition surface doesn't change for most Olympic sports. A pool's a pool. A track's a track. A wrestling mat's a mat. And so on. Tennis? That's a whole other story, with tournaments contested on clay, hard or grass courts -- and now there's a shift for the Paris Games. For the first time in more than 30 years, the tennis competition at an Olympics will be held on red clay, which means players who recently made the adjustment from the dirt at the French Open in early June to grass at Wimbledon in early July will need to reverse course again in short order. The "terre battue" at Roland Garros used for the French Open hosts Olympic matches starting on July 27 -- two weeks after Wimbledon wrapped up with singles titles for Barbora Krejickova of the Czech Republic and Carlos Alcaraz of Spain -- and the transition back to that site is more concerning to some athletes than others. "That'll definitely be interesting. But everyone's kind of doing it. We'll all be in the same boat," said Jessica Pegula, an American ranked in the top 10 who is expected to play singles, women's doubles with U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff and perhaps mixed doubles, too. "I usually don't struggle too much with switching. And I like how the courts play there. It might be easier than some other places we play on clay. When the weather is warm in Paris, it plays pretty true. There's a good speed. There's not a lot to get used to." For her, maybe. "It's going to be the first time for me, going from grass to clay," said Elena Rybakina of Kazakhstan, the 2022 Wimbledon champion and a semifinalist there this month. "It's not easy. Physically, it's not easy, (or) mentally." One additional factor on



some players' minds: There will be another brief turnaround after the Olympics to prepare for the move to the hard courts ahead of the U.S. Open, which starts in late August. That's less than a month after the medals are awarded in France. "It's awful for the schedule," said Taylor Fritz, Pegula's teammate for the United States and someone who just reached the quarterfinals at the All England Club. "It makes absolutely no sense. It screws everything up, for sure." Tennis becomes a different sport, in some key ways, depending on where it's being played. "You have to adapt to it. ... It's going to be weird, obviously, going back on the clay quickly," said Cam Norrie, who will represent Britain at the Olympics, "but we're changing surface and changing variables all the time." Clay is softer and slower, which can dull the power on serves and groundstrokes and create longer exchanges, putting a premium on stamina, while the grittiness can magnify the effect of heavy topspin. Grass is speedier and balls bounce lower. Hard courts tend to produce truer, midrange

bounces and generally will reward those who go for point-ending shots. The biggest difference among them might be the footwork. Clay requires sliding. Grass is more about choppy steps, to avoid slipping. Hard courts generally do not cause as many falls as either of the others. "For a clay-court player, the adjustment's not that hard," 1989 French Open champion Michael Chang said. "For (people) that have grown up playing on the surface, you just know the surface so well." So someone like Iga Swiatek, who has won four of the past five French Opens, should feel comfortable and confident on clay, by far her best surface. The same goes, of course, for Rafael Nadal, a 14-time champion at Roland Garros. Novak Djokovic has won at least three Grand Slam titles at each of the sport's biggest events, the only man to do so, and the adjustments required come rather naturally to him. Then again, Alcaraz, whose title at Roland Garros this year made him, at 21, the youngest man to win a major trophy on clay, hard and grass courts, had this to say about going from London to Paris: "It's not easy to change surfaces in just a week.

Messi loses fitness battle at Copa America, puts goal of playing 6th World Cup on hold

AP ■ BUENOS AIRES

Lionel Messi cried uncontrollably after he exited from a Copa America final before fulltime for the first time in his career. Beyond the severe pain in his right ankle on Sunday night in Miami Gardens, the tears on the face of Argentina's captain showed a deeper anguish. Despite winning the title in one of his "last battles," as Messi described this Copa, the 37-year-old superstar did not pass the fitness test that could have opened the way for him to play his sixth World Cup in 2026. Argentina successfully defended its South American title with a hard-fought 1-0 extra-time win against Colombia. Messi left the pitch in Hard Rock Stadium in the 64th minute, breaking down without being touched. The Copa was Messi's first major tournament since leaving European soccer to play in the less competitive Major League Soccer in the U.S. Still, he has missed several games over the last year for his Inter Miami club and Argentina due to muscle issues. Messi felt muscular pains in his right leg in the second group match against Chile, which sidelined him from the



following game against Peru. He did not deliver an impressive performance in the quarterfinals against Ecuador and missed his chance in the penalty shootout. In the semifinal victory over Canada, he scored his only goal in the tournament in the 2-0 win. With a limp, Messi celebrated his second Copa title in modest fashion on the field. The injury still hurt the star on Monday. "One more," he said on his social media

channels. Messi did not speak to the media after the injury, and Argentina did not give details about the damage. Messi's farewell to the national team is still on hold, but there's other players aged above 35 who are likely to have played their last major international tournament; winger Ángel Di María (36), defender Nicolás Otamendi (36), and substitute goalkeeper Franco Armani (37).

