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CRISIS AS KCR FALTERS

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MONEY 10
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Dilli door ast... aspirants

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The tragedy in infamous by-lane of Old Rajinder Nagar in the national Capital, which claimed the lives of three IAS aspirants last week, rocked Parliament on Monday. Leaders cutting across party lines demanded a high-level probe and called for a mechanism to curb mushrooming of coaching centres nationwide, particularly in Delhi. Lok Sabha members demanded an enquiry into the tragic incident, while Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said the culture of coaching centres has spawned "gas chambers" and stressed on the need to examine the huge expenditure on newspaper advertisements by them. Given the sensitivity and urgency of the matter the Upper House agreed for a short duration discussion on the deaths of three UPSC aspirants by drowning in a coaching centre in Delhi due to waterlogging. While BJP's New Delhi Lok Sabha MP Bansuri Swaraj blamed the AAP-led Delhi Government for "utter apathy", AAP leader Sanjay Singh urged the Rajya Sabha Chairperson to hold discussions in the House also on NEET, Manipur violence and "infiltration" by China. DMK MP Tiruchi Siva sought to know had this incident happened in a NEET centre, what would have the Treasury Benches done. He said the Delhi Lieutenant Governor has all the powers in the national Capital and only he should be held responsible (for this incident). "The Chief Minister of Delhi is just for namesake," he said.



File photo: PTI

Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan informed Parliament that there are clear guidelines for running coaching centres and it is the duty of the State Governments to supervise their functioning. "We must fix responsibility so that such incidents do not recur. There should be no politics... Negligence has happened and someone has to take responsibility so that a solution can be found," Pradhan said. The Government has sent advisories related to coaching centres to the States and Union

Territories in 2017, 2019, 2020 and 2024, he informed. BJP MP Sudhanshu Trivedi who initiated the discussion in Rajya Sabha, pointed towards the "laxities" of the Delhi Government's various departments. "There were many complaints (against the institute). A student complained on June 26 and then a reminder on July 22 while the fire department gave NOC (no-objection certificate) for the use of the basement as storage," Trivedi said. In his remarks Dhankhar said, "I find that youth demographic

dividend of the country has to be nurtured, I further find that coaching has become virtually commerce." He also pointed out the high sums earned by the coaching centres leading to commercialisation of education. "Coachings have become a flourishing industry with high returns.... Every time we read a newspaper front one or two pages are by way of advertisements.... Every penny spent on advertisement is coming from the students, every new building is coming from the students," he said.

Comparing the coaching culture to no less than "gas chambers", the Chairman stated, "In a country where opportunities are growing this silo is turning out to be a problem... They are becoming no less than a gas chamber." He urged the members to tell the youths about the various other employment and skill opportunities available in the country. Congress MP Randeep Singh Surjewala demanded a law to regulate fee structure and ensure safety of students. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav wrote to Speaker Om Birla urging him to direct the Government to pay ₹one crore compensation to the next of kin of the students who died. In the Lok Sabha the issue of suicides in the coaching hub of Kota in Rajasthan was also raised and Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar said several initiatives have been taken by the Centre to curb incidents of suicide among students. "According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) and Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, only 1.2 per cent of total suicide cases are related to failure in examinations," Majumdar told the House. On the other hand a civil services aspirant wrote to Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud seeking action against officials responsible for the deaths of three fellow students. In his letter, Avinash Dubey said students residing in these areas are "living a life of hell" due to annual flooding caused by "apathy" of the authorities.

Media muffled



Pioneer photo

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After a day-long protest by the mediapersons over the security norms to curb the movement of journalists in the Parliament premises on Monday, Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla met a group of journalists and assured them that all their grievances would be redressed and better facilities would be provided to them to discharge their duties. Print and TV journalists routinely record comments from MPs near the entry and exit points of the Parliament building but on Monday they were restricted to a porta-cabin enclosure made for them. Reporters were removed from Parliament's Makar Dwar where they usually interact with MPs. Makar Dwar is one of the entrances to the new Parliament building. Leader of the Opposition

Rahul Gandhi raised the issue in the Lok Sabha and requested the Speaker to remove the restrictions imposed on the media within Parliament premises. "Sir, I would request you to allow the media, who have been restricted to a cage, to move out," Rahul said in the Lok Sabha. Birla reminded Rahul about the rules of procedures of Parliament and said such issues should be discussed with him in person and not be raised on the floor of the House. Rahul and other Opposition leaders such as Trinamool Congress leader Derek O'Brien, Congress MP Karti Chidambaram, and Shiv Sena-UBT MP Priyanka Chaturvedi met mediapersons in the media enclosure. "This is censorship. This is completely unacceptable. We are with you in this fight," O'Brien said.

Jammu terrorised Hunted to extinction

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

A late-night fire incident, in which at least four houses belonging to Kashmiri Pandits were gutted under mysterious circumstances in the Mattan area of Anantnag district on Sunday, has once again sparked a debate and raised serious security concerns among the Kashmiri Pandit community living in exile since 1990. The houses stood tall and witnessed over three-decade-long struggle before they were gutted under mysterious circumstances late last night. "We received this news early in the morning. The fire incident took place around 2.30 am. We demand a high-level probe into the fire," a close relative of the family living in Jammu told reporters. The multi-floor building was considered heritage site in the area. Most visitors reaching Mattan to fulfil their religious obligations used to pay a visit to the area and soak themselves in the glorious history of their forefathers who had constructed these architecturally rich structures. A prominent Kashmiri Pandit activist Ravinder Padita, associated with the Save Sharda in a post on X commented, "Is it sabotage or natural causes? One needs to know".



At least four houses belonging to Kashmiri Pandits were gutted under mysterious circumstances in the Mattan area of Anantnag district. Pioneer Photo

Another Kashmiri Pandit sharing his angst posted a message on X, "A Kashmiri Pandit house gutted in Mattan, Anantnag, Kashmir last night. The genocide continues for 34 years". Chetan Wanchoo, a political worker

associated with the BJP said, "I strongly resent the fire incident at Mattan, Anantnag, where more than 4 houses of Kashmiri Pandits were gutted. This incident raises serious concerns. Urgently request L-G Manoj Sinha to form a high-level enquiry to uncover why these houses were targeted. The main concern is clear: Why are Kashmiri Pandit homes and Hindu shrines repeatedly targeted? Time has come to take decisive action against the miscreants." Meanwhile, Chief Spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir National Conference Tanvir Sadiq in a post on X commented, "Very sorry to hear that. These are such aesthetic constructions, and architecture which are disappearing slowly. It's a significant loss. I request the police to investigate the case and find out reasons behind this fire incident". Umesh Talashi, also associated with the National Conference said, Heartbroken as four KP houses, including mine, were gutted in a fire in Mattan. Urging Deputy Commissioner Anantnag and Jammu Kashmir Police to take swift action and ensure justice. At the time of the fire incident, no one was staying in the house. Family members claimed in the absence of any power connection the question of fire caused by a short circuit does not arise.

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

On World Tiger Day, July 29, India faces troubling news about its iconic wildlife. In its first seven months of this year alone, 81 tigers have died across the country due to habitat destruction, poaching, territorial disputes, disease, and human-wildlife conflicts, in the past five years 528 elephants have lost their lives to unnatural causes including electrocution, train accidents, poaching, and poisoning. According to the data available from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), Madhya Pradesh-home to the country's largest tiger population-has reported the highest number of mortalities at 27 followed by Maharashtra (14) and Karnataka (11). Madhya Pradesh has seven tiger reserves. The other States which also reported tiger deaths are Uttar Pradesh, Odisha, Uttarakhand, Kerala, Chhattisgarh, Kerala, Rajasthan and Assam. Of the total deaths, 45 were adults and eight were cubs, with the sex of the remaining tigers still to be identified. Most fatalities occurred within tiger reserves,



suggesting territorial disputes among the predators and increased human-animal conflicts as many tigers ventured into fringe areas. Presently, there are 54 tiger reserves in India, managed under Project Tiger and overseen by the NTCA. Last calendar year 2023, the country reported a disturbing surge in tiger deaths, reaching a record 204, as reported by the Wildlife Protection Society of India (WPSI), a non-profit organization engaged in the conservation of these majestic creatures. In contrast, the NTCA data put the figures at 182. The number of tigers in India has increased from 2,967 in 2018 to 3,682 in 2022, an annual rise of 6 per cent,

in Assam (22) and Odisha (16). Poaching was reported primarily in Odisha (17), Meghalaya (14), and Tamil Nadu (10), while poisoning cases occurred in Assam (10), Chhattisgarh (2), and West Bengal (1). The question on jumbo deaths was raised by BJP MPs Jayanta Kumar Roy and Sangeeta Kumari Singh Deo. In response, Union Minister of State for Environment Kirti Vardhan Singh told the Lok Sabha that 392 elephants died from electrocution and 73 were killed in train accidents during this period. According to the last elephant census conducted in 2017, India has 29,964 elephants, which is around 60 per cent of their global population. Data presented in Parliament last week revealed that human-elephant conflict resulted in 2,853 human deaths in India over the last five years, with the number of fatalities reaching a five-year high of 628 in 2023. The data revealed that Odisha recorded 624 such deaths during this period, Jharkhand 474, West Bengal 436, Assam 383, Chhattisgarh 303, Tamil Nadu 256, Karnataka 160, and Kerala 124.

Kejriwal booked

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) on Monday filed a chargesheet against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in connection with its corruption probe into the now scrapped 2021-22 Delhi excise policy, calling him one of the conspirators of the criminal conspiracy. In a related development, the Delhi High Court on Monday reserved its order on the bail plea by Kejriwal in the corruption case. The verdict was reserved by Justice Neena Bansal Krishna after hearing the counsel appearing for the AAP leader as well as the CBI. In the trial court, the CBI filed a chargesheet against Kejriwal alleging the AAP received kickbacks worth ₹100 crore. The CBI, which first questioned Kejriwal in April



2023, has so far filed five chargesheets in the case against 18 accused including Kejriwal's former deputy, Manish Sisodia, and Bharat Rashtra Samithi leader K Kavitha. The CBI said the one filed today, will be its final charge sheet in the case. The development came days after Delhi's Rouse Avenue Court extended Kejriwal's judicial custody in the case till August 8. The court also extended the judicial custody of Sisodia and Kavitha in connection with a money-laundering case linked to the liquor policy case. The CBI has named Kejriwal, AAP MLA Durgesh Pathak, non-executive director of Aurobindo Pharma P. Sarath Chandra Reddy, director of Buddy Retail Pvt Ltd Amit Arora, alleged hawala

operator Vinod Chauhan, and businessman Ashish Mathur as accused. According to the agency, it has been revealed that Vijay Nair [former media in charge of AAP], a close associate of Kejriwal, was contacting various liquor manufacturers and traders and demanding undue gratification since March 2021, for incorporation of provisions favourable to them in the upcoming Delhi excise policy 2021-22. The CBI also alleged that kickbacks of around ₹90-100 crore were paid in advance to some politicians of the ruling AAP in Delhi and other public servants by some persons in the liquor business from South India through co-accused Vijay Nair, Abhishek Boinpally and Dinesh Arora to tweak the Excise Policy for 2021-22.



Shimla: Clouds hover over the hill town of Shimla on Monday

PTI

Five dead in two separate road accidents in Roorkee

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Five persons, including a Kanwadia, lost their lives in two separate road accidents in Roorkee. The first accident occurred on the Haridwar-Delhi highway in Belda village near the Roorkee Civil Line Kotwali area, when a car with

second accident involved a head-on collision between two motorcycles near the bypass in Nagla Imarti village, also in the Roorkee Civil Line Kotwali area. Three people died on the spot and a fourth, who was seriously injured, died during



a Haryana number plate hit a motorcycle. A man Amit, a resident of Jhabreda area, died on the spot and another person Vicky, sustained severe injuries. A huge crowd gathered at the accident site and the driver of the car fled the scene, abandoning the vehicle, the officials said. They informed that the police reached the spot and admitted Vicky to Roorkee Civil Hospital and the doctors later referred him to a higher centre. The police sent Amit's body for post-mortem. The

treatment. The deceased were identified as Sagar (27) from Gandhinagar, Vishal from Pinjra village in Haryana and Vijendra from Belda village in Roorkee. Amresh Chaudhary, was critically injured and initially treated at Roorkee Civil Hospital before being referred to a higher centre, where he later died. The officials said that the police have registered cases against unknown accused and the investigation is ongoing.

Garhwal commissioner visits disaster-affected areas of Tehri Geological survey and resettlement work underway in hard hit villages

PNS ■ NEW TEHRI

Garhwal commissioner Vinay Shankar Pande visited the disaster-affected Tingarh village and Budhakedar area in Tehri district on the directions of chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama on Monday. Officials stated that Dhama himself is slated to visit these areas on Tuesday. During his visit on Monday, the Garhwal commissioner held a meeting with the disaster-affected people and officials at the temporary relief camp set up in the Vinakkhal government inter college. He said that the CM is aware and regularly monitoring the situation. Dhama has directed officials to provide all possible assistance to the villagers affected by the heavy rain and landslides on July 27, stressing that there will not be any budgetary constraints for assisting the disaster victims. On the CM's directions, Pandey has approved a sum of Rs eight crore for initial works for safety of the road damaged along the Dharmganga river in Budhakedar area. The Irrigation department superintending engineer has been directed to provide the estimate of cost for the work to the Tehri district magistrate by Tuesday along with starting the tender process. Checking the facilities



at the temporary relief camp, the Garhwal commissioner directed officials to ensure power backup, television, studying for the children and other aspects for those staying there. He directed the Tehri district magistrate to facilitate alternative homes for the disaster affected, identifying five spots and preparing cattle shelter there, shifting the cattle and making proper arrangements for their feed and water. The commissioner also directed the DM to work upon the resettlement of Tingarh villagers on a priority basis. The DM Mayur Dixit said that 28 families of Kota village are in the process of being resettled. The first instalment was being issued to these villagers on

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Heavy rain warning issued for 10 districts

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Trace to light rain was reported in some parts of the State on Monday. However, the State meteorological centre has yet again issued a yellow warning (Watch) regarding the possibility of heavy rainfall/thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/intense to very intense spells of rain likely to occur at isolated places in Dehradun, Tehri, Pauri, Haridwar, Almora, Bageshwar, Pithoragarh, Champawat, Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar districts on Tuesday. Thunderstorms accompanied with lightning/intense to very



intense spells of rain are likely to occur at isolated places in the remaining districts of the State. Apart from this, light to moderate rain/thundershowers are likely to occur at many

places in Uttarakashi, Rudrapur and Chamoli districts and at most places in the remaining districts of the State today. The provisional State capital Dehradun is forecast to witness a partly to generally cloudy sky. Few spells of light to moderate rain/thundershowers are likely to occur, of which one or two spells may be intense/heavy in some

areas. The maximum and minimum temperatures are likely to be about 35 degrees Celsius and 25 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun today. The maximum and minimum temperatures recorded in various places on Monday were 35.2 degrees Celsius and 24 degrees Celsius respectively in Dehradun, 35.6 degrees Celsius and 28.2 degrees Celsius in Pantnagar, 22.8 degrees Celsius and 17 degrees Celsius in Mukteshwar and 26.4 degrees Celsius and 18.7 degrees Celsius in New Tehri.

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ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति दाकी, ग्राम पंचायत दाकी, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर, पो 010 सहसपुर, जनपद देहरादून	
निविदा सूचना	
1. स्वच्छ भारत मिशन (शामीप) के अन्तर्गत दोस एवं तल अपशिष्ट प्रबन्धन कार्य हेतु ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति दाकी, ग्राम पंचायत दाकी, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर जनपद देहरादून, अधिकृत एजेन्सियाँ से सीलबन्ध निविदाएं आमंत्रित करती है। विवरण निम्नवत् है :-	
S.NO.	Particulars
1	Supply of 120 liters pvc wheel dustbin pair
2	M.S. Partial Jali Plastic Collection Unit With stopper Wheel, Side Hook, Size (5ftx4ftx5ft)
2. निविदा ग्राम प्रभान/अग्रह ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति दाकी, ग्राम पंचायत दाकी, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर जनपद देहरादून के कार्यालय में विधि प्रकाशित होने की तिथि दिनांक 28.7.2024 से दिनांक 10.8.2024 तक 02 बजे तक जमा किये जा सकते हैं।	
3. निविदा ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति दाकी, ग्राम पंचायत दाकी, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर, जनपद देहरादून में दिनांक 10.8.2024 अपराह्न 03 बजे निविदादाताओं समक्ष खोली जायेगी।	
4. निविदा निरस्त करने का अधिकार ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति दाकी, को होगा। अग्रह/को/बाध्या ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति,सहसपुर ग्राम पंचायत दाकी, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर, देहरादून।	

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2	Mahindra Pickup Garbage, Hydraulic Tipper With Close Body and Partition, Hydraulic Cylinder, Sound System, MCV wear etc. - 1no.
2. निविदा ग्राम प्रभान/अग्रह ग्राम पेयजल एवं स्वच्छता समिति खुशहालपुर, ग्राम पंचायत खुशहालपुर, विकासखण्ड सहसपुर जनपद देहरादून के कार्यालय में विधि प्रकाशित होने की तिथि दिनांक 28.7.2024 से दिनांक 10.8.2024 तक 02 बजे तक जमा किये जा सकते हैं।	
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Scams in Char Dham registration & gold plating at Kedarnath, alleges former MLA

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Alleging scams in the registration process for Char Dham Yatra and in the gold plating at Kedarnath Dham, Congress leader and former Kedarnath MLA Manoj Rawat has demanded that central agencies such as Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and Enforcement Directorate (ED) should conduct inquiries in these cases.