Argentina does have up-and-coming players and a squad averaging 28 years of age when the veterans are not counted. That is partly why it held strong against Colombia despite the absence of its star for 56 minutes of play. "I don't know whether we marked an era, but this team never ceases to surprise. It recovers from difficulties," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "When (Messi) leaves, the team multiplies with the one that comes in and we play better in a different way." Young talents such as Alejandro Garnacho, Valentín Carboni, Thiago Almada, Claudio Echeverri and Valentín Barco are not to be compared with the eight-time Ballon d'Or winner, but they can help Argentina remain competitive when it defends the World Cup in 2026. Key squad members such as goalkeeper Emiliano Martínez, defender Cristian Romero, midfielder Rodrigo de Paul and striker Lautaro Martínez are likely to remain. Argentina will return to action in September in World Cup qualifying against Chile and Colombia. The Argentines lead South America. That international window will give more hints about whether Messi's legend will go on or stop at Sunday's title.

Nagal attains career-high ATP ranking of 68

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic-bound Sumit Nagal continued his ascent in the ATP singles chart, climbing to a career-high ranking of 68. The 26-year-old rose five spots in the latest ATP ranking list released on Monday. His previous best was 71. Nagal thus moves past former world No. 71 Sashi Menon to become the fourth highest-ranked Indian man since 1973. Vijay Amritraj (ranked 18th in 1980), Ramesh Krishnan (ranked 23rd in 1985) and Somdev Devvarman (ranked 62nd in 2011) are the only other Indian players who have



held a higher rank than Nagal. A string of impressive results in recent times has not only helped Nagal improve his ranking but also make the cut for singles event at the Paris Games. Nagal, who will be the sole Indian in the men's singles

event at the Paris Olympics, has so far logged 779 ATP points. The year began with a win against Alexander Bublik, the 31st seed from Kazakhstan at the Australian Open. He also competed at the French Open and Wimbledon. He had won the men's singles crown at the Heilbronn Neckarcup 2024 Challenger event in Germany earlier this month and the Chennai Open in February. Nagal, who is currently the best-ranked Indian singles player, has won four ATP Challenger titles since 2023 and Heilbronn was his fourth title on clay.



Gareth says he will step down as England manager

AP ■ LONDON

After eight years, four tournaments and two finals, Gareth Southgate announced he was stepping down as England manager on Tuesday, saying it was "time for change." Sunday's 2-1 loss to Spain in the European Championship final proved to be his last game in charge of the national team. "As a proud Englishman, it has been the honour of my life to play for England and to manage England. It has meant everything to me, and I have given it my all," he said. "But it's time for change, and for a new chapter." Southgate's contract was due to expire this year and his announcement comes after months of uncertainty surrounding his future. Mikel Oyarzabal's 86th-minute winner in Berlin was a painful way to end his reign after he transformed the fortunes of England's underperforming national team. Hired in 2016, he led England to back-to-back finals at the Euros and to the semifinals of the World Cup in 2018. But, ultimately, he was unable to end the nation's decades-long wait for a first major trophy since the World Cup in

1966. "Gareth has made the impossible job possible and laid strong foundations for future success. He is held in the highest regard by the players, the backroom team, by everyone at the FA and across the world of football," said Mark Bullingham, chief executive of the English Football Association. Southgate said before the European Championship that it would likely be his last tournament if England did not win. During it, he faced fierce criticism for the team's early performances and some fans throw plastic beer cups towards him at the end of the 0-0 draw with Slovenia in the group phase. But he achieved what no other England manager has by leading his team to two finals, including the first final on foreign soil. "We look back at Gareth's tenure with huge pride - his contribution to the English game, including a significant role in player development, and in culture transformation has been unique. However, it is his record of winning tournament games which is most extraordinary," Bullingham said.

On incredible day, Mbappé welcomed by Real Madrid fans at packed Santiago Bernabeu

AP ■ MADRID

Kylian Mbappé finally put on a Real Madrid jersey on Tuesday, fulfilling his childhood dream in front of a packed Santiago Bernabeu Stadium. Nearly 80,000 fans were in hand at the Bernabeu to welcome the 25-year-old France star during his official presentation as the club's newest player. After signing his five-year contract with the Spanish powerhouse alongside club president Florentino Pérez, Mbappé entered the stage set up at the Bernabeu to loud

cheers by the Madrid fans. Wearing the No. 9 jersey, Mbappé smiled broadly and waved to the fans who chanted his name, then embraced Pérez and former Madrid player and coach Zinedine Zidane, who invited Mbappé to visit the Spanish club for the first time when he was just a teenager. "It's incredible day for me," Mbappé told the crowd, in Spanish. "Since being a kid I dreamed about playing for Madrid and today I'm here. It means a lot to me." Mbappé's relatives, club officials and several former players were by the stage at the



Bernabeu, which had its roof closed for the midday ceremony in the Spanish capital. Kids linked to

Mbappé's foundation were also on hand. The record-15 European Cups won by Madrid were also on display on the stage where Mbappé was introduced. The message "Welcome, Mbappé" was shown on the large video boards at the newly revamped Bernabeu. Some of the club's most iconic moments were also shown while the song "Nessun Dorma" was played on the loudspeakers. Images of Mbappé's career were also displayed, as well as photos including Mbappé wearing Madrid's uniform as a kid and

posing alongside former club star Cristiano Ronaldo. Pérez called Mbappé's presentation a "historic act" for the club. "Today we welcome an exceptional player who today is fulfilling his childhood dream," Pérez said. "Today you are here because it's something that you wanted. Thank you for making a great effort to be able to wear this white jersey." Mbappé's presentation came after he played at the 2024 European Championship, where France lost to eventual champion Spain in the semifinals.

HARDIK PANDYA TO LEAD INDIA IN T20IS AGAINST SRI LANKA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Star all-rounder Hardik Pandya is all set to lead India in the three-match T20 International series against Sri Lanka starting July 27. However, one of the heroes of India's T20 World Cup victory last month will take a break during the three-match ODI series, which is scheduled in August, due to "personal reasons". "Hardik Pandya was India's T20 vice-captain under Rohit Sharma. He is completely fit and available for the three-match T20I series and will lead the side," a senior BCCI source told PTI on conditions of anonymity. Rohit retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup. The T20Is against Sri Lanka will run from July 27 to 30 in Pallekele, followed by the ODIs from August 2 to 7 in Colombo. The squad for the series is expected to be announced in the next couple of days. While there is still no clarity on who would be Pandya's deputy, the toss-up is between Shubman Gill, who recently captained India to a 4-1 series win over Zimbabwe, and Suryakumar Yadav, who led the side during the T20Is against South Africa last year. About the ODIs, the official confirmed that Pandya has asked for leave and has already communicated this to regular skipper Rohit Sharma, who is also taking a break from this series.



"The break from ODIs is for very personal reasons. Hardik doesn't have any fitness issue as is being floated in the media," the official said. For the ODIs, KL Rahul, who led in the last ODI series in South Africa, and Gill are in contention for the leadership role. **THRUST ON DOMESTIC AVAILABILITY:** BCCI secretary Jay

Shah has made it clear that even star cricketers must make themselves available for domestic engagements when they are free from national duty. But exceptions will be made for the likes of Rohit, Virat Kohli and pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah. The BCCI would, however, want all the other T20 specialists to play at least one or two of a couple of Duleep Trophy games

in August as a precursor to the Tests against Bangladesh and New Zealand. "This time there is no zonal selection committee for Duleep Trophy. Only national selection committee will pick Duleep teams. "All Test team contenders will be picked. For Rohit, Virat and Bumrah, it will be their choice if they want to play or not," the source added.