Interacting with the media persons at Rudraprayag on Monday, Rawat said a Gujarat based company Ethics InfoTech SLP limited was handed over the task of installing pilgrim security management system by the Uttarakhand Tourism Development Corporation (UTDC). He claimed that as per the scope of the works mentioned in the tender, the company should also facilitate trekking of the pilgrims, their security and crowd management apart from registration. Rawat said the company is only doing the registration of the Char Dham pilgrims and not doing other tasks mentioned in the tender. He claimed that the company is so powerful that a senior officer was transferred from his post after he questioned the company for not complying with the conditions of the tender. Rawat said that the State government is paying crores of rupees to the company and is not paying any heed to the demand of the local businessmen that the system of registration of pilgrims should be abolished. He claimed that the Gujarat based company

has got support of a powerful political lobby. Taking up the issue of putting gold plating on the inner walls of the Kedarnath temple, Rawat said that the process of gold plating was completed before the closure of the portals of Kedarnath for winters on October 26-27, 2022 and after the closure no one has been allowed to enter the sanctum sanctorum. He said that when Swami Avimukteshwaranand raised the issue of missing gold from Kedarnath, Badrinath Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC) came out with some documents. Rawat said that one such document, the tax invoice issued by Mahalaxmi Amba jewellers for transporting gold to Kedarnath mentions the date November 6, 2022. Similarly the document of the temple committee shows February 15, 2023, as the date for receiving the gold. Rawat said that both these dates mentioned on the documents released by BKTC are of the period when

the gold was already plated on the walls of the Dham and it was closed. It raises question marks over the entire process, he said. Rawat said that the BKTC is operated by the Act of 1939 and the financial handbook of Uttarakhand government and as per the rules the temple committee should have released the minutes of the meeting which approved the proposal of accepting the donation in gold. BKTC should also disclose the names of the employees and officers who supervised the process of gold plating. "The question is why the company issued a tax invoice after 20 days of gold plating and how the BKTC received gold three months after it was put on the walls of the temple," he said. Rawat said that the gold plating on walls of Kedarnath Dham is a major scam and it should be investigated by CBI and ED.

Congress spreading lies on Kedarnath and disaster: Agrawal

Kedarnath rally yet another flop effort of PCC chief, disaster victims satisfied with government, claims minister

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Targetting the Kedarnath rally of the Congress, cabinet minister Prem Chand Agrawal said that Lord Shiva will punish the Congress for spreading lies and indulging in drama regarding Kedarnath Dham. He said that this is yet another flop rally of the Pradesh Congress Committee president Karan Mahara as the public and even many Congress leaders are maintaining a distance from it. Despite this, the Congress is adamant to raise unnecessary protest, he said.

Interacting with the media here on Monday, the cabinet minister averred that the Congress' political rally on the issue of Kedarnath has flopped completely. "Considering the picture emerging even in media reports, it is clear that about 20 to 25 persons are participating in this rally at a time. Earlier, the PCC president had taken out a 'Nyay Yatra', which had also flopped. Most of the senior and local Congress leaders are keeping a distance from this rally. Even the leader who was being presented as a hero despite the Lok Sabha election defeat, was absent from his own area during this rally.

The Congress leaders

are focusing on saving their political base and relevance in the party by taking out a rally projected as one aimed at 'saving' Kedarnath Dham. Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama is right when he says that the Congress should take out a repentance Yatra," Agrawal said.

He further said that it is very unfortunate that the Congress is so lacking in issues and ideas that it is resorting to using Lord Shiva as a political weapon. Regarding the allegations levelled by the opposition regarding disasters in the State, the cabinet minister questioned which video the Congress is watching before making such claims. "I have myself visited the disaster-affected areas and interacted with the affected villagers, in addition to seeking information from the local administration about the damage caused.

The authorities are providing all necessary facilities to the victims in temporary relief camps. The affected families are satisfied with the work done by the government. The claims being made and videos being shown to the contrary are a pack of lies," the minister added.

Chasing target to raise fruit production twentyfold in next 5 years: CM

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief minister Pushkar Singh Dhama has said that under the Apple Mission, 80 per cent subsidy is being given to farmers for setting up apple orchards in the State. He said that the Uttarakhand government has formulated a new apple policy in which a target for high density apple plantation in five thousand hectares of area in next eight years has been taken. The State government has taken a target to increase the annual turnover of apples from Rs 200 crore to Rs 2,000 crore, he said. The CM added that the State government has also taken a target to increase the production of fruits by 20 times in the next four-five years. The CM was addressing a programme organised by the 'Unnati Apple project' at Goralchod in Champawat in a virtual mode on Monday.

He said that Coca-Cola India and Indo Dutch Horticulture Technologies Private Limited (IDHT) are playing an important role in making Project Unnati Apple successful in Champawat. Dhama said that the project is an example of collective efforts for agricultural transformation. The CM said that the production of apples from 100 orchards using high density plantation technology in only 20 months in Champawat is a good sign for apple cultivation. The chief minister said that the project has provided farmers access to advanced planting

material, training in good agricultural practices (GAP) and modern infrastructure, resulting in substantial increase in apple production and farmers' income.

Dhama said that the climate of Uttarakhand is suitable for the cultivation of kiwi, walnut, pear, plum, apricot and passion fruit and Champawat region is considered suitable for the production of these fruits. He said that under the guid-

The government is providing interest free loans up to Rs three lakhs to farmers and Rs five lakh to women self-help groups.

He added that under the Farm Machinery Bank scheme, agricultural equipment is being made available to farmers at a subsidy of up to 80 per cent.

Speaking on this occasion, the district Panchayat chairperson Jyoti Rai said



ance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, efforts are being made to connect more and more farmers with the Apple Mission in the state.

The CM expressed confidence that by planting improved varieties of apples and with the use of new technology, Uttarakhand can produce better quality apples than Jammu-Kashmir and Himachal Pradesh. He said that focus is on quality and improving packaging for Uttarakhand to have a special identity in apple production.

Dhama said that the state government is making efforts to provide necessary resources and technical assistance to the farmers.

that the apple production in the district is increasing and it has also given an impetus to the local economy.

The director of Indo Dutch Horticulture Technologies, Sudhir Chaddha said, "Project Unnati Apple is an example of how partnerships between private and public entities can bring lasting and positive change to society."

Coca-Cola director Rajeev Gupta said that under this mission, better results are coming in apple production in Champawat.

Spokesperson of State BJP Suresh Joshi and others were present in the programme.

Fuel prices lowest in India despite global uptick: Minister

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Hardeep Singh Puri on Monday said India is the only country where rates of petrol and diesel have come down between November 2021 and April 2024. Replying to various queries during Question Hour in Rajya Sabha, the Minister also said that the Government is encouraging dialogue between Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) and dealers regarding margins for the latter.

Puri noted that petrol and diesel were deregulated during the UPA Government. Deregulation means that prices of the commodity in the market are not set by the Government, he added.

"Prices here being high and elsewhere being low. It's exactly the opposite. In India today, the prices are the lowest and is the only country where prices have actually come down," Puri said.

He attributed this to very bold, ambitious and farsighted decisions taken by the Prime



Minister.

"The prices in the world, I am giving you a two-year reference period between November 2021 and April 2024. Why I'm doing this because we have prices available. In India the price of petrol came down 13.65 per cent and of diesel 10.97 per cent," the Minister said.

However, he said in France the increase in petrol price has been 22.19 per cent, Germany 15.28 per cent, Italy 14.82 per cent, Spain 16.58 per cent.

commercial contractual situation between OMCs and the dealers whom they employ as part of that contract.

As of July 1, 2024, there are 90,639 retail outlets in the country of which about 90 per cent belong to public sector companies and rest to the private sector companies.

"We have been monitoring this, there are discussions going on between OMCs and the dealers. Last time the margins were increased was in 2017." Dealers went to court, because they saw that some of the conditions in the stipulated guidelines were somewhat stringent. "So, when the dealer margin is raised, one of the conditions that the dealer has to comply with is to ensure that the wages to their employees are paid according to the minimum wages act.

"So OMCs won the case in the High Court and then the dealers went up to the Supreme Court in 2022. It is sub judice but we are encouraging dialogue between OMCs and dealers and we would like to see them coming to a conclusion," he said.

These are all published international figures of prices, he added. Puri also highlighted that while prices in India have declined, the rates have gone up in neighbouring countries. The Minister also attacked the UPA Government for floating oil bonds. "Oil bonds were floated for ₹ 1.41 lakh crore. Today we are having to pay back ₹ 3.5 lakh crore for that kind of a farsighted decision," he said.

On the dealers' margin increase, Puri said this is a

Surge in snakebites due to global warming, 50,000 deaths annually

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Echoing findings from various studies on climate change and biodiversity, BJP MP Rajiv Pratap Rudy raised a critical issue in the Lok Sabha on Monday regarding the rise in snakebite incidents and fatalities in India.

Rudy attributed this surge to climate change, noting that rising temperatures above 28 degrees Celsius are contributing to an increase in snakebite cases. India already has the highest rate of snakebite fatalities globally, with approximately 50,000 deaths and 3 to 4 million bites reported annually in the country.

This is for the first time that the issue of surge in snakebites linking with climate change was raised in Parliament, thus underscoring the need for urgent action in the matter.

The MP from Saran constituency in Bihar emphasized that many of these deaths could be avoided, particularly in Bihar, which suffers disproportionately due to its poverty and vulnerability to natural disasters.

According to government data, snakebites result in 2,000



deaths in the country but studies contravene these claims stating that only 7.23 per cent of snakebite deaths are officially reported. Studies, including one published in Lancet Planetary Health, suggest that climate change will alter snake habitats, pushing them into new areas and increasing the likelihood of encounters with humans.

This shift is expected to occur if greenhouse gas emissions remain unchecked, with venomous snakes potentially moving into new regions by 2070. The World Health Organization (WHO) too has warned that climate change will exacerbate the problem by affecting snake distribution and behavior.

"As temperatures rise and extreme weather events become more frequent,

human-snake interactions are predicted to become more common." According to WHO, changes in farming practices and increased human migration will further heighten these interactions.

Globally, snakebites afflict about 5.4 million people each year, resulting in 81,410 to 137,880 deaths, along with numerous amputations and disabilities.

The study published in the Lancet Planetary Health which is co-authored by ecologist Pablo Ariel Martinez from the Federal University of Sergipe in Brazil predicts that savannas, grasslands, and deserts will see an influx of venomous snake species, while tropical rainforests will lose some. Notably, three viper species—Bitis rhinoceros, Vipera aspis, and Vipera ammodytes—are

expected to expand into new habitats, particularly in areas undergoing agricultural expansion and experiencing warmer, drier conditions. Rural communities are particularly at risk as these new species encroach upon their environments.

Climate change induced extreme weather events such as floods can also worsen the problem. Research in Southeast Asia has shown that snakebite incidents increase during the monsoon season; this is because snakes and people both seek shelter away from floodwaters and become more likely to encounter each other. Hence, as climate change increases flooding, the risk of snakebite may rise even further. Despite these threats to humans, the researchers asserted that venomous snakes are crucial parts of ecosystems as predators of animals such as rats and insects.

They also brought home the point that these venoms contain some compounds that have potential medical uses unrelated to snakebite, such as cytotoxins with anticancer potential or proteins that can be used in antihypertensive drugs.



ICG rescues injured crew member from fire-hit LPG tanker

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) successfully evacuated a critically injured patient from LPG tanker Limra (Flag: Panama) and brought to Kochi at 1942 hrs on Sunday, officials said here on Monday.

The patient was shifted to Aster Medcity Hospital for further medical treatment.

Giving details, they said on Sunday at approximately 1620 hrs, the ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC), Mumbai, received a distress alert from the LPG tanker Limra reporting major fire in engine room.

The incident occurred at around 1453 hrs resulting in total power and propulsion failure, prompting the crew to raise a distress alarm.

The vessel was en route from Chittagong, Bangladesh, to Khor Fakkan, UAE, with 21 crew including 18 Indian

nationals, 1 Ukrainian, 1 Sri Lankan, and 1 Pakistani national.

The crew successfully contained the fire; however, a 36-year-old Sri Lankan national, was found missing during the firefighting efforts. On locating the crew member his vitals were found to be critical.

The crew administered basic aid and requested urgent medical evacuation. The ICG promptly activated the Search and Rescue mechanism and immediately dispatched. ICG Ship Abhinav for SAR assistance. Additionally, an Advanced Light Helicopter (ALH) equipped for medical emergencies was launched from Kochi at 1800 hrs approximately.

The patient was evacuated and brought to Kochi at around 1942 hrs and transported to Aster Medcity Hospital. Despite all efforts, the patient succumbed to his injuries.

SC dismisses PIL against UGC-NET exam cancellation

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday refused to entertain a PIL challenging the Government's decision to cancel the UGC-NET examination following alleged question paper leak.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices JB Paridwala and Manoj Misra, however, said the

dismissal of the PIL does not amount to a decision on the merits of the PIL as it was filed by a lawyer and not by aggrieved students.

"Why are you (lawyer) coming? Let the students come here themselves," the CJI told the lawyer, adding "while declining the above PIL, we express nothing on merits".

The bench asked advocate Ujjawal Gaur, who has filed the

PIL as a petitioner, to focus on some legal matters and leave such issues for aggrieved persons. The plea was filed against the decision of the Union Education Ministry and the National Testing Agency to cancel the UGC-NET exam following inputs that its integrity may have been compromised.

The Ministry on June 19 had ordered the cancellation of the UGC-NET exam and handed

over the matter to the CBI for an investigation.

In the plea, Gaur also sought a direction to immediately stay the proposed re-examination of the UGC-NET exam until the CBI completes its inquiry into the paper leak allegations.

"The petitioner asserts that the decision is not only arbitrary but also unjust, given the recent findings of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).



"The CBI's investigation brings the fact that the evidence suggesting the paper leak is doc-

tored, thus nullifying the grounds on which the cancellation was based," the plea, filed through advocate Rohit Pandey, said.

The petitioner submitted that the "unwarranted" cancellation of the exam has caused significant distress, anxiety, and an unnecessary expenditure of resources for the aspirants who have rigorously prepared for this crucial examination..

SC rejects ED's challenge to Jharkhand CM Soren's bail

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a relief to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, the Supreme Court on Monday dismissed the Enforcement Directorate's plea challenging a High Court order granting him bail in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam.

The apex court said the Jharkhand High Court's June 28 order granting bail to Soren was a "very well reasoned judgement". "We are not inclined to interfere with the impugned order," a bench of Justices B R Gawai and K V Viswanathan said. However, the top court said that since the observations made by the High Court were with regard to consideration for granting bail, the same would not influence the trial judge, either at the stage of trial or any other proceedings. "We find a very well reasoned judgement has been rendered by the single judge (of the High Court)," the bench said, adding, "We don't want to



observe anything more... If we observe, you (ED) might be in difficulty," Soren, the Executive President of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM), had resigned as Chief Minister shortly before the ED arrested him on January 31 in the case. After coming out of jail on bail in the case, he returned as the Chief Minister of Jharkhand on July 4. Opposing Soren's bail plea in the High Court, the ED had alleged that he misused his position as the Chief Minister to "unlawfully" acquire 8.86 acres of land in the Bargain area in the state capital Ranchi. Soren's lawyer had earlier con-



tended that he was falsely implicated in the criminal case by the central agency. During the hearing in the apex court on Monday, Additional Solicitor General S V Raju, appearing for the ED, claimed that during the probe, Soren's media consultant Abhishek Prasad admitted that the JMM leader had instructed him to manipulate official records to change the ownership details of the plot. The agency had also claimed that the original owner of the land, Raj Kumar Pahan, had tried to lodge a complaint about his land being usurped but it was never acted upon.

Section 50 of the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) cannot be relied upon at the stage of bail. The bench observed that the High Court has considered the statements recorded under Section 50 of the PMLA and given reasons. It said there was a specific finding that in all the records which were seized from one of the co-accused, there was nothing implicating Soren.

Justice Gawai also referred to a recent statement given by Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud in Bengaluru that the trial courts play safe when the question of granting bail arises. The ED had claimed that during the probe, Soren's media consultant Abhishek Prasad admitted that the JMM leader had instructed him to manipulate official records to change the ownership details of the plot. The agency had also claimed that the original owner of the land, Raj Kumar Pahan, had tried to lodge a complaint about his land being usurped but it was never acted upon.