Harmanpreet moves to 12th, Shafali 15th in ICC T20 rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

India opener Shafali Verma on Tuesday moved to 15th place while her skipper Harmanpreet Kaur climbed to the 12th spot in the latest ICC T20 rankings, following their strong performances in the series against South Africa. Harmanpreet has moved up three places and now has 613 rating points while Shafali rose two rungs to share the 15th spot with New Zealand's Amelia Kerr and Danni Wyatt

from England. The swashbuckling Smriti Mandhana continues to be the top-ranked Indian batter as she remained static on the fifth spot. In the bowlers' list, the seasoned Deepti Sharma continued her stay at the third place. Radha Yadav moved eight spots to 15th while Pooja Vastrakar climbed up six places to 23rd and Shreyanka Patil rose nine rungs to 60th. England spinner Sarah Glenn

has claimed a new career-high rating of 768 points. She has claimed eight wickets through four matches of England's ongoing T20I series at home against New Zealand. This has allowed the right-arter to maintain her place as the No.2 ranked T20I bowler in the world. The only player in front of Glenn in the ratings is teammate and fellow spinner Sophie Ecclestone and she also has eight scalps from the first four matches of the five-game series.

Lakshya underdog in reasonable Olympics draw, will play freely: Coach Vimal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The presence of some established foes notwithstanding, Indian shuttler Lakshya Sen has got a "fair" draw in his debut Olympics, according to his coach Vimal Kumar, who expects the youngster to play freely in Paris thanks to his "underdog" status and some technical improvements in his overall game. World No. 19 Sen's path to an Olympic medal has multiple hurdles as he will need to get past familiar Indonesian nemesis Jonatan Christie, last Olympics' surprise semifinalist Kevin Cordon from Guatemala, and Julian Carraggi from Belgium in Group L. "I think it (the draw) is very fair, I feel it is a very reasonable draw for him," Vimal, a former India coach, told PTI from Marseille, France

where Sen is currently training ahead of the Paris Olympics. "A couple of times, he has lost to Jonatan Christie in close matches. It's a 50-50 match. You have to convert (chances) if you have to get to the second stage. In my opinion, Lakshya has nothing to lose. He will be the underdog and he can play a lot more freely," he asserted. Describing Sen as a big-match player, Vimal said he expects Sen to trump former Asian Games champion Christie, who was also a part of Indonesia's Thomas Cup-winning team in 2022. Vimal said Sen has worked on his front-court alertness and closing stage composure. The 22-year-old would be aiming to become the first Indian male shuttler to finish on the Olympic podium. India's previous badminton medals at the Games have been clinched by

Saina Nehwal (bronze in 2012, London) and P V Sindhu (silver in 2016, Rio de Janeiro and bronze in 2020, Tokyo). "Jonathan will be the last match of the group and Lakshya should pull through. So I see a lot of positives. Not going to the Canada Open was a dampener but he has overcome that. Being away here in similar conditions will help him," Vimal said referring to Sen being forced out of his title defence in Canada Open owing to visa issues. To prepare the player from Almora, Korea's Yoo Yong-Sung, a two-time men's doubles Olympic silver-medallist, was brought back to polish his net game, improve his on-court pace and dial up the focus in crunch situations. Yong-Sung had worked with Sen in 2022. "We have brought in a lot of speed work into closing stages, we



introduced a lot of double drills in finishing, pushing the pace towards certain points. Last three weeks, Yoo Yong-Sung has been helping us with those drills," Vimal said. Vimal said Sen has also been doing a lot of service variations practice. "(The idea is) basically to bring in

some sort of intensity in the routines. Certain sets of routines that we follow are mostly singles-oriented. He (Sen) worked on those flat exchanges, retrieving and things like approaching the net and being a little more alert at the net," Vimal explained.

For the last one week, Sen has been training at the Halles des Sports Parsemain in Fos-sur-Mer, which is about 45 minutes from Marseille city centre. Sen is also training with the Olympic-bound Popov brothers -- Christo and Toma Junior -- till July 21. Indian shuttlers Kiran George, Ayush Shetty have been roped in too for sparring. "Next week we will be doing one set of tournament practice because he needs that little bit of that match practice. It would have been good to see him in Canada. So next week I want to see how he is implementing what he learned. "Against both the Popov brothers, it will be a good test. So I'll be able to assess him. Once he gets into the village in Paris, we won't get to play much. We will have limited time for practice in the main arena."

Lakshya had struggled through much of 2023 and early part of 2024. He fell behind in the qualification race but turned things around in time with two semifinal finishes at the All England Championship and the French Open to seal his place in the Olympics. "From all that he has survived, he got an opportunity to qualify. He has been practising and has worked on his game. Lakshya has acclimatised to the conditions, he plays well there in those conditions. "We have also got some of that tournament shuttlecock (F-90) because the conditions are a little on the slower side in Paris. So we have been practising with those shuttles," said Vimal, who guided Saina Nehwal to world No. 1 in 2015. Sen, along with his coach, will be leaving for Paris on July 22.

Moudgil overcomes mental demons to secure place in shooting contingent for Paris Games



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Overcoming mental demons after being left out of the Indian team from last year's Asian Games and the World Championships was key to shooter Anjum Moudgil securing a Paris Olympic berth. Former world no.1 Moudgil, a world championships and Commonwealth Games medallist, competed in two events during the last edition in Tokyo. She finished 15th in the 50m rifle 3 position and 18th in the 10m air rifle, but in Paris, she will be featuring in only women's 50m 3 position. By her own admission, the ouster from the Indian team for Worlds and Asian Games due to inconsistent form was an eye opener for her as the 30-year-old worked on bettering her mental toughness besides focussing entirely on her training. "Three years after Tokyo was a roller-coaster ride for me. I have seen tough times but I wanted to comeback stronger. The experiences of Tokyo will surely be of helpful (in Paris)," Moudgil said in a virtual media interaction. "I really took advantage of

quotas and trials, the federation told me not to lose out hope. They understood the things I was going through. I was really confident of making through to the team after I didn't make the team for World Championships and the Asian Games because of just 2 points in the trials. "I was too focussed and positive in giving my best in the trials. I knew my strengths and how to work under pressure and it paid off. "One year after Tokyo, I won couple of medals in World Cups and became world no.1. I did mental training focus, it's been a positive step for me. I now speak up, which is a positive change heading to Paris. I used time to get better and find what works better for me," she added. Understanding the importance of mental health issues, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has set up the Mentally Fit Helpline, a dedicated, independent and confidential mental health counselling service available to all athletes accredited for the Paris Games. "It's (mental health) so important for all the

federations and IOC to understand. It's important to understand the mental side, understand how it works for an athlete, understand mental toughness. So, it's positive step to see mental helpline being introduced in Paris Olympics," Moudgil said. "Athletes have spoken in the past about mental health issues. It's a common issue which needs to be addressed not only for athletes, but in every profession. "People should respect mental health, and not hide anything. The helpline is a positive step towards admiring mental health issues." India have named a strong 21-member shooting contingent for Paris Games, which includes many youngsters, including 22-year-old Sift Kaur Samra who will be competing alongside Moudgil in 50m 3p event. "There are so many strong, young shooters, it really helps me to push my limit. I would have been stuck if I was not pushed. There is high competition in my event, and it really helped me to push. The reason I am here because of the efforts I have put in over the last 3 years," Moudgil said.

"I am very positive going into Paris with this young contingent. All of them are confident, the team is doing very well. It is positive for each and every shooter, there is no pressure. My expectation is for everyone to give their best, everyone going with positive mindset." Moudgil is counting on her difficult Tokyo experience to shine in Paris. "Competing in one rather than two events both have positive and negative sides, but I am happy. In Tokyo, the environment was different because of Covid. Everything was tentative, we had to appear for Covid test everyday and if you turn positive you are out of the competition. All of these things were disturbances. "The competition is very high in India and the pressure situations we face during trials will definitely help in Olympics. I just wanted to be my best in trials, the fire to perform in trials and the experience of last 15 years really paid off. These things will surely help me in Paris, the experience of playing in the Olympics is there with me," she said. "...We had a different experience in Tokyo because of Covid, we won quotas 3 years before and was waiting as the Games were postponed. But we really don't discuss too much baggage of Tokyo. It's just another big competition and that's what we discuss." Shooting competitions of the Paris Olympics will be held at National Shooting Center in Châteauroux, the capital city of the French department of Indre, central France, which is approximately 270km from Paris. "The preparation is going really well and according to plan. We are Luxembourg for the last phase of our training and preparation before we head to Châteauroux, France on 21st."