Min: Govt takes action to address student suicides

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Government has taken several steps to curb suicide cases among students, Union Minister of State for Education Sukanta Majumdar said in the Lok Sabha on Monday and added that 1.2 per cent of suicides were related to examination failures.

Asked about student suicides in Kota, a hub of coaching centres in Rajasthan for competitive examinations, the Minister said a number of steps had been taken by the Central and the State Governments. "Several initiatives have been taken by our Government to curb incidents of suicide among students. According to NCRB (National Crime Records Bureau) and Accidental Deaths & Suicides in India, only 1.2 per cent of total suicide cases are related to failure in examinations," Majumdar told the House.

He said the Union education ministry had started the



'Manodarpan' initiative for providing psychological support to students. He added that the Rajasthan Government had also taken several steps to ensure mental health support for the students. "The Rajasthan Government issued a guideline in 2022 and again in 2023, which is enforced by the district administration. They have appointed 90 psychological counsellors ... There is also a toll free helpline," he said.

Majumdar added that 10,000 hostel gatekeepers had been trained to identify if a student required mental health-related help.

SC launches Special Lok Adalat for settlement of cases, media allowed

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In a first, the first seven benches of the Supreme Court commenced a Special Lok Adalat at 2 pm on Monday for an amicable resolution of disputes, with media cameras being allowed inside courtrooms.

The week-long special Lok Adalat, celebrating 75 years of the Supreme Court, began with the aim to "facilitate amicable settlements of suitable pending cases", in matters that have "elements of settlement".

Earlier in the day, Chief Justice of India (CJI) D Y Chandrachud said the first seven benches of the apex court will hear cases in the Special Lok Adalat at 2 pm.

The top court will hold the Special Lok Adalat till August 3, in an effort to reduce the pendency of cases.

"From today till Friday, we will have the Supreme Court Lok Adalat and the first seven benches will sit for it. If lawyers have cases which can go before the Lok Adalat, please bring them," the CJI said at the out-



set of the day's proceedings. Justice Chandrachud had earlier requested citizens, who have pending cases before the Supreme Court, to take part in the special Lok Adalat to get their disputes resolved amicably and speedily.

In a video message uploaded on the court's website, he had said, "From July 29 to August 3, the Supreme Court is organising a Special Lok Adalat. This is part of a series of activities which the Supreme Court is observing to commemorate the 75th year since the establishment of the Supreme Court." Most significantly, the CJI had said judges dedicated to the institution of justice are concerned about the large backlog of cases.

"The Lok Adalat represents a very informal technology-based solution to resolve cases involving our citizens to their satisfaction in a purely voluntary, consensual mode.

"Therefore, on behalf of all my colleagues and the staff of the Supreme Court, I would appeal to all citizens who have cases before the Supreme Court or lawyers advocates on record to take the advantage and benefit of this opportunity in an attempt to resolve the cases speedily, in a manner which is acceptable to every contesting party," Justice Chandrachud had said. The top court said Lok Adalats are an integral component of the country's judicial system, enhancing alternative dispute resolution as a means of expediting and fostering amicable settlements. It said cases with elements of settlement, including those relating to matrimonial disputes, property disputes, motor-accident claims, land acquisition, compensation, service and labour, pending before the apex court would be taken up to facilitate a speedy disposal.

DAC approves Advanced Navigation System for AFVs

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to give a fillip to operational preparedness, nod was given on Monday for acquisition of Advanced Land Navigation System (ALNS) to armoured fighting vehicles for the army and 22 interceptor boats for the Coast Guard. Giving details here, Defence Ministry officials said a meeting of Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), under the Chairmanship of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Monday considered various capital acquisition proposals. Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) was accorded to the procurement of Advanced Land Navigation System (ALNS) for Armoured Fighting Vehicles (AFVs) of the Indian Army. The system is spoof-proof with high levels of encryption.

The ALNS Mk-II is compatible with the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System, NAVIGATION using Indian Constellation (IRNSS, NavIC), India in addition to Global Positioning System (GPS) and Global Navigation Satellite System (GLONASS).



The ALNS Mk-II offers compatibility with Defence Series Maps resulting in very high accuracy in navigational applications for AFVs. This equipment will be procured from Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL), Chennai under Buy [Indian-Indigenously Designed Developed and Manufactured (IDDM)] category.

In order to enhance the capabilities of the Indian Coast Guard, the DAC accorded AoN for procurement of 22 Interceptor Boats with latest state-of-art system capable of quick interception and shallow water operation in territorial waters. These boats will be used for coastal surveillance and patrolling, search and rescue operations, including medical evacuation.

Navy pulls out oil tanker, looks for truck washed away in Uttara Kannada

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Indian Navy is working round the clock as part of rescue and relief effort in rain hit Shirur, Ankola in Uttara Kannada district (40 kms south of Karwar) since last week and pulled out an oil tanker. Rescue team were now looking for a truck washed away, Navy officials said here on Monday.

Giving details, officials said incessant monsoon rains triggered a landslide at Shirur on Ankola - Kumta Road, in Uttara Kannada district (40 kms south of Karwar), Karnataka on July 16.

This led to the closing of National Highway 66 between Kumta and Karwar. It has been reported that a few personnel and vehicles including a Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL) tanker were missing or washed away into the adjoining Gangavali river.

The Uttara Kannada district administration had requested assistance from the Indian Navy to locate the HPCL tanker in the area. Responding promptly, two diving teams



(comprising twelve divers and six Hydrographers) with inflatable craft/ requisite equipment, from the Indian Navy's Base at Karwar were dispatched to the site in Shirur.

In coordination with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) team, the Naval personnel tackling strong river currents recovered the HPCL LPG tanker that had fallen into the river and by July 17 was hauled ashore, where representatives from HPCL then drained the gas making it safe and avoiding any potential danger.

Thereafter, from July 19 onwards two Indian Navy teams, along with high-resolution sonar, have been searching for another missing truck purportedly driven by Arjun Mooladikuzhiyil from Kerala. The strong currents in the river, dislocated debris from the hill, and adverse weather conditions have made searching the riverbed difficult.

A coordinated response by the Indian Navy, the NDRF and the district administration is presently underway to locate the missing personnel and truck near the landslide area.

Ready to discuss Mekedatu project implementation with TN: Karnataka CM

PTI ■ MYSURU
Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Monday said his government was ready to discuss with Tamil Nadu regarding implementation of Mekedatu project across river Cauvery, but the neighbouring state was not coming forward despite it not "causing any problem to them". If the Centre gives necessary permissions, the State is ready to implement the project, he told reporters here.

Siddaramaiah along with Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar, several Ministers and officials today offered 'bagina' (traditional thanksgiving) to river Cauvery at Krishnaraja Sagar (KRS) dam in Srirangapatna taluk in Mandya district. It is customary to offer a 'bagina' to the rivers in the state, when the dams are filled to their maximum capacity. "We are ready to discuss. Despite Mekedatu not causing any problem to them (Tamil Nadu), they are not ready to discuss. If the central government gives permission we are ready to construct the Mekedatu reservoir," Siddaramaiah said. He was responding to a question on whether he will hold discussions with Tamil Nadu or the Centre for a "concrete programme" as a lot of water is flowing into the sea, with Mettur dam in Tamil Nadu expected to fill up in a couple of days. Shivakumar, who is also the Water Resources Minister, had recently made a



passionate appeal to the Tamil Nadu government to cooperate with the implementation of the Mekedatu project, stating that it would be more beneficial to the neighbouring State. Mekedatu is a multi-purpose (drinking water and power) project proposed by Karnataka, which involves building a balancing reservoir near Kanakapura in Ramanagara district (now renamed as Bengaluru South 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 'Mekedatu

Balancing Reservoir and drinking water project of Cauvery river valley, 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."

Rajasthan Assembly adjourned thrice amid ruckus over crimes against Dalits

PTI ■ JAIPUR
The Rajasthan Assembly was adjourned thrice on Monday as the opposition cornered the government over crimes against Dalits in the state. During Zero Hour, Bharat Adivasi Party MLA Thavar Chand raised the issue of the murder of a Dalit teacher in Salumbar district last week while Congress MLA Pitram Singh Kala raised several cases of alleged atrocities against Dalits. Leader of Opposition Tikaram Jolly also targeted the government on the issue. Hitting out at the Congress, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Jogaram Patel said the party was shedding crocodile tears. This led to a ruckus in the House, prompting Speaker Vasudev Devnani to adjourn the proceedings till 2 pm. Within a few minutes of the House reassembling, the speaker had to adjourn it again as the uproar continued. When the House



reassembled for the second time, Devnani had to adjourn it for a third time for another half an hour. After the three adjournments, when the House reassembled, the speaker assured the opposition that he will get an answer from the government on the issue during Zero Hour on Tuesday. Pacified by the speaker's assurance, the opposition members returned to their seats and the House proceedings resumed.

Haryana man 'sent by Russian Army to fight against Ukraine' dies



PTI ■ CHANDIGARH
A 22-year-old Haryana man "sent to the frontline by the Russian Army to fight against Ukrainian forces" has died, his family claimed on Monday. The Indian embassy in Moscow confirmed the death of Ravi Moun, who hailed from Matour village in Haryana's Kaithal district, his brother Ajay Moun said. Ravi Moun went to Russia on January 13 after being "hired" for a transportation job but was inducted into the military, his brother claimed. Ajay Moun wrote to the embassy on July 21 for information on his brother's whereabouts. "The embassy told us that he has died," he said. The family said the embassy also asked them to send a DNA test report for identification of the body. "Ravi went to Russia on January 13. An agent sent him to Russia for a transportation job. However,

he was inducted into the Russian Army," Ajay Moun said. The family's claim comes days after Russia agreed to India's demand to ensure early release and return of Indian nationals inducted into the country's military. Ajay Moun alleged that the Russian Army asked his brother to go to the frontline to fight against Ukrainian forces or face 10 years in jail. He was trained to dig trenches and later sent to the frontline, Ajay Moun said. "We remained in touch with him till March 12 and he was quite upset," he said. According to the Indian embassy's reply to Ajay Moun's letter, "The embassy had requested the concerned Russian authorities for confirmation of his death and transportation of his mortal remains requested by you." "The Russian side has confirmed his death. However, to identify the body, they need a DNA test from his close relatives," it added. Ajay Moun also requested Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bring his brother's mortal remains back to India. "We do not have enough money to bring back his body," he told reporters. The family sold off a one-acre land and spent Rs 11.50 lakh to send him to Russia, he said. Earlier this month, Russia agreed to India's demand to ensure early release and return of Indian nationals working in the Russian military as support staff after Modi raised the issue with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Russia had promised early discharge of all Indian nationals from the army. Last month, the Ministry of External Affairs said the issue of Indian nationals serving in the Russian Army remained a matter of "utmost concern" and demanded action from Moscow. The Russia-Ukraine conflict in eastern Europe has been raging since February 2022.

Pawar raises fears of Maharashtra going Manipur way; BJP hits back



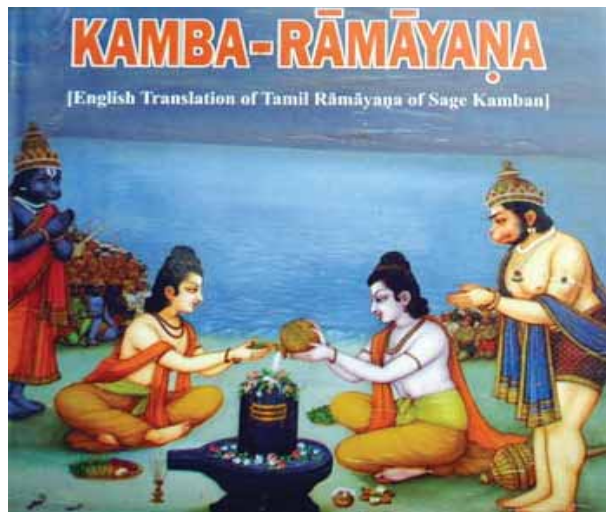
PTI ■ THANE
Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar has expressed deep concern over the potential for Manipur-like disturbances in Maharashtra and called for maintaining social unity for the development of the country. Addressing a Social Unity Conference in Navi Mumbai on Sunday evening, Pawar also criticised the Centre's handling of the ethnic strife in Manipur, which has claimed several lives since last May. Pawar didn't specify the reason for his assessment, however, the remarks come days after he flagged the "rift" among communities over the Maratha-OBC quota tussle and recent criticism by Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who dubbed the veteran Maratha politician a "corruption ringleader". "The prime minister never felt the need to visit Manipur in the wake of social disturbances in the north-eastern state and console people. In neighbouring states also such incidents occurred, especially in Karnataka where same things happened," Pawar said.

strengthening the economy, Pawar said the current situation of tension and division is alarming. "The growing discord in the country requires unity beyond caste, religion and language. The responsibility of fostering social unity lies with the government," he said while accusing the government of failing to take effective steps to address these issues. Pawar repeatedly highlighted Manipur in his speech. "A discussion was held in Parliament on Manipur. People from various castes and creeds came to meet us in Delhi. They described how a small state, where people lived in harmony for generations, has become restless. A conflict between two communities saw houses being set afire, destruction of houses, and abuse of women," he added. People of Manipur, who have been living together and maintaining dialogue for generations, are now unwilling to speak with each other, the Rajya Sabha member added. "It is the responsibility of rulers to resolve and address such a huge crisis and assure people, foster unity and maintain law and order. Unfortunately, today's rulers have not even looked at this crisis. Despite so much turmoil, the Prime Minister of the country didn't feel the need to visit Manipur and console people," Pawar said. Maharashtra BJP president Chandrashekar Bawankule on Monday slammed Pawar and described his remarks as inappropriate. He accused Pawar of using the language that could "instigate riots". "He (Pawar) used language that could instigate riots, but the people of Maharashtra are intelligent and won't resort to rioting. Some people are trying to create a rift between communities and staging agitations. I urge Pawar to come forward to stop such people," Bawankule told reporters apparently referencing protests for the Maratha quota led by Manoj Jarange.

Kolkata Police to crack down on offensive messages on vehicles

PTI ■ KOLKATA,
Vehicle owners in Kolkata displaying obscene, derogatory messages, posters, or photographs on their vehicles that could offend sentiments related to caste, creed, or gender may now face legal action under the Motor Vehicle Act, a senior Kolkata police officer said. Police said such obscene messages are generally seen on the rear side of private buses and trucks. In a social media post, Kolkata Police shared a photograph of a vehicle with a derogatory message written on it and stated that such acts could lead to charges of defamation under sections 499 IPC and 356(i) BNS. "The car sticker you see in the image... Caught the attention of one of our colleagues during his duty. Initially, he perceived malice and misogyny behind the supposed humour. Furthermore, such an openly provocative statement could be deemed defamation under the law, drawing penalties as per sections 499 IPC and 356(i) BNS," Kolkata Police said in the post. Police said they could have pursued legal action, but instead decided to approach the vehicle owner first, appealing to his better judgement. "By displaying such a generic and negative statement, was he not also demeaning women in his own family? Fortunately, he understood the real intent behind our request and removed the sticker immediately," the post added. "We appreciate the cooperation from this fellow citizen and urge everyone to help maintain the stellar reputation of India's safest city for women," it concluded. A senior officer from Kolkata Police Traffic Department told PTI, "Displaying obscene, derogatory messages, posters, and photographs that hurt someone's sentiments or relate to caste and creed is not allowed under the Motor Vehicle (MV) Act."

Kamban's Ramayana to be translated into English for first time



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI
The biggest publishing coup of 2024 is here. The monumental work Ramayana by Kampan (Tamil literary tradition's Greatest Poem) is being translated into English by a team of eminent scholars and the eight-volume work is expected to hit book shelves across the globe between 2028 to 2030, according to Penguin Random House. In a media release on Monday, Penguin's Saumya Jha, said that her company has acquired the complete English translation of Kampan's Ramayana which 'stands out for its innovative use of language, the psychological depth of its characters, and its profound engagement with the themes of power, truth, and divinity. The influence of Kampan's Ramayana extends far beyond Tamil Nadu, impacting literary traditions in Kerala, parts of the Indian peninsula, and even the Southeast Asia. Despite its vast influence, a reliable and complete English translation of the text has been long overdue, largely due to its immense size. This new translation aims to prioritize completeness, clarity, and poetic beauty, making this influential poem accessible to both scholars and general readers alike'. According to Saumya Jha, Penguin Random House, the translation of Kampan's Ramayana is being executed by Dr. Shiv Subramaniam, Emory University - Volume 1: Bala (Youth), Prof. David Shulman, Hebrew University - Volume 2: Ayodhya (on Ayodhya), Prof. Whitney Cox, University of Chicago - Volume 3: Ara?ya (Wilderness), Dr. Jennifer Clare, Independent Scholar - Volume 4: Ki?kindha (on Ki?kindha), Prof. Archana Venkatesan, UC Davis - Volume 5: Sundara (Loveliness), Dr. Aniruddhan Vasudevan, Princeton University - Volume 6 and 7: Yuddha Part 1 and 2 (War). Professors Archana and David will also serve as the volume editors, and the authors of an Introductory Volume. Kampan (1180-1250) was a Tamil poet who was honoured with the title The Emperor of Poets by Kulothunga Cholan III for his works Ramavataram (the Tamil version of the Great Epic Ramayana) popularly known as Kamba Ramayanam. Kampan was a scholar in both Sanskrit and Tamil. Ramayana, especially the Valmiki Ramayana has generated a lot of interest among the new generation of readers. Dushyanth Sridhar, an IT professional-turned-Hari Katha exponent-turned-spiritual Guru has come out with the first volume of Ramayanam - Volume 1 which is widely debated and discussed in literary circles across India.

Transform districts into fulcrum of administration, Himanta directs DCs

PTI ■ GUWAHATI
Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Monday called upon the district commissioners (DCs) to transform their respective districts into the "fulcrum of administration" to ensure convenient disbursement of benefits. In his opening remarks on the first day of a two-day district commissioners' conference here, Sarma urged the DCs to lay more emphasis on areas and sectors that their respective districts are rich in, so that each district can contribute to the growth of the state. He said that the newly created sub-districts in the state, a vital state government policy to decentralise administration, will start functioning from October 2 and on the same day, the foundation stone for their permanent offices will be laid. A core team will be constituted at the state level to support DCs to delegate work to the sub-districts, he said. Sarma directed the DCs to visit and supervise the construction of government buildings in their respective jurisdiction.

The CM also directed the officers to expedite work on health, education and anganwadi centres as they hold immense potential for development. He also asked the DCs to distribute flood rehabilitation grants by August 12. Sarma also directed the officers to frequently hold meetings with the guardian ministers of the respective districts, preferably every fortnight. The DCs were also directed to keep government functions simple with only vegetarian food to be served in all government functions or during visits of the chief minister or ministers. Sarma said that in case of the chief minister's visit to the districts, the motorcade should not consist of more than 10 vehicles, including those of the DC and the superintendent of police. The chief minister also congratulated all the DCs on the successful conduct of the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. Sarma will review the progress of all ongoing welfare projects with the ministers, senior officials and the DCs during the two-day conference which will conclude on Tuesday.

Mizoram, Assam to resume border talks after over a year



PTI ■ AIZAWL,
Mizoram and Assam will resume border talks in August, twenty months after the two northeastern neighbours held discussions to find an amicable solution to the inter-state boundary dispute. Mizoram Home Minister K Sapdanga on Monday said the next round of border talks will be held in Aizawl on August 9. The two states held the last round of talks in November 2022 in Guwahati. "The Assam home secretary last week communicated to our home secretary about their intention to come to Aizawl on August 9 for talks. We conveyed our consent to the Assam government after consulting Chief Minister Laldulhoma," Sapdanga told PTI. The Mizoram delegation would be headed by Sapdanga, while the Assam team would be led by its Border Protection and Development Minister Atul Bora. Sapdanga expressed optimism that the talks will yield positive results to bring an amicable solution to the border dispute which remained unresolved for decades.

He said there was no violation of the status quo from both sides since the violent clash in July 2021 when police forces of the two states exchanged fire at the inter-state boundary, leading to the death of six policemen and a civilian from Assam. Three Mizoram districts - Aizawl, Kolasib and Mamit - share a 164.6 km border with Assam's Cachar, Karmganj and Hailankandi districts. The dispute mainly stemmed from two colonial demarcations - 1875 and 1933. Mizoram claims that 509 square miles area of the inner line reserved forest, notified in 1875 under the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation (BEFR) 1873, falls within its territory. Assam, on the other hand, regarded the map prepared by the Survey of India in 1933 as its constitutional boundary. Vast areas within the inner line reserved forest now fall under Assam. Similarly, a certain extent of the area, as per the 1933 demarcation line, is now on the Mizoram side. There is no ground demarcation of boundaries between the two states.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Talk tough, act tougher

Despite PM Modi's stern warning to Pakistan, crossborder terrorism is showing no signs of waning

Despite warnings, increased presence of troops and diplomatic manoeuvres cross-border terrorism remains a grim reality. In what must be a grave concern for all, the Indian Army has reported the loss of its 12th soldier this month, further straining the already tense relations between India and Pakistan. Rifleman Mohit Rathour was killed, and a Major along with three other soldiers were wounded in an unprovoked attack by Pakistanis Border Action Team (BAT) on an Indian forward post during an operation against terrorists attempting to cross the LoC at Kamkari in Machhal sector, north Kashmir. BAT, comprising Pakistani military personnel and terrorists, often provides cover fire for intruders crossing the LoC. In this latest assault, Pakistani personnel exploited poor weather and low visibility to attack the Army post with grenades and gunfire, resulting in a prolonged gunfight that critically wounded two soldiers, one of whom later died. In response to the surge in terror attacks, security in J&K



has been tightened, with the Government deploying two BSF battalions, totalling over 2,000 personnel, to the Union territory. The recent attack comes a day after the India Prime Minister warned Pakistan of dire consequences.

On Kargil Vijay Diwas, Prime Minister Narendra Modi issued a stern warning to Pakistan, asserting that the evil designs of the masters of terror will never succeed and that India will overcome every terror challenge. This strong message came amidst a rise in terror attacks in Jammu and Kashmir, including a deadly attack on a bus carrying pilgrims. But the PM's warning had little effect on the perpetrators.

The ongoing skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) and heightened insurgency activities in Jammu and Kashmir have contributed significantly to these casualties. While Pakistan's alleged support for militant groups continues to stir trouble, India must chalk out a comprehensive strategy to end such activities and ensure the safety of citizens and secure borders. Indeed, it is a tough task, given the difficult terrain but we must show resolve to take on terrorism and give fitting reply when such an incident takes place. Isolating Pakistan on international forums, especially at the UN, can work provided we present our case discreetly with proof. So far, despite the provocations, India has been steadfast in its efforts to normalise the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The Government's approach includes developmental initiatives, infrastructural investments, and engagement with local communities to foster peace and stability. But clearly, it is not enough and terrorists must be dealt with more vigorous force using high-tech solutions. The martyrdom of the soldiers should not go waste and we should strengthen India's resolve to pursue peace and stability in the region. Cross-border terrorism must stop now and we should have zero tolerance towards infiltrators to protect our borders and the people.

PICTALK



*Kanwariyas' gather at Har Ki Pauri ghat to collect 'Ganga jal', in Haridwar

BRS faces existential crisis as KCR falters

Despite substantial party funds, the BRS now faces an existential crisis, compounded by internal defections and declining support



KALYANI SHANKAR

The Bharatiya Rashtra Samithi, formerly the Telangana Rashtra Samithi, sets itself apart from other declining political parties. Led by the ambitious K. Chandra Shankara Rao, or KCR, the party's national expansion has been marked by setbacks, including its failure to retain power in Telangana. This fate is shared by many political parties and their leaders, as most eventually fade away after holding power at a state or national level. The downside continued as BRS suffered a significant and sudden setback with no Lok Sabha seat in 2024. Despite having around Rs 1,000 crore in party funds, KCR's hopes of national expansion were dashed. Rao renamed his party BRS in 2022, dropping the word Telangana, and KCR opened branches in Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh. Those units are defunct now.

This is a stark example of how the political landscape can change instantly. Having lost power in the 2023 Assembly elections to Congress in the wilderness for the past ten years, the BRS is now facing a significant struggle for survival. The BRS has no representation in the Lok Sabha for the first time after the 2024 Lok Sabha polls. The party, which dominated Telangana politics for about two decades and ruled the state for almost a decade, has now been voted out of the Lok Sabha in 2024. Just last week, BRS received a further setback. BRS MLA A. Gandhi defected to the ruling Congress, which reflects the party's decline.

The Congress now boasts 75 M.L.A.s, including 65 from Congress, one from C.P.I., and nine former BRS Members. In 2001, KCR made a historic decision to resign from the Telugu Desam Party (T.D.P). He believed that creating a separate state was the only way to end the discrimination in the Telangana region, sparking a demand for separation. TRS was formed to achieve separate Telangana, a seemingly impossible regional objective. He was 47 at the time. T.D.P. was the second-largest party in the National Democratic Alliance. In



2004, the TRS. Joined forces with the Congress and secured five Lok Sabha seats. Following this, KCR was appointed the Union Minister for Labour and Employment in the United Progressive Alliance (U.P.A.) government, headed by U.P.A. Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh. He continued his struggle inside and outside Parliament. In 2009, he initiated a hunger strike to demand the introduction of the Telangana Bill in Parliament. After a few days, the Centre conceded to his demands. Shortly before the 2014 election, the U.P.A. government announced the formation of Telangana state. The TRS performed well in the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, winning 11 seats, its highest tally. However, it lost power to the Congress in the 2023 Assembly polls. On December 9, 2022, TRS, was officially renamed BRS., indicating KCR's intention to pursue national ambitions.

Now that the BRS, has failed to win even a single Lok Sabha seat in the state and its vote share has dropped to only 16.69%, the party faces a genuine existential crisis. The BRS, lost power last year, with just 35 seats in the Assembly.



UNLIKE CHANDRABABU, WHO HAD THE BACKING OF THE KAMMA COMMUNITY, KCR LACKS SUPPORT FROM ANY CASTE GROUP EXCEPT VELAMAS, A SMALL GROUP

The BRS chief struggled to keep the party together during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. It could not implement plans to field candidates in other states. KCR's attempt to establish a dynastic rule by appointing his son, nephew, and daughter to significant positions has been a point of contention. It was seen as a deviation from the party's founding principles and a sign of increasing autocracy. Secondly, like many dictatorial leaders, Rao failed to develop a second tier of leadership, which is an asset for any political leader except promoting his family. Thirdly, KCR, who rose to power through agitation and protests, steadily withdrew from public spaces. His inaccessibility and his aversion to media have significantly contributed to the disconnect between him and his leaders and workers. Rao surrounded himself with people who lacked substance and only praised him. As a result, he could not see the reality and fell into the trap of his sycophants, who presented false facts. Unlike Chandrababu, who had the backing of the Kamma community, KCR lacks support from any caste group except Velamas, a small group.

This political isolation is a significant factor in his decline. Fifthly, there were allegations of corruption. His daughter Kavitha is now in jail for alleged corruption in the Delhi liquor case. Sixthly, instead of concentrating on the state, KCR began dabbling in national politics and went around the Opposition-ruled states with a naked ambition of becoming Prime Minister. But he failed. This wavering resulted in BRS. Unable to form the government in the 2024 polls. Seventhly, he thought he and his party were unbeatable and would continue to rule Telangana indefinitely like many other tinpot dictators. Eighthly, BRS. Faced defections. However, he also induced defections when he was the chief minister. KCR has now joined a group of once-influential leaders such as Sharad Pawar, Lalu Prasad Yadav, Edapadi Palaniswamy, Deve Gowda, Mayawati, Uddhav Thackeray, and others who have previously held power but are now struggling. In politics, it's like playing a game of snakes and ladders. (The author is a popular columnist; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

DO NOT SUBVERT NITI AAYOG

Madam — Boycotting NITI Aayog Meetings Undermines Democratic Processes Boycotting NITI Aayog meetings by some political parties contradicts the principles of cooperative federalism. With parties from the INDIA bloc attending, it was expected that others, including the Congress party with its significant representation in Lok Sabha, would also participate.

The central government's allocation of more funds to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh, seen as politically motivated, should be addressed through dialogue rather than boycotts. Cooperation between the government and opposition is essential for national interest. Opposition parties staying away from NITI Aayog meetings miss the opportunity to voice their concerns and influence critical decisions.

Boycotts serve as ineffective protests, harming democratic processes and national unity. Continuous stalling of official processes by the opposition, since Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure began, undermines the democratic framework. For citizens, the concern is about the smooth functioning of democracy. The opposition's confrontational approach hinders cooperative federalism, affecting national interest.

Addressing grievances through participation, not boycotts, ensures a healthier democratic process. Same Old Story Educated middle-class citizens often await the budget with anticipation, only to feel disappointed afterward. The recent budget, though promising in terms of infrastructure, employment, and other areas, fell short of transformational changes, particularly in taxation. The Finance Minister missed an opportunity to significantly alter the taxation structure, leading to disillusionment among the middle class. This cycle of expectation and disappointment continues, echoing Indiana Jones' sentiment: "Same old, same old." Dorai Ramani Suresh | Ghaziabad

Ensure safety norms at coaching centres



The coaching institutions at Old Rajinder Nagar in Delhi are endangering the lives of UPSC aspirants, who face numerous hardships to pursue their dreams of becoming IAS officers. The recent tragic incident where three aspirants drowned in a basement flooded with rainwater underscores the dire state of India's coaching centers. Previously, such stories were common from Kota, but now Old Rajinder Nagar has also gained

notoriety for exploiting students for profit. This area, known as the UPSC hub, is filled with overpriced, poorly maintained apartments rented out to students from low and middle-income families who struggle to afford them. The Delhi government must take immediate action against negligent property owners and coaching institutions, enforcing strict standards to ensure the safety of the aspirants. These standards should include regulations on the number of students per batch, proper ventilation, parking facilities, and reasonable rent for student accommodations. Additionally, a toll-free number should be established for students to report grievances related to their living and studying conditions directly to the police, ensuring their safety and empowering them against exploitation. These measures are crucial to protect the lives and aspirations of future officers and uphold societal responsibility. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

CELEBRATING PARENTS DAY

Madam — Parenting responsibilities are a testament to the unconditional love, support, and sacrifices parents make throughout their lives. This day emphasizes the importance of family values, fostering stronger relationships, and promoting gratitude and respect towards parents. Parents guide us with unwavering love and support, enduring countless silent and selfless sacrifices to ensure our happiness. Despite the challenges of raising children, including teenage tantrums and door slams, their disciplined approach aims to provide us with a better life. As we transition into adulthood, parents continue to support us, often silently, checking on us and ensuring our well-being. Their selfless gestures speak volumes, even if they are not always expressive. It is time to show our appreciation and thankfulness for the support and love parents provide. The young generation must understand that one day they would be parents too! MR Jayanthi | Mumbai

NAIL THE MYTH

Madam — Scientific facts have broken several myths and misconceptions. Will it put a break to political rhetoric in India which advocates population control based on false assumptions that the minority population is growing at a faster pace than its majority counterparts. Now that the pandemic period is over, the focus must be to release the 2021 census based on latest survey conducted so as to ascertain a clear picture of the socio economic scenario rather than targeting any particular community or area. It is absurd to predict about the future only on narrow rhetoric and political compulsions rather than using the demographic dividend for the progress of the country. So, no single community or religion be held responsible for rising population since it can falsify facts. If the Minority phobia is real or a mechanism to gain political dividends is a million dollar question. Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Monsoon mayhem: The pothole predicament

Despite millions being spent annually by road authorities to ensure safe travel, the recurrence of potholes raises serious questions about where the money is going

The arrival of the monsoon season brings relief from the scorching heat, but it also brings along a familiar foe: "Potholes". This issue constantly frustrates commuters and raises doubts about the effectiveness of road maintenance. Every year, the Road Authorities spend millions of rupees to ensure a smooth and secure journey for travellers. However, these hazardous holes continue to deface the roads. All that money—where is it going? The other day I had to take a chance and walk the distance between the Amar Business Zone and the Hinjewadi Bus Stop. The rain was so intense that vehicles and cabs were unavailable, so I had to face it on my own. I prayed while I walked, hoping that I wouldn't hurt myself. The flooded streets and obscured footpaths turned the walk into a risky journey, where every step held the risk of either finding solid ground or plunging into an unseen pothole.



they are on foot or in their vehicles. The unpredictable nature of the road, obscured by the coverings of water, is risky. Potholes, which are frequently hidden beneath murky pools, become silent causes of numerous accidents, damaged vehicles, and occasionally fatal injuries. This issue demands urgent attention and a lasting resolution. The persistence of potholes is a glaring testament to a systemic failure. Despite the annual financial outlay, the roads remain in a perpetual state of disrepair. One can't help but wonder about the quality of materials used, the thoroughness of the repair work, and the accountability

of the authorities involved. Are these millions being funneled into quick fixes rather than sustainable solutions? Moreover, the economic implications of this issue cannot be ignored. In an inflated world, where every rupee counts, the costs incurred from vehicle repairs, medical bills, and lost productivity due to traffic caused by bad roads are substantial. It's an added burden on the average citizen, who is already grappling with the rising cost of living. So, what can be done to address this perennial problem? First and foremost, there needs to be a shift from reactive to proactive maintenance. Regular inspections, especially before the monsoon

season, can help identify potential trouble spots and address them preemptively. Employing advanced materials and technologies in road construction can also play a pivotal role in enhancing durability. Clear records must be kept of how the funds are spent and allocated. Citizens have the right to know where their money is going and, more importantly, to hold the authorities accountable for standard work. It may be worth considering a public-private partnership to enhance the expertise and efficiency in road maintenance. In conclusion, the monsoon, while a welcome relief from the heat, should not bring with it the dread of navigating pothole-ridden roads. It's high time the Road Authorities move beyond mere patchwork solutions and invest in lasting infrastructure improvements. For the sake of every commuter's safety and sanity, let's pave the way for smoother, safer journeys, rain or shine. (The author is a freelance writer and a motivator; views are personal)



RACHNA LAKHPATRI



FIRST COLUMN

THE HIDDEN ENEMY WITHIN

By keeping their ego in check, we can create a positive and productive work environment that will foster innovation and sustained success



SAKSHI SETHI

Today, many of us insist the main impediment to a full, successful life is the outside world. The most common enemy that lies within an individual is the three-letter word 'Ego'. At the beginning of the career, it impedes learning and the cultivation of talent. With the progress, it blinds to their faults and sows future problems and in failure, it magnifies each blow and makes the recovery more difficult. The ego, which is often defined as a person's sense of self-esteem or self-importance, is often viewed as a necessary trait for leaders. However, when ego inflates to unhealthy levels, it becomes a significant obstacle to effective leadership thereby stifling personal growth, distorting decision-making, eroding trust and ultimately jeopardizing the success of an organization. Collaboration is a cornerstone of effective leadership. Great leaders understand the importance of harnessing the collective intelligence and diverse perspectives of their team.

Apart from collaboration, Constructive feedback is also essential for personal and professional growth. Leaders who embrace feedback can adapt, learn and improve continuously. While a healthy level of self-confidence is essential for leadership, an inflated ego can have detrimental effects. Leaders with big egos often believe their ideas are superior, which can prevent them from valuing the input of their team. This attitude can stifle creativity and innovation, as team members may feel undervalued and less motivated to share their ideas.

Moreover, such leaders may resist feedback, seeing it as a threat to their authority or self-image. This resistance can prevent them from growing and improving, leading to repeated mistakes and missed development opportunities. Above all, ego can erode trust within a team. If team members feel that their leader is self-serving, they may become disengaged and less loyal to the organization. For a high-functioning team, it is the trust, and clear accountability mechanisms, that can allow leaders to build strong relationships with their team members thereby fostering a positive work environment where individuals feel safe, valued and motivated to contribute their best efforts.



The absence of the said factors can lead to a toxic work environment as leaders with large egos may struggle to admit when they are wrong which will ultimately prevent learning from mistakes and perpetuate problems. For an organisation to flourish, it becomes vital to acknowledge the mistakes continuously for continuous improvement and to build a culture of honesty and transparency. There is no denying the fact that leaders with inflated egos may prioritize short-term gains and personal accolades over long-term success and sustainability. This can lead to decisions that provide immediate benefits but can harm the organization in the long run. The only way to mitigate this is by encouraging leaders to engage in self-reflection and seek feedback; creating an environment where open communication is valued and establishing clear accountability mechanisms that can help them become more aware of their ego and its impact.

By addressing and learning from their failures, leaders can drive continuous improvement and inspire their teams to do the same. Moreover, leaders who practice humility and openness, encourage a culture of collaboration, thereby fostering an environment where ideas can flourish and the best solutions can emerge. Remember, ego in the workplace leadership can be a double-edged sword. By promoting self-awareness, fostering a culture of humility, encouraging open communication, setting clear accountability, and leading by example, organizations can mitigate the negative impacts of ego and cultivate more effective and empathetic leaders. In an era that glorifies social media and other forms of shameless self-promotion, the battle against ego must be fought on many fronts. Great leaders recognize the importance of humility, empathy and a commitment to the collective goals of their team and organization.

(The writer is an educator; views are personal)

Equitable revenue sharing is must for fiscal federalism



A S MITTAL

Punjab's declining GDP reflect the broader issue of uneven development. Addressing these disparities is essential for promoting holistic growth and preventing social distress across states



The current state of India's fiscal federalism is significantly detrimental to the states. The system needs to be reoriented to spur a competitive environment across the country, not just within some individual states. The recent union budget was expected to set a comprehensive five-year economic agenda for the country's wholesome growth.

In Budget 2024-25, unique packages were granted to Bihar of Rs 26,000 crore and Rs 15,000 crore to Andhra Pradesh in exchange for political support, resulting in an even wider fiscal imbalance. It's essential to ask why a similar approach has yet to be taken to address the economic growth of other financially distressed states. For example, Punjab, as a landlocked border state facing locational disadvantages, requires a fair platform to compete on an equal footing.

Once a prosperous and progressive state, Punjab grapples with a significant problem of unchecked unemployment stemming from distressed farming and an imbalanced industrial base dominated by 99.7% of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Punjab accounts for only 5% of industrial units in the country, with a 3.6% Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) in the industrial sector over the last five fiscal years, ranking 12th. In contrast, the neighbouring state of Haryana has demonstrated higher growth rates at 5.9%. Punjab ranked first in GDP in 1981 and fourth in 2004. In the fiscal year 2023-24, with a GDP of Rs 6.98 lakh crore, the state was ranked 16th.

In comparison, the neighbouring state of Haryana's GDP stands at Rs 11.20 lakh crore, ranked 12th. Interestingly, Bihar, once part of the economically challenged states known as 'BIMARU' (Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Uttar Pradesh), is now a fast-growing economy with a growth rate of 10.6% and a GDP of Rs 8.59 crore in FY 2023-24. Allowing lopsided economic development in a sensitive state like Punjab will have serious repercussions. Failing to ensure



ONCE A PROSPEROUS AND PROGRESSIVE STATE, PUNJAB GRAPPLES WITH A SIGNIFICANT PROBLEM OF UNCHECKED UNEMPLOYMENT STEMMING FROM DISTRESSED FARMING AND AN IMBALANCED INDUSTRIAL BASE DOMINATED BY 99.7% OF SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISE

holistic development will ultimately lead to accusations of inefficiency in managing human resources. Unemployment exacerbates various issues in distressed areas, including mental health, crime, and drug abuse. Substantial evidence links drug abuse and law and order problems directly to unemployment. These issues must be addressed assertively to ensure the overall progress and well-being of Punjab.

Economic distress in Punjab has led to unemployment and a significant migration of its human resources to Canada, which has created a breeding ground for radicals and anti-Indian Khalistani extremist activities on Canadian soil; it is a globalised challenge that must be addressed promptly. Secondly, the Pakistan border has been adversely affecting Punjab's economy.

This, along with illegal arms supply and drug-related terrorism, has severely impacted Punjab's social fabric and law and order. The central government has not adequately compensated Punjab for its unique challenges compared to other states. The revenue-sharing disparity is a pressing issue causing significant, alarming socio-economic distress in Punjab. The state receives only 51 paise for every rupee it contributes to the Centre's tax pool, compared to states like Bihar, which receive Rs 1.20. This highlights the urgent need for equitable revenue sharing to ensure Punjab's socio-economic well-being.

Currently, Punjab's contribution to the country's tax kitty stands at approximately 3%, and it only receives 1.8% of the divisible pool of taxes allocated by the Fifteenth Finance Commission. It

is concerning that Punjab only received 1.8% of the Rs 8,16,649 crore distributed by the Centre to the states during 2022-23. However, the large areas and population figures of Uttar Pradesh and Bihar provide them with additional leverage from the central tax pool. Uttar Pradesh received the highest share at 18% (Rs 1,46,525 crore), and Bihar received the second-highest share of 10%.

This highlights why Punjab and other states argue they must receive a fair share of funds despite contributing more to the exchequer. During the fiscal year 2022-23, Punjab contributed Rs 32,800 crore to the central taxes fund, which included CGST, income tax, corporation tax, wealth tax, union excise duty, customs, and service tax. However, in return, the state only received Rs 14,756 crore. Punjab has raised the issue with the Sixteenth Finance Commission, which believes it deserves a fair share of central tax. The Finance Commission recommends the distribution of tax revenues between the Centre and States.

Despite recommendations to allocate 42% and 41% of net tax revenue to States, their share of gross tax revenue fell to 35% in 2015-16 and 30% by 2023-24. For 2024-25, the Gross Tax Revenue (GTR) is projected to grow at 11.7%, raising concerns about adequacy in meeting state fiscal needs. The introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST) Act has had significant and varying consequences on fiscal federalism.

It has given the Centre more extensive taxation powers, altering the budget landscape and transforming budgetary federal-

ism in the country. While GST has led to revenue growth, it also restricts the financial autonomy of the states. In a recent memorandum submitted to the 16th finance commission chairman, Punjab highlighted the loss on account of GST introduction, indicating that the state would have earned more than Rs 45,000 crore with VAT versus the budgeted GST of Rs 25,750 crore in FY 2024-25.

This gap is expected to increase to Rs 95,000 crore with VAT and GST at Rs 47,000 crore by 2030-31.

The Way Forward: In the current fiscal federalism, it is crucial to adopt a comprehensive and inclusive approach to budgetary prudence, local employment generation, and social harmony, regardless of demographic and political differences. Devolve more fiscal powers to states, enhancing their flexibility in revenue generation, expenditure planning, and borrowing limits. Reforms are necessary to address imbalances in the revenue transfer system.

A Finance Act amendment is still pending to establish fairness and accountability in managing the resource imbalances between the Centre and the States, which has led to growing regional tensions. Ultimately, fair, competitive, and effective fiscal federalism is essential to ensure that resources result in improved services and infrastructure for citizens.

(The Author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council. Views expressed are personal)

India's population: A liability or an untapped asset with immense potential

As the world population nears 8 billion, it becomes imperative to reassess the impact of population dynamics on sustainability and progress.

Much is being written and spoken about India's teeming human population. Huge concerns are being raised on the spectre of the burgeoning population becoming a severe liability for national survival. India's population was 1.44 billion in January 2024 and could be a shade above this at present. This population has been growing at the rate of nearly 1 per cent per year during the last decade. People say that the country cannot progress economically and become a developed nation unless population growth is checked. Or, in other words, a big population is a most severe dampener to national growth and development. How far is this true and is there historical precedence to cor-



ATUL SEHGAL

roborate this concern? The subject of the population needs to be analysed from a larger, global perspective. The population of the world is close to 8 billion today and has trebled over the last 100 years. The core issue regarding population being considered an asset or liability pertains to the current paradigms of tapping and using global material resources and the huge disparity in ownership of those resources. Humans do not and cannot

produce babies at will like goods are produced in a factory. Humans can only cohabit and copulate, like lower animals. This is borne out by the fact of decreasing fertility in many parts of the world despite the professed advancements of modern medical science.

Scientists and medical professionals can help with the process of fertilisation of reproductive cells but cannot achieve conception at will. It stands to reason that babies are produced in the factory of nature by the subtle action of a supernatural, omnipotent entity. You can call him Creator or God who is also the controller and regulator of the world and the larger universe. This is a prime scientific fact if science is correctly under-

stood as the systematic and logical treatment of any subject. Hence population growth or decline is a subject more of God than of man. If population growth is high and humans fear that it will make human life unsustainable, their Creator knows better. He makes humans learn and realise their mistakes through natural disasters like climate change, wildfires, cyclones, tornados, earthquakes, floods and epidemics. These serve to balance out the excessive population from time to time. It has to be admitted that modern science has done a lot to conquer life-threatening illnesses and increase the longevity of humans. Average life expectancy globally today is almost double compared to what it was 200



years ago. But this increase has come at the cost of the environment. We have used chemical fertilizers for crops abundantly which have undermined the quality and fertility of soil. We have used chemical, reductionist formulation-based drugs and vaccines aplenty whose serious, sneaky side effects are slowly coming into evidence. But we cannot go on doing it ad infinitum without seriously prejudicing sustainability. Today, humans

are ravaging and pillaging global material resources like never before. They are enhancing human comforts at the cost of the environment. Life expectancy is rising at the cost of life quality. Infectious diseases are being combated through strong chemical formulation drugs, while insidiously inviting chronic diseases and newer ailments unheard of before. Humans are unwittingly proceeding towards a situation of unsustainable existence. Let us go back to the prime metaphysical truths of existence. God regulates all life. He is the source of all knowledge which is enshrined in the divinely revealed scriptures called Vedas. These scriptures are the repository of all knowledge including science and technology.

Vedic hymns declare that each human couple should produce 10 children. The same Vedas exhort humans to live up to at least 100 years, healthy and fit. In the above backdrop, the human population is an asset, not a liability. We should know how to utilise the manpower productively and fruitfully. If we follow the modes of agriculture and food production as per Vedic sciences, using technologies based on such sciences, we will never have to compromise the quality or fertility of the soil and can produce bumper crops season after season. We can achieve this through strictly organic farming and protect our environment and ecosphere. Following assiduously the principles of Ayurveda, we can ensure

sound health and high longevity without recourse to synthetic chemical drugs. All we have to do is change our systems and paradigms of living to reduce the stark wealth disparity witnessed today where 20 per cent of the global population holds 80 per cent of global resources. Our instinct of self-aggrandisement, driven by capitalism based on the banal baser element of greed has led to the present situation. Population needs to be considered an asset and it will be regarded as an asset if we change our living paradigms to align with nature and embrace environment-friendly technologies expounded in our ancient Vedic scriptures. (The author is a management consultant based in New Delhi; views are personal)

Quad calls for respecting sovereignty of nations

PTI ■ TOKYO

In a loud and clear message to China, the Quad on Monday reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific and resolved to work towards a region where no country dominates others and each state is free from "coercion" in all its forms.

The grouping comprising India, the US, Japan and Australia, after a meeting of their foreign ministers, announced a plan to expand its ambitious Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) programme to the Indian Ocean region that would facilitate monitoring the strategic waters.

The Quad also said that it was working for early operationalisation of its South Asia programme through India's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region.

The Quad foreign ministerial meeting also called for upholding the free and open rules-based global order and respecting the principle of freedom, human rights, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.

Without directly naming China, the ministers expressed serious concern over the situation in the East and South China Seas and reiterated the Quad's strong opposition to any "unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion."

China accuses Quad of 'inciting' confrontation

Beijing (PTI): China on Monday accused the Quad nations, including the US and India, of "artificially creating tension" and "inciting confrontation" to "contain" the development of other countries in the Asia Pacific region.

Beijing's statement came hours after the foreign ministers of the Quad countries, comprising the US, Japan, India and Australia, in a meeting in Tokyo, reaffirmed its steadfast commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, vowing to work towards a region where no country dominates others and each state is free from coercion in all its forms.

The Quad was "artificially creating tension, inciting confrontation and containing the

development of other countries", Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said at a press briefing here when asked for his reaction to the joint statement of the foreign ministers of the Quad countries released after the end of their meeting.

This is against the global trend of peace and development and stability in the Asia Pacific, Lin said.

In a loud and clear message to China, the Quad foreign ministers in Tokyo called for upholding the free and open rules-based international order and respecting the principle of freedom, human rights, democratic values, sovereignty and territorial integrity of nations.

The meeting was attended by

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa and Australia's Penny Wong.

Without directly naming China, the four foreign ministers expressed serious concern over the situation in the East and South China Seas and reiterated the Quad's strong opposition to any "unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo by force or coercion".

Lin said China believes cooperation among countries and regional initiatives to be conducive to regional development, stability and prosperity rather than forming small circles harming mutual trust and cooperation.



Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong, left, Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar, second left, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, second right, arrive for the Quad Ministerial Meeting, at the Foreign Ministry's Iikura guesthouse in Tokyo, Monday.

Foreign ministers also expressed "deepest concern over the war raging in Ukraine including its terrible and tragic humanitarian consequences."

"We reiterate the need for a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in line with international law, consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, including respect for

sovereignty and territorial integrity," they said.

The Quad foreign ministers also referred to increasing Chinese manoeuvres in the South China Sea, especially the "dangerous use" of coast guard and maritime militia vessels. "We continue to express our serious concern about the militarisation of disputed features, and coercive and

intimidating manoeuvres in the South China Sea," the joint statement said. "We also express our serious concern about the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia vessels, the increasing use of various kinds of dangerous manoeuvres, and efforts to disrupt other countries' offshore resource exploitation activities," it said.

Maduro wins Venezuela's presidential election

AP ■ CARACAS

Nicolas Maduro was declared the winner in Venezuela's presidential election Sunday, even as his opponents were preparing to dispute the results, setting up a high-stakes showdown that will determine whether the South American nation transitions away from one party rule.

Shortly after midnight, the National Electoral Council said Maduro secured 51% of the vote, overcoming the main opposition candidate, Edmundo González, who garnered 44%.

But the electoral authority, which is controlled by Maduro loyalists, didn't immediately release the tallies from each of the 30,000 polling booths nationwide, hampering the opposition's ability to challenge the results after claiming it had data for only 30% of the ballot boxes.

Foreign leaders held off recognizing the results as the electoral council promised to release official tallies in the "coming hours."

"The Maduro regime should understand that the results it published are difficult to believe," said Gabriel Boric, the leftist leader of Chile. "We won't recognize any result that is not verifiable."

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the U.S. has "serious concerns that the result announced does not reflect the will or the votes of the Venezuelan people," speaking in Tokyo.

The delay in announcing results — six hours after polls were supposed to close — indicated a deep debate inside the government about how to proceed after Maduro's opponents came out early in the evening all but claiming victory.

When Maduro finally came out to celebrate the results, he accused unidentified foreign enemies for trying to hack the voting system.

"This is not the first time that they have tried to violate the peace of the republic," he said



to a few hundred supporters at the presidential palace. He provided no evidence to back the claim but promised "justice" for those who try to stir violence in Venezuela.

Opposition representatives said tallies they collected from campaign representatives at the polling stations showed González trouncing Maduro.

Meanwhile, the head of the electoral council said it would release the official voting acts in the coming hours.

Maduro celebrated the result with a few hundreds supporters at the presidential palace.

He ca

Maduro, in seeking a third term, faced his toughest challenge yet from the unlikely of opponents in González: a retired diplomat who was unknown to voters before being tapped in April as a last-minute stand-in for opposition powerhouse Maria Corina Machado.

Earlier, opposition leaders celebrated, online and outside a few voting centers, what they assured was a landslide victory for González.

"I'm so happy," said Merling Fernández, a 31-year-old bank employee, as a representative for the opposition campaign walked out of one voting center in a working class neighborhood of Caracas to announce results showing González more than doubled Maduro's vote count. Dozens standing nearby erupted in an

impromptu rendition of the national anthem.

"This is the path toward a new Venezuela," added Fernández, holding back tears. "We are all tired of this yoke."

Voters started lining up at some voting centers across the country before dawn Sunday, sharing water, coffee and snacks for several hours.

The election will have ripple effects throughout the Americas, with government opponents and supporters alike signaling their interest in joining the exodus of 7.7 million Venezuelans who have already left their homes for opportunities abroad should Maduro win another six year term.

Authorities set Sunday's election to coincide with what would have been the 70th birthday of former President Hugo Chávez, the revered leftist firebrand who died of cancer in 2013, leaving his Bolivarian revolution in the hands of Maduro. But Maduro and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela are more unpopular than ever among many voters who blame his policies for crushing wages, spurring hunger, crippling the oil industry and separating families due to migration. The opposition managed to line up behind a single candidate after years of intraparty divisions and election boycotts that torpedoed their ambitions to topple the ruling party.

Vandalism hits communication lines in France

Paris (AP)

The French government says multiple telecommunications lines have been hit by acts of vandalism, affecting fiber lines and fixed and mobile phone lines as cities around France are hosting events for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

The scale of the impact is unclear, as is whether it has affected any Olympic activities.

The vandalism came after a series of attacks hit train networks around France on Friday, hours before the Olympics opening ceremony.

Marina Ferrari, secretary of state in charge of digital affairs, posted on X that damage in several regions overnight Sunday to Monday affected telecommunications operators. She said that led to localized impact on access to fiber lines and fixed and mobile telephone lines.

Israeli military detains 9 soldiers for alleged detainee abuse

Tel Aviv (AP)

The Israeli military said Monday it was holding nine soldiers for questioning following allegations of "substantial abuse" of a detainee at a shadowy facility where Israel has held Palestinian prisoners throughout the war in Gaza. The military did not disclose additional details surrounding the alleged abuse, saying only that its top legal official had launched a probe.

An investigation by The Associated Press and reports by rights groups have exposed abysmal conditions at the Sde Teiman facility, the country's largest detention centre.

A report by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, earlier this year said that detainees alleged they were subjected to ill-treatment and abuse while in Israeli custody, without specifying the facility.



A heated argument erupts between soldiers at the Sde Teiman detention facility in southern Israel after Military Police investigators arrived to detain suspects for questioning.

The military has generally denied ill-treatment of detainees. Following the accusations of harsh treatment, Israel has said it is transferring the bulk of Palestinian

detainees out of Sde Teiman and upgrading it. Israeli media reported that military police officers who arrived at Sde Teiman in southern Israel to detain the soldiers

were met with protests and scuffles. The detentions of soldiers prompted an outcry among members of Israel's far-right government, who condemned the investigation into their conduct, saying it was an affront to their service.

Israel has detained thousands of Palestinians since the Oct 7 Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza, according to official figures, though hundreds were released after the military determined they were not affiliated with Hamas.

Israeli human rights groups say the majority of detainees have at some point passed through Sde Teiman.

International mediators are trying to bring Hamas and Israel to agree to a cease-fire deal that would wind down the war in Gaza and free the remaining 110 hostages held there.

Social media hinders teens' self-discovery

AP ■ SUNSHINE COAST

Over recent months, a number of politicians have supported calls to ban social media for children under 16 in Australia. Currently, kids under 13 are not allowed to use social media.

There's some research that suggests social media can be helpful for certain young people by, for example, connecting them with like-minded peers.

That said, there are a raft of reasons for this proposed change. The most compelling is evidence showing inappropriate screen time and social media use are linked to poor mental health in children and young people, including depression and anxiety.

Overuse or misuse of social

media can damage many areas of psychological wellbeing. But, as an expert in adolescent development, I've been exploring one that's not often considered: identity development.

Identity development has long been regarded as the core psychological business of adolescence. You decide who you are, what you want to become, what underlying values you stand for and what you want out of life as you move toward adulthood. But might social media risk thwarting this process?

Between the ages of about 11 and 15, the human brain becomes increasingly sensitive to attention and feedback from peers. The parts of the brain responsible for developing perspective, judgment, critical thinking and self-control will

not fully mature until a person's early to mid 20s.

Teenagers have always compared themselves to others. They seek validation from peers as they explore their values, develop their personalities and seek to express themselves. But social media has provided a platform for adolescents — particularly those high in FOMO, or fear of missing out — to obsess over how they compare to many more people, including aptly named "influencers."

It can be difficult for a young person to develop a clear sense of self when they're constantly comparing themselves to and following others.

Similarly, young people are developing many of their opinions based on what they see on social media. An individual's

tendency to conform to other people's opinions is sometimes called the "bandwagon effect." While plenty of social media content can be harmless enough, social media — like the real world — are becoming increasingly political and polarised, with little tolerance for opposing ideas. Some teens may find themselves latching onto ideologies fed to them via marketing algorithms. And we know young people can become radicalised through social media. How do you see yourself? Are you the same person in public, in private, with friends, family or at work? Would you honestly admit some of your deepest feelings to your work colleague, friend, or even your partner? How about to yourself?

Amitabh Bachchan statue in US listed as tourist attraction on Google Maps

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A life-size statue of Bollywood superstar Amitabh Bachchan installed by an Indian-American businessman outside his New Jersey residence in the US has now been listed by Google as a tourist attraction.

Gopi Seth installed Bachchan's life-size statue in August 2022 outside his residence in Edison city, about 35 kilometres south of Manhattan in New York.

"Our home has become one of the most popular tourist attractions, thanks to the Amitabh Bachchan statue. Recognised by Google Search, this site attracts a growing number of visitors each day," Seth told PTI



on Sunday. In two years since then, fans of the Indian superstar have been coming to this place, taking pictures and selfies, with many of them posting on social media platforms like Instagram and X.

"Fans of Mr Bachchan from all around the world travel to see the statue, with 20 to 25 cars of families arriving daily. Visitors often leave greeting cards and letters, expressing their admiration for the legendary actor," Seth said, sharing some of the videos of the fans visiting the statue.

Seth said the popularity of his home extends far beyond in-person visits. "Enthusiastic fans post videos, photos, and tweets about their experiences, flooding social media platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. These posts have garnered significant attention, further boosted the site's fame and made it a trending destination on the internet," he said.

Firefighters make progress amid wildfires spreading smoke across US West

Forest Ranch (US) (AP):

Firefighters made progress and were aided by improving weather over the weekend in the battle against wildfires covering massive areas and leaving a trail of damage in the western United States, but further evacuations and resources have been necessary as thousands of personnel tackle the flames.

The so-called Park Fire, the largest wildfire in California this year, was one of more than 100 blazes burning in the US on Sunday, according to the National Interagency Fire Centre. Some were sparked by the weather, with climate change increasing the frequency of lightning strikes as the western US endures blistering heat and bone-dry conditions.

The Park Fire had scorched an area greater than the city of Los Angeles as of Monday, darkening the sky with smoke and engaging thousands of firefighters. The blaze spanned more than 562 square miles (1,455 sq km) of inland Northern California.

Winds and temperatures were expected to increase slightly amid a drop in humidity, officials said in an update early Monday. Air quality alerts were issued for Monday in the northwestern US and western Canada.

The Park Fire started Wednesday, when authorities say a man pushed a burning car into a gully in Chico and then fled. A man accused of setting the fire was arrested Thursday and is due in court Monday. Firefighters increased containment to 12% on Saturday, aided by cooler temperatures and more humidity, officials said.

150 killed in unrest, B'desh announces mourning

PTI ■ DHAKA

For the first time, the Bangladesh government on Monday officially acknowledged that 150 people were killed across the country during the students' unrest over the quota system.

Violence gripped Bangladesh recently and the government called in the army to quell protests against job quotas. The protests, which started in universities and colleges earlier this month, quickly turned into a more widespread agitation against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government. The unrest has left several thousand people, including policemen, wounded and major government installations damaged.

"The government has decided that a nationwide mourning will be observed tomorrow... People have been urged to wear black badges to mourn the deaths (during the violence)." Cabinet Secretary Mahbub Hossain told a media briefing after a meeting chaired by Hasina at the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

He said mosques, temples, pagodas and churches across the country were also urged to offer prayers for the departed souls and the wounded people. The top bureaucrat said Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal presented a report at the meeting about the overall situation and confirmed 150



deaths in clashes across the country. The announcement came on a day when the military and paramilitary troops patrolled the streets of the capital Dhaka while police in riot gear enforced a strict vigil as a faction of the protesting students overnight called a new round of protests.

The group called the new protest after six of their coordinators announced the withdrawal of the demonstrations, which the protesters said was obtained under duress in police custody.

The six student leaders in an appearance before the media overnight announced the withdrawal of the street demonstra-

tions as their demand for reforms in the quota system was met by the government following a Supreme Court order. "We have mobilised forces to prevent fresh violence," a police official said.

Witnesses and live TV footage showed the security forces guarding major points in the capital with military and police armoured personnel carriers patrolling the streets alongside the paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh. The protesters subsided after the apex Appellate Division of unitary Bangladesh's Supreme Court on July 21 ordered a massive quota reform, keeping only seven per cent of reserve posts instead of the existing 56

per cent. The government subsequently issued a Gazette notification in line with the order saying 93 per cent of jobs would be open to candidates on merit. "Our main demand for logical reforms to the government job quota system has been met," student coordinator Nahid Islam on Sunday said in a video message, calling for educational institutions to re-open. However, other students, calling for a new protest, claimed their leaders were forced to announce while in police custody. Meanwhile, the government ignored an ultimatum to release their leaders and apologise for those killed in deadly unrest.

Groups of youths held scattered street protests but were quickly chased away by police in parts of the capital and elsewhere. Their demand included a public apology from the prime minister for the casualties, the dismissal of several of her ministers, and the reopening of schools and universities around the country which were closed for an indefinite period as the unrest reached its peak. A nationwide curfew gripped Bangladesh mid-July, and the government called in the army in aid to the police and paramilitary Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) to quell protests against job quotas that, according to media reports, killed more than 200 persons across the country. The mass circulation 'Prothom Alo' newspaper cited 210 deaths, 113 of them being children. Most others were juveniles and youths. The newspaper said at least 9,000 people were arrested nationwide since the beginning of the unrest. According to observers and political commentators, the students protests were largely peaceful until the ruling Awami League student activists were asked to quell the protestors and police attacks on demonstrators, who were later presumed to be backed by the opposition political quarters. The government leaders said the peaceful and issue-specific students' movement was not

involved in violence and attributed the anarchy to the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party and their student activists backed by the main Opposition outside parliament Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) of ex-premier Khaleda Zia. The BNP had boycotted the January 7 elections. The government has accused JI of hijacking the protests to cause a nationwide anarchy.

The unrest significantly impacted Bangladesh's economy with the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industries (FICCI) estimating the economic impact to be around USD 10 billion and rising. President of the country's apex business chambers, Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industries (FBCCI), Mahbubul Alam, said the major export-earning garment industries alone incurred losses of Bangladeshi Taka 6,400,000 (USD 5,45,167). Bangladeshi authorities said they restored internet services in the country after a 10-day disconnection of both mobile internet and the key social media platform as the situation returned to normal following the disbandment of the protests.

However, the resumption of mobile internet on Sunday failed to relieve tens of thousands of F-commerce sellers, who rely on Facebook to sell their goods and services, were yet to resume.

Braverman lashes out on colleagues over Tory leadership race

PTI ■ LONDON



Britain's former home secretary, Suella Braverman, on Monday lashed out at her Conservative Party colleagues for branding her "mad, bad and dangerous" as she decided not to contest the Tory leadership contest to succeed Rishi Sunak as Opposition Leader.

The 44-year-old Indian-origin member of Parliament from Fareham and Waterlooville in south-east England was widely expected to not join the race by Monday's nomination deadline to go up against fellow Indian-origin former home secretary Priti Patel and other former ministers - Kemi Badenoch, James Cleverly, Tom Tugendhat, Robert Jenrick and Mel Stride. However, contrary to some media reports that she had failed to find the requisite 10 MPs to propose her candidacy, Braverman said she had chosen to step aside because her party was unwilling to accept her diagnosis of what led to its worst electoral defeat in history earlier this month.

"I've been branded mad, bad and dangerous enough to see that the Tory Party does not want to hear the truths I've set out," writes Braverman in "The Daily Telegraph". "Although I'm grateful to the 10 MPs who wanted to nominate me for the leadership, getting onto the ballot is not enough. There is, for good or for ill, no point in someone like me running to lead the Tory Party when most of the MPs disagree with my diagnosis and prescription. The traumatised party does not want to hear these things said out loud. Instead, platitudes about 'unity' are fashionable. That's all fine but it's not honest," she writes.

According to the former minister who was sacked by Sunak as home secretary, the party's disastrous election result was down to the party's failures on "migration, taxes and trans ideology". She also lamented the lack of a proper rebellion against the former British Indian leader as she criticised his leadership over the party's controversial Rwanda scheme to deport illegal migrants to the African nation.

She writes: "The reality is that we were a united party under Rishi Sunak. We MPs united to

install him as PM with a coronation...Precisely everything on Rishi's agenda was nodded through: smoking bans, pedicabs, tax rises, Windsor framework and even the misguided early general election. "In fact, if only our Rwanda rebellion had succeeded, we would have got flights off. But not enough colleagues joined us, instead putting 'unity' above a fatally flawed law that failed to stop the boats - as we predicted." A barrister by profession, the Goan heritage politician had led calls for the UK to leave the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) to make the Rwanda scheme work, something the incoming Labour government has categorically ruled out as it shelved the deportation programme. However, while admitting that the Tories got things "monumentally wrong" and declared that the general election defeat was "predicted, preventable, deserved and, as yet, unaddressed", she pledged to support whoever takes charge as a backbench MP.

"I wish all the candidates the best. The survival of our party depends on the outcome of this contest. And it is not just about unity. Pretending that we are united on the surface when we are unreconciled on policy won't work," she added.

The final list of candidates in the race to replace Sunak will be unveiled this week after which they will kick off their campaigns to sway enough MPs to vote for them in the first round of votes ahead of the Conservative Party conference at the end of September. After a whittling down process to the final two candidates who will fight it out for the wider Tory membership vote through October, the new leader will take their place as the UK's Opposition Leader on November 2.

Pak seeks reprofiling of over \$27-bn debt with friendly nations

Islamabad (PTI):

Cash-strapped Pakistan has sought the re-profiling of more than USD 27 billion in debt and liabilities with China and two other friendly nations to secure a bailout package from the IMF, according to a media report on Monday.

The Washington-based International Monetary Fund last month announced that it signed a staff-level agreement with Pakistan to provide a USD 7 billion loan which would be disbursed for 37 months.

However, it attached stringent conditions with it, requiring Pakistan prior action before the fund's board accords final approval for the loan.

Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb after returning from Beijing told the media on Sunday that talks have been going on with China, Saudi Arabia and the UAE for a re-profiling of USD 27 billion. Aurangzeb said Pakistan had already asked the friendly bilateral trio of lenders to roll over its more than USD 12 billion annual debt portfolio by three to five years to secure the IMF board's approval, which is expected next month.

This is on top of Islamabad's request to Beijing to convert imported coal-based projects to local coal and re-profile more than USD 15 billion in energy sector liabilities to create fiscal space amid difficulties in timely repayments.

Pakistan has a peculiar financial arrangement with these three countries in the shape of commercial loans and SAFE deposits that are rolled over every year and form a major part of the IMF programme in terms of external financing needs.

Pakistan has now requested the maturity period of these loans - USD 5 billion from China, USD 4 billion from Saudi Arabia, and USD 3 billion from the UAE - to be extend-

ed to at least three years, offering greater predictability under the IMF programme. Aurangzeb said the Chinese side acknowledged Pakistan's foreign exchange difficulties and wanted to help in new business ventures and the re-profiling of energy sector payments besides playing its role in supporting Pakistan's case at the IMF board as one of the major stakeholders.

He said the process of debt and equity rescheduling had been started and would now go to the working groups with relevant financial institutions and sponsors of Chinese projects for which Pakistan hired local Chinese consultants.

"Between now and the IMF board meeting (on the 37-month bailout package), we have to ensure confirmation of external financing" from friendly bilateral partners, the minister said.

However, he explained that the Chinese energy sector debt reprofiling had nothing to do with the IMF programme as other prior actions had been completed and structural benchmarks were under implementation.

Aurangzeb said he was in contact with the Chinese, Saudi and UAE finance ministers for an extension in debt rollover for three years and they had assured their support that would place Pakistan in a very comfortable position in terms of external financing gap.

"I can assure you we are at a very good place on external financing for the next three years, including year one, year two and year three," he said.

He said the IMF had worked out a financing needs assessment for three years that also included its own USD 7 billion Extended Fund Facility. After rollovers from friendly countries, the remaining external financing gap would become very manageable, he said.

Pakistan court extends remand of PTI's info secretary by two days

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court has extended the physical remand of a close aide of jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party for two more days and sent a female social media activist, allegedly linked to the political organisation, to judicial remand. The Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) presented Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) Central Information Secretary Raouf Hasan before District and Sessions Judge Murid Abbas on Sunday after the expiry of his three-day remand granted last week, the Dawn newspaper reported on Monday.

The FIA prosecutor informed the judge that the case record, including transcripts of videos, has been submitted to court. The forensic analysis of the videos has to be carried out, the pro-

secutor said and sought eight days' physical remand of Hasan. Following the arguments, the judge extended Hasan's physical remand for two more days, the report said.

During the last hearing on Thursday, the FIA presented a report to the court claiming that Hasan received "instructions through messages, audio notes, graphics and videos" from abroad daily. It alleged that the PTI member oversees the party's social media teams that run trends on social media platforms "to incite violence, create law and order situation and fan cyberterrorism".

The FIA also presented Syeda Arooba Kanwal, a social media activist who was allegedly linked with the PTI in court. The FIA prosecutor claimed that Kanwal was operating the party's account on social media



platform X, which she refused to surrender to the investigators, and sought her physical remand for investigation.

The defendant's lawyer, Ali Bukhari, said Kanwal was an employee and handled PTI's social media account. He claimed the entire case has been based on data retrieved from a

cell phone, which is already in FIA's custody. The advocate requested the court to discharge all the accused.

However, the judge sent Kanwal to jail on judicial remand. The Pakistan government last week formed a joint investigation committee to identify those involved in creating disorder in the country through "malicious social media campaigns". No party or person has been named against whom the possible investigation would be directed.

However, analysts say, the step may be targeted at the PTI party. Hasan was arrested on Monday last week along with 11 other PTI supporters and was booked by the FIA's cybercrime wing under Sections 9 (glorification of an offence), 10 (cyber terrorism) and 11 (electronic forgery) of the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA).

'Sexual violence rampant in Sudan civil war'

AP ■ CAIRO

An international rights group on Monday accused a paramilitary group in war-torn Sudan of sexual violence against women, including rape, gang rape, and forced and child marriage. A smaller number of incidents were also attributed to the military, it said.

Human Rights Watch called for the United Nations and the African Union to establish a joint mission to protect civilians in Sudan as more than 15 months of fighting between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces has shown no signs of abating.

"The Rapid Support Forces have raped, gang raped, and forced into marriage countless women and girls in residential areas in Sudan's capital," said

Laetitia Bader, deputy Africa director at Human Rights Watch. The group also accused both warring parties of blocking survivors' access to critical emergency care, and said the military has "willfully restricted" shipments of humanitarian supplies to RSF-controlled areas, including medical supplies and aid workers since October last year.

The RSF, meanwhile, has pillaged medical supplies and occupied medical facilities, it said. RSF fighters also committed sexual violence against service providers, the group said, citing local responders.

Sudan plunged into chaos in April last year when simmering tensions between the military and the RSF exploded into open fighting in the capital, Khartoum, and elsewhere in the country. The fighting has

killed more than 14,000 people and wounded 33,000 others, according to the UN, but rights activists say the true toll could be much higher.

The conflict has created the world's largest displacement crisis, with over 11 million people forced to flee their homes. The formerly military-aligned RSF grew out of the Janjaweed militias formed during the conflict in Darfur in the 2000s by former President Omar al-Bashir, who ruled the country for three decades until he was overthrown during a popular uprising in 2019. He is wanted by the International Criminal Court for charges of genocide and other crimes committed during the conflict.

In a report released on Sunday, Human Rights Watch said it documented widespread sexual violence, as well as forced

and child marriage during the conflict in Khartoum and the nearby cities of Omdurman and Bahri, or Khartoum North. The three cities are known as Greater Khartoum.

These acts constitute "war crimes and crimes against humanity", it said.

The group said most of the cases were attributed to the Rapid Support Forces, but some were also blamed on the military, especially as the military retained control of Omdurman earlier this year. It said men and boys have also been raped, including in detention. Both the RSF and the military didn't immediately answer requests for comment.

Human Rights Watch said neither party has taken meaningful steps to prevent its forces from committing rape or attacking health care, nor to

independently and transparently investigate crimes committed by their forces.

It said an RSF spokesman denied occupying hospitals or medical centres in Khartoum and its sister cities, but didn't provide evidence that the group has carried out effective investigations into allegations of sexual violence by its forces.

It called on the African Union and the United Nations to jointly deploy a new mission to protect civilians in Sudan, including preventing sexual and gender-based violence.

"The United Nations and African Union need to mobilise this protection and states should hold to account those responsible for ongoing sexual violence, attacks on local responders, health facilities and the blocking of aid," Bader said.

Top radical leader booked in Pak for issuing death threats to CJ

Islamabad (PTI):

An FIR was filed against a top leader of the radical Islamist group Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan and its 1,500 workers for issuing death threats to Chief Justice of Pakistan Qazi Faez Isa.

The FIR was registered against Pir Zaheerul Hasan Shah, the Deputy Amir of Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP).

The charges against Shah include sections of the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA), inciting religious hatred, causing public disorder, intimidating the judiciary, threatening the judiciary, interfering in official duties, and obstructing legal functions.

According to the FIR, during a protest outside the Press Club, Shah incited hatred against the judiciary and announced a reward of PKR 10 million for anyone who brings the head of Justice Faez Isa. The FIR also includes charges against 1,500 Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan workers.

The FIR was registered after Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said that strict action would be taken against those issuing death threats to the Chief Justice, emphasising that the state will not tolerate such fatwas.

During the press conference, Asif condemned the inflammatory remarks made against Chief Justice Isa and highlighted attempts on social media to incite the public to commit murder.

He warned that permitting such rhetoric could lead to the disintegration of the state's structure.

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif pointed out that there are efforts to incite violence in the name of religion, with Chief Justice Isa being targeted through various pretexts.

NOTICE FOR CANCELLATION OF TENDER
No. E-499218/302 Date: 27.07.2024
Due to insufficient participation of bidders in the e-tender invited vide NIT No. E-499218/3 dated 11 June 2024, are cancelled and re-tender is invited. The detailed notice inviting re-tender is available in the website www.assamtenders.gov.in.
Sd/-Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19
Janesanyog/CF/902/24/30-Jul-24

NOTICE INVITING E-TENDER
No. E-499218/301 Date: 27.07.2024
The Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha, Assam, invites bids from registered appropriate class of contractor for 8 group of building works in different schools as per the detailed notice inviting tender which can be downloaded from the website <https://www.assamtenders.gov.in>.
The last date of submission of tender is 19-08-2024 upto 2:00 PM.
Sd/-Mission Director, Samagra Shiksha Axom, Kahilipara, Guwahati-19
Janesanyog/CF/899/24/30-JUL-24

verka
APPOINTMENTS
The Punjab state Cooperative Milk Producers' Federation Limited (Milked Punjab) invites applications/resumes for appointment of 01 post of Animal Nutrition Officer (ANO), 02 posts of Animal Nutrition Supervisor and 05 posts of Calf Rearing Programme Supervisor on contract basis till March 2026 under JICA Project (which could be extended further as per requirement of the project).
Qualification:
1. For the post of Animal Nutrition Officer:- Veterinary post graduate/graduate or agriculture post graduate/graduate with relevant field experience.
2. For the post of Animal Nutrition Supervisor:- Graduation in veterinary science/agriculture. However, if such graduates cannot be found, then candidates with diploma in veterinary science/agriculture will be considered. If even such candidates are not available then bachelor's degree in any discipline, having field experience will be considered.
3. For the post of calf Rearing Programme Supervisor:- Any graduate. In case person with graduation is not available, then suitable candidate with Higher Secondary School Certificate(Class 12) will be considered.
All the requisite details of the posts and process of submitting applications are available under "Career Section" of our website <http://www.verka.coop/career/>. The last date of receipt of the resumes/applications is 15.08.2024.
General Manager (QA&E)/ Incharge (HR)
NA/12/24407/2023/36097 Dated CHD :- 7/29/2024

Govt's debt set to rise to ₹185 lakh cr in FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government estimates its debt, including external borrowing, valued at current exchange rate and public account and other liabilities will increase to Rs 185 lakh crore, or 56.8 per cent of the GDP, during the current fiscal year. The total debt stood at Rs 171.78 lakh crore, or 58.2 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP), at the end of March 2024, Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary said in a written reply to the Lok Sabha on Monday. As per the International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook, April 2024, India's Gross Domestic Product at current prices has already reached USD 3.57 trillion in 2023-24, he said. Replying to another question, Chaudhary said the growth rate of the private final consumption expenditure (PFCE) at constant prices in



2022-23 and 2023-24 is 6.8 per cent and 4 per cent, respectively, he said, quoting provisional GDP estimates for 2023-24 released by the National Statistical Office. The growth rate of PFCE at current prices in 2022-23 and 2023-24 is 14.2 per cent and 8.5 per cent, respectively, he said, adding that the ratio of PFCE to the GDP at current prices in 2023-24 is 60.3 per cent. In response to another question, Chaudhary said the normal net borrowing ceiling (NBC) of the states for 2021-

Union government under the head 'Special Assistance' under Demands for Grants 'Transfers to States' provide grants-in-aid to states for spill-over committed liabilities for which Budget provision is not made and for other need-based assistance to states. Further, NITI Aayog, in its report titled 'Report on Developmental Support to the Successor State of Andhra Pradesh under Andhra Pradesh Re-organization Act (APRA), 2014' dated December 1, 2015, has recommended "...A total assistance of Rs 2,100 crore for the seven backward districts of Andhra Pradesh at the rate of Rs 300 crore per district. Based on recommendations of NITI Aayog, he said the Department of Expenditure has released an amount of Rs 1,750 crore so far under the APRA, 2014 for development of seven backward districts of Andhra Pradesh. He said fintechs are collaborating with banks and non-banking financial

Digitalisation in finance paving way for next-generation banking: RBI Gov

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking and improving access to financial services at affordable cost, said Reserve Bank Governor Shaktikanta Das on Monday. In the foreword of the Report on Currency and Finance (RCF) for 2023-24, the Governor also said the flagship Unified Payments Interface (UPI) has revolutionised the retail payment experience for end-users, making transactions faster and more convenient. In the digital currency arena, the Reserve Bank is at the forefront with pilot runs of the e-rupee, the central bank digital currency (CBDC). The digital lending ecosystem is becoming vibrant with initiatives such as Open Credit Enablement Network, Open Network for Digital Commerce and the Public Tech Platform for Frictionless Credit. He said fintechs are collaborating with banks and non-banking financial



companies (NBFCs) as lending service providers. They are also operating platforms to facilitate digital credit. BigTechs are backing payment apps and lending products as third-party service providers. "Digitalisation in finance is paving the way for next-generation banking; improving access to financial services at affordable costs; and enhancing the impact of direct benefit transfers by effective targeting of beneficiaries in a cost-efficient manner," Das said. He noted that loans in the

retail segment are being enabled by online payments and innovative credit assessment models with instant disbursements. Also, e-commerce is being boosted through embedded finance. "All these innovations are making financial markets more efficient and integrated," the Governor said. At the same time, Das said digitalisation also presents challenges related to cybersecurity, data privacy, data bias, vendor and third-party risks, and customer protection.

"Increased interconnectedness may lead to systemic risks. Additionally, emerging technologies can introduce complex products and business models with risks that users may not fully understand, including the proliferation of fraudulent apps and mis-selling through dark patterns," he said. Das further said digitalisation may induce human resource challenges in the financial sector, necessitating strategic investments in upskilling and reskilling. Taking stock of India's digital journey so far, the report explores emerging opportunities and challenges, supported by surveys of key stakeholders and data analytics. It finds empirical support for a positive role of the regulatory framework in increasing the confidence of consumers in digital financial products, boosting operating and technical efficiencies of financial institutions and engendering more liquid and integrated financial markets.

India's power generation capacity rises to 4.46 GW in 10 years: MoS Power

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's total installed power generation capacity has grown around 80 per cent over the last 10 years to 4,46,190 MW (4.46 GW) in June 2024, Parliament was informed on Monday. The installed capacity, which was 2,48,554 MW in March 2014, reached 4,46,190 MW in June, the Union Minister of State for Power Shripad Naik said. In a reply to the Rajya Sabha, he said the installed capacity of coal-based power has increased from 1,39,663 MW in March 2014 to 2,10,969 MW in June 2024. While the installed capacity of renewable sector has increased from 75,519 MW in March 2014 to 1,95,013 MW in June 2024, the minister added. The Government of India proposes to set up an additional minimum 80 GW coal-based capacity by 2031-32, Naik said. He further said 1,95,181 circuit kilometre (ckm) of transmission lines, 7,30,794



MVA of transformation capacity and 82,790 MW of inter-regional capacity have been added, connecting the whole country into one grid running on one frequency with the capability of transferring 1,18,740 MW from one corner of the country to another. "India's grid has emerged as one of the largest unified grids in the world. Connecting the whole country into one grid has transformed the country into one unified power market," he added. Now, the distribution companies (discoms) can buy power at cheapest available

Rupee settles flat at 83.73 against US dollar in restricted trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee moved in a narrow range before settling flat at 83.73 (provisional) against US dollar on Monday as a firm American currency in overseas markets offset the gains from weak crude oil prices. Forex traders said a recovery in the US dollar and dollar demand from importers restricted gains for the domestic unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.70 and touched a low of 83.74 against the dollar during the trading session. It finally settled at 83.73 (provisional) against the American currency, unchanged from its previous close. On Friday, the rupee recovered from its all-time low level and appreciated 5 paise to 83.73 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on



month-end dollar demand from importers and oil marketing companies. A recovery in the US Dollar ahead of the Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting this week may also weigh on the rupee," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Choudhary further noted that "a positive tone in the domestic markets and fresh foreign fund inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. Investors may remain cautious ahead of the FOMC, Bank of England (BoE) and Bank of Japan (BoJ) meeting this week.

Sensex, Nifty settle flat after hitting fresh all-time high levels

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit intra-day record high levels before closing almost flat on Monday due to profit-taking in FMCG and IT shares by cautious investors ahead of the key US Fed interest rate decision later this week. The 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 23.12 points or 0.03 per cent at 81,355.84 - its all time closing high -- with 16 of its components advancing and 14 ending lower. The index opened higher and jumped 575.71 points or 0.70 per cent to hit a new intra-day record peak of 81,908.43 in late morning deals following a decline in US bond yields. However, investors preferred to book profits at record high levels amid high volatility dragging the index down. The NSE Nifty ended marginally up 1.25 points or 0.01 per cent at an all-time closing high of 24,836.10. During the day, it surged 164.9 points or 0.66 per cent



to hit a fresh lifetime peak of 24,999.75. From the Sensex pack, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finserv, Mahindra & Mahindra, UltraTech Cement, State Bank of India, IndusInd Bank, Reliance Industries and Sun Pharma were among the biggest gainers. Bharti Airtel, Titan, ITC, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Tech Mahindra and HDFC Bank were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory.

European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets rallied on Friday. "An ease in the US personal consumption expenditure to 2.5% and the subsequent drop in the US 10-year yield have fuelled optimism that the Fed might cut rates in September, leading to a global rally. However, profit-taking was triggered in the domestic market given trading in the overbought territory and closed flat," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 2,546.38 crore on Friday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.31 per cent to USD 80.88 a barrel. The BSE benchmark jumped 1,292.92 points or 1.62 per cent to settle at 81,332.72 on Friday. The NSE Nifty surged 428.75 points or 1.76 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,834.85.

IN BRIEF

NTPC DECLARES Q1 FY25 UNAUDITED RESULTS
New Delhi: The country's largest integrated power utility - NTPC Ltd., with a group installed capacity of more than 76GW, declared unaudited financial results for Q1 FY25 on July 27, 2024. NTPC Group generated ₹114 Billion Units in Q1 FY25 as compared to ₹104 billion units in Q1 FY24. NTPC's standalone gross generation in Q1 FY25 is ₹98 billion units as compared to ₹88 billion units in the corresponding previous period.



INTEGRATION OF AI INTO DENTAL EDUCATION
New Delhi: A high-level stakeholders meeting was held at GGSIPU to integrate Artificial Intelligence (AI) into dental education. As per the WHO Global Oral Health Status report, oral diseases affect 3.5 billion individuals globally. To tackle this case load, the academic experts feel AI can play a vital role. The technology enhances diagnostic accuracy, treatment planning, and patient care in dentistry.



JUNCKERS' OAK NATURE LAUNCHED
New Delhi: Freddy Svane, the Ambassador at the Royal Danish Embassy in New Delhi launched "Oak Nature" by Junckers, Europe's leading manufacturer of premium solid wood flooring for sports, residential, and commercial uses. The launching was celebrated the Junckers' 25 successful years in India, marking significant growth in the industry. The launch event, titled "Discover Junckers: A Night of Art and Design," was held at the Kiran Nadar Museum of Art (KNMA) in Saket highlighting Danish craftsmanship in an Indian setting.

LOHIA LAUNCHES ELECTRIC 3-WHEELER MODELS
New Delhi: Lohia, one of India's largest electric automobile manufacturers, has announced the launch of new electric three-wheeler (E3W) models, signalling a renewed focus on this segment. This strategic move aims to revolutionise the EV market with innovative, sustainable solutions, offering a wide range of electric rickshaws and three-wheelers to meet diverse customer needs.

REC DECLARES 1ST INTERIM DIVIDEND OF 3.50 PER SHARE
New Delhi: The Board of Directors of REC Limited, today approved the limited reviewed standalone and consolidated financial results for the quarter ended 30th June 2024.



INTER-SCHOOL AQUATIC MEET HELD
New Delhi: LPS Global School hosted the Inter-school Aquatic Meet, Nautica, on July 26, 2024, welcoming 233 participants from 22 prestigious schools across the region. The event, held at LPS Global School, showcased spirited competition and camaraderie among young athletes passionate about aquatic sports.



Report flags employer-employee expectations mismatch

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Around 34 per cent of organisations in the country struggle to find the right talent and one in three grapples with retaining existing employees as the gap between employer expectations and employee realities regarding hiring and retention continues to grow, according to a report. Even as employers and job seekers agree that flexibility, higher salaries and career progression are top priorities, employees value company culture and ethics more than the organisations realise while organisations overvalue the importance of brand and incentives, said Michael Page 'Talent Trends 2024 - India Expectation Gap' report. Coming out of the pandemic, a convergence of factors resulted in a subtle but



transformative change in workplace dynamics, with people thinking more holistically about the value their job gives to their lives, said Nicolas Dumoulin, Michael Page Senior Managing Director for India, Thailand, Philippines, and Vietnam. Michael Page 'Talent Trends 2024 - India Expectation Gap' report is based on interviews among 3,087 respondents across India.

The report further revealed that, on one hand, companies struggle to meet salary expectations, while on the other hand, they face a scarcity of applicants with the required skills who also align with the organisation's culture. Meanwhile, the report found that most employees are open to new careers and job roles in 2024 compared to last year and 94 per cent of respondents were open to exploring different roles this year, according to the report. Though openness to new roles has varied slightly across demographics, this shift has endured since 2022, during the great resignation, and it added. The report also revealed that 41 per cent of respondents in India would refuse a promotion to maintain well-being.

When it came to workplace discrimination, the report found that in India 47 per cent of employees report workplace discrimination, which is higher than the Asia Pacific average of 31 per cent. However, 45 per cent of the Indian employees who experienced discrimination still face barriers in formally reporting such incidents, it added. "Discrimination remains a pervasive issue in India's workplaces, as highlighted in our 'Talent Trends 2024 - India Expectation Gap' report. This has created an urgent need for comprehensive diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) initiatives to address systematic bias and foster a more inclusive environment..." Michael Page India Managing Director Anshul Lodha told.

Indian economy likely to record over 7% growth: NCAER

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian economy could grow higher than 7 per cent and possibly closer to 7.5 per cent in the current fiscal on the back of normal monsoon and receded electoral uncertainty, economic think tank NCAER has said. In its July 2024 issue of Monthly Economic Review (MER), NCAER said real GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in FY2023-24, driven by stable consumption demand and steadily improving investment demand. "Based on the momentum in the high-frequency indicators, normalised monsoon, a relatively benign global outlook and receded electoral uncertainty, both in India and in the rest of the world, growth will likely turn out to be higher than 7 per cent, and possibly closer to 7.5 per cent," NCAER director general Poonam

Gupta said. Gupta said the Union Budget 2024-25 lived up to the expectations of unwavering commitment to fiscal consolidation, prudence, and quality. The Budget has kept the fiscal deficit target at 4.9 per cent of GDP and capital expenditure at 2.4 per cent of GDP during 2024-25. According to the National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), the short to medium-term growth strategy is based on six key areas - private sector capital formation, green transition financing, MSME development, agricultural transformation, Education and skill development, and enhanced state capacity. The NCAER-NSE business confidence index (BCI) increased to 149.8 in the first quarter (Q1) of FY25, up from 138.2 in the fourth quarter (Q4) of

FY24, indicating an improvement in business sentiments. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) revised its growth projection for India upward to 7 per cent, while the Asian Development Bank (ADB) maintained its projection at 7 per cent as of July 2024 for FY2024-25. The range of projections for India for the current fiscal year is between 6.6 to 7.2 per cent. As per the Economic Survey 2023-24, India's real GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in FY2023-24 due to stable consumption and improving investment demand, and it is projected to grow between 6.5-7 per cent in FY2024-25. The Union Budget for FY2024-25 emphasised fiscal prudence and capex. Nominal GDP is projected to grow at 10.5 per cent in FY2024-25; while the fiscal deficit is budgeted at 4.9 per cent of GDP.

Vedanta Nico signs pact for supplying nickel to US-based AESir Technologies



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

"Vedanta Nico, India's primary nickel producer, has signed a strategic Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with AESir Technologies, Inc, a US-based innovator in advanced battery technologies," Vedanta Nico said in a statement. Vedanta Nico has now joined forces to develop and commercialise cutting-edge nickel-zinc batteries for critical infrastructure, 5G telecom, and electric vehicle chargers, it said. "We are thrilled to partner with AESir Technologies to create a game-changing battery solution for the critical infrastructure, 5G telecom, and EV market. Our expertise in nickel production, coupled with AESir's innovative zinc battery technology, positions us to deliver a product that meets the evolving needs of the industry. This collaboration aligns with our vision of contributing to a sustainable future through responsible mining and value-added products," Vedanta Nico COO Prashuk Jain said. Vedanta Nico, a subsidiary of Vedanta Ltd, on Monday said it has entered into a pact with US-based AESir Technologies for the supply of nickel, a critical component for next-generation batteries. Nickel plays an important role in EV battery technology, particularly in the cathode, where it enhances energy density, power output, and battery lifespan. Nickel-rich batteries, such as nickel-zinc variants, offer fast charging, reduce reliance on cobalt, and improve the overall electric vehicle (EV) value proposition. The global demand for nickel in batteries is projected to reach 500,000 tonnes by 2025 from 150,000 tonnes in 2020 due to the expanding EV market adoption. The International Energy Agency (IEA) forecasts that the number of electric cars will rise from over 10 million in 2020 to 145 million by 2030, spurred by larger battery capacities, faster charging, and advancements in reducing cobalt use.



Refugee athletes want more of them to compete at Olympics as migration takes global focus

AP ■ PARIS

The first time Perina Lokure Nakang began to run for sport, she ran 9 miles (14 kilometers) along the road near her refugee camp in northwestern Kenya. Now, the 21-year-old South Sudanese runner is competing in the Paris Olympics, among many of the 37 athletes on the Olympic refugee team who are pushing to see more refugees like her able to compete in the Games.

"I told myself if I continue running this, it is going to change my life," she said. "In the Olympics, everyone is looking to me to represent them."

They are getting support from former refugee Olympians and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi, who told The Associated Press in an interview Sunday that the team is "a symbol of inclusion, of equality, of achievement for a large community around the world of refugees and displaced people."

The Olympic refugee team was born at the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro, a collaboration between the International Olympic Committee and UNHCR, with just 10 athletes from four different countries. Now, it has expanded to dozens of athletes that have fled 11 countries - ranging from Cuba to Afghanistan and South Sudan like Nakang, who escaped war when she was 7. The refugee team has spurred hope by many to recover their dreams that were lost when they left their lives behind to start from scratch in a new country. These athletes have taken center stage in the Paris Olympics, a competition that has underscored themes like diversity and inclusion at a time of historic global migration.

In Friday's opening ceremonies, Grandi was honored with the Olympic laurel for his support of the Olympic refugee team and "his dedication to support refugees recognizing the power of sport."

"It is a moment in which people that have



often lost everything can gain back dignity, identity and give back to the communities hosting them," Grandi told the AP. "And they're not the objects of charity in a way, but are actors and the active participants in their communities."

The Olympics are set during a tense time in France: The country's far-right party has made political gains in recent elections while focusing on anti-immigration policies.

French and local authorities in Paris also have come under fire for breaking up homeless camps largely made up of migrants from African countries once colonized by the French, including Burkina Faso, Guinea, Ivory Coast and Senegal.

Migrants have been loaded up on buses and taken out of the city in an effort by authorities to clean up the streets during the Olympics.

"We understand the city needs to manage itself," Grandi said. But especially with asylum-seekers, finding "solutions that are humane is very important. And this is a

message that goes far beyond the Olympics. This is a message that goes far beyond the French government."

Still, many current and former refugee athletes like Yiech Pur Biel see the platform offered by the Olympics as crucial in a larger push to humanize refugees and people fleeing their homes as nations around the world clamp down on access to asylum.

Another South Sudanese runner, the 29-year-old Biel was among the first 10 athletes to compete on the Olympic refugee team in 2016. Now living in Nebraska and working with UNHCR, Biel said he hopes the team can "bring back the dream of refugees" and "showing what refugees can do."

With growing representation of refugees in the Olympics, he said he hopes to reduce the need for there to be a refugee team at the Games.

"The team will grow. We don't want to see (refugee populations) growing, but no one can control what is happening in the world," Biel said.

Manu-Sarabjot duo enters bronze medal round; Ramita finishes seventh

PTI ■ CHATEAURoux

Confident Manu Bhaker placed herself in contention for a second Olympic medal as she combined with Sarabjot Singh to make the bronze playoff in the 10m air pistol mixed team event but Ramita Jindal ended seventh in the 10m air rifle women's competition here on Monday.

The 22-year-old Bhaker came into the mixed team qualifications after winning a historic bronze medal in the 10m women's air pistol event on Sunday. Bhaker and

Sarabjot finished with a total of 580 to make the medal round to be held on Tuesday.

The Indians will face Koreans Oh Ye Jin and Lee Wonho, who shot 579, in the bronze-medal match. The other Indian pair of Rhythm Sangwan and Arjun Singh Cheema finished 10th with a score of 576 and failed to make it to the medal rounds. Turkiye, who equalled Qualification Olympic Record with 582, and Serbia (581), who finished second, respectively, will contest the gold-medal match.

Bhaker was sensational with her 98s in the first two series,

but a 95 in the third set pulled the team down a bit. However, the pair did enough to make the medal round in the end. Sarabjot, who missed out on gaining a spot in the finals of the men's 10m air pistol event by a whisker, shot 97 in the second and third, after a 95 in the first.

RAMITA FACES TOUGH COMPETITION: Young Indian shooter Ramita's score was 145.3 when she bowed of the high-quality eight-women final. She was placed seventh after 10 shots (104.0), when the elimination began. In danger of being eliminated,

a 10.5 pushed Ramita to sixth place even as Norway's Hegg Jeanette Duestad made an exit. But the Indian could not save herself after that. She was placed fourth at one point but failed to maintain the momentum.

In the qualifications on Sunday, she performed exceedingly well to make the final in the fifth place. Ramita, the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze-medallist in the event, beat World Championship medallist Mehuli Ghosh and Tilottama Sen at the domestic trials to make it to Paris Games.

Afghan judoka traverses five countries before realising Paris dream

PTI ■ CHATEAURoux (FRANCE)

For most athletes, a journey to Olympics under normal circumstances involves gruelling training, discipline and some perseverance but when the aspirant hails from war-torn Afghanistan, it ends up being a 6000km voyage to safety and sporting opportunities.

Afghan judoka Sibghatullah Arab fled Taliban in 2021, took refuge in five different countries before settling in Germany, covering 6000km. Arab will be representing the IOC (International Olympic Committee) refugee team in the men's 81kg category at the Paris Olympics.

He as learned many things from judo, a sport he came to love after watching the world championships on television at home in the rural north of his native Afghanistan. But nothing could prepare him for what happened in 2021 when, with the Taliban regaining huge swathes of territory in and around his home province of Kunduz, he fled to Europe.

Arab was merely 19 and had just broken into the Afghan judo team at that time.

"When I left Afghanistan, there were many problems, I did not know if I would be alive and if I would arrive," he said.

After nine months of travelling through countries including Iran, Turkiye, Greece, Bosnia and Slovenia, he settled in Germany. The journey full of risks had an adverse impact on



his health. "I had many problems on the way, there was stress, my health was not good," he said, not wanting to go into the details.

After his lengthy journey, he first arrived in Kamen, a small town to the east of Dortmund, and was placed in a refugee centre. This proved to be a turning point in his judo career. "There was a guy who told me I can go to a judo club in Monchengladbach - that's how I found my coach, who is from Iran and could speak Persian with me. He helped me so much."

Despite his new surroundings, Arab regained his strength and settled into a new routine under the guidance of Wahid Sarlak, who is the IOC refugee team coach in Paris. He is himself exiled from the country of his birth -- Iran.

"The first time I came into the gym in the judo club, I had more stress and did not see a way for my future," the now 23-year-old said.

"I did not know what would happen, if I can continue this way or not. But after a time, I

found my way and I thought I can follow it. I am going to the gym every day now," he added. The hard work began to pay off with a seventh-place finish at the European Open in Madrid in 2023 offering some encouragement. Aside from becoming an Olympian, Arab says his parents, who are still in Afghanistan, remain one of his biggest sources of motivation. "My family calls me every day, especially my mother and my brother, who encourage me to have a good programme for eating, sleeping and training. This is very important because I will be a member of the refugee team in Paris. They give me advice every day," he said.

On his selection in the refugee squad, he added: "When I heard I will be part of the team, I was nervous but then I thought, 'Now I am responsible to do more.'"

"This is an important duty for me and I am trying to do everything for myself and my team. I am ready for the tournament. All I am thinking about are my goals and my time in Paris," Arab added.

Nemour impresses with her bars routine at Olympics

AP ■ PARIS

When Kaylia Nemour competes alongside Simone Biles and her gymnastics rivals at the Paris Olympics, she feels right at home. The 17-year-old athlete, one of the best in the world on uneven bars, was born in France. She grew up here, and still trains here.

She posted the best score on her favorite apparatus during Sunday's women's team qualifications and will be aiming for the gold medal in that discipline. Too bad for the Olympics host country, she competes for Algeria.

The situation is due to a dispute between the French gymnastics federation and Nemour's club

of Avoine Beaumont, which has led the gymnast to embrace her father's Algerian nationality.

The long-lasting crisis was settled after the French minister for Sport intervened following an initial refusal from the federation to release the gymnast that could have jeopardized her presence in Paris.

Nemour's massive score of 15.600 on Sunday was unmatched by any of her rivals. It was the second highest score of the day on any apparatus, bettered only by Biles' first vault score of 15.800. Nemour was consistent on all four events and also qualified in fifth place for the all-around final, where no French athlete will be



represented. "I'm in the mix with the best, and I can improve things, I have some time left to work," she said.

The conflict between Nemour - who holds dual citizenship -

and the French federation started after Nemour suffered from a bone and cartilage condition and had to undergo surgery on both knees in 2021. The federation thought her problems were the result of

overtaining during a time her body was growing up and decided to postpone the moment she would return to competition, despite her surgeon giving a go-ahead.

The long dispute ended last year as she was finally authorized to put on an Algerian leotard. Since she switched, Nemour has been on a high-speed ride to success.

At last year's world championships, she won a silver medal on uneven bars, the first World medal by a gymnast representing an African nation. She is also an African all-around champion and has an element named after her in the Code of Points.

AP ■ MARSEILLE (FRANCE)

Embattled Canada women's soccer coach Bev Priestman apologized to her players and pledged to cooperate with an investigation into the drone-spying scandal at the Paris Olympics.

The team was deducted six points and Priestman was banned for a year after two of her assistants were caught using drones to spy on New Zealand's practices before their opening game Wednesday.

"I am absolutely heartbroken for the players, and I would like to apologize from the bottom of my heart for the impact this situation has had on all of them," Priestman said in a statement. "As the leader of the team on the field, I want to take accountability, and I plan to fully cooperate with the investigation."

Canada kept alive its hopes of advancing despite the sanction by beating France 2-1 Sunday after Vanessa Gilles's winner in

Banned coach Bev heartbroken, apologises