Bawa assures India of medal in World Junior squash, Anahat bows out

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's Shaurya Bawa guaranteed himself of a medal as he moved to the semifinals with a hard fought 3-2 win over Malaysian Low Wa-Sern in the World Junior Squash Championships in Houston. The 18-year-old from Delhi, thus, becomes only the second Indian male to reach the semifinals after Kush Kumar, who reached the last four stage in 2014. In a thrilling clash that lasted 80 minutes, Bawa was down 6-

9 and 7-10 in the fifth game but remarkably saved three match balls to eke out a 2-11 11-4 10-12 11-8 12-10 victory in the boys' quarterfinals on Monday. With the win, Bawa set up a semifinal clash with Egyptian top-seed Mohamed Zakaria. Meanwhile, compatriot Anahat Singh bowed out from the girls' quarterfinals for a third straight year. The 16-year-old women's national champion lost a close five-setter to Nadien Elhammamy, with the Egyptian winning 11-8 11-9 5-11 10-12 13-11.

Punjab FC retains five Indian players ahead of upcoming ISL season

PTI ■ MOHALI

Punjab FC on Tuesday announced retaining five Indian players, including midfielder Ashish Pradhan and goal-keeper Ravi Kumar, on multi-year deals for the upcoming Indian Super League season. The other players retained are Ricky Shabong, Manglenthang Kipgen, and Suresh Meitei. While Ravi and Pradhan will remain at the club until May 2026, centre back Meitei and midfielder Ricky will be a part of the Punjab FC till May 2027.

Kipgen, also a midfielder, will continue till May 2028. "They were key players for the club in the previous season and the club has kept their faith in these players," the club said in a release. Ravi made 47 saves for the club in 16 appearances last season while Meitei made 14 appearances while assisting once for the club. "Pradhan, Shabong and Kipgen made 17, 10 and four appearances respectively adding steel and creativity in the middle of the park," the club added.

Olympics-bound javelin thrower Jena says he was on verge of quitting last year

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Asian Games silver medallist javelin thrower Kishore Jena says he was on verge of quitting the sport in 2023 after a string of poor performances but he heeded to his father's advice, leading to a revival of his career. Jena admitted that Neeraj Chopra's Tokyo Olympics gold medal motivated him to achieve more in his sport but he found it difficult to get the big throws and thought of quitting the sport in July last year just before the World Championships. "When Neeraj won at the Olympics, we celebrated and enjoyed his victory. But honestly, the victory also left me dejected because I too was playing the same sport. I felt it was time for me to achieve something in sports," Jena said. "I participated in Lebanon National Championships after a dip in my rankings and produced a throw of 78m. Despite giving it my all, I



couldn't achieve much. I started doubting if all the hard work was worth it. I called my father, who encouraged me to participate in next competition in Sri Lanka," he said in a JioCinema release. Jena won in Lebanon (on July 21) with a throw of 78.96m, which by any standard was a modest performance. In fact, Jena could not breach the 80m mark till the end of 2022. His first 80m-plus throw came in March 2023 during the Indian

Grand Prix in Thiruvananthapuram where he came up with 81.05m effort. "I decided the event in Sri Lanka (July 30) would be my last attempt, after which I would quit and go back to prioritizing work and family. With God's grace, I performed well, producing a throw of 84.38m which led to my qualification for the World Championships." Jena qualified for the Budapest World Championships in

August 2023 through world ranking quota. He could not breach the automatic qualification mark of 85.20m. "I performed well in the World Championships as well, achieving a personal best of 84.77m," said Jena who finished fifth in the final while Chopra won the gold with 88.17m. "I followed it up with another personal best of 87.54m at the Asian Games (in Hangzhou, China where he won a silver behind Chopra) securing my ticket to Paris 2024. I now want to give my best at Paris. I am quite confident. While I haven't set any particular targets, I am aiming to improve my personal best." Jena is currently struggling for form as he has crossed the 80m mark just once in the six events he has taken part after the World Championships. He threw 80.84m to win a bronze medal at the National Inter-State Championships in Panchkula in June and that was his season's best so far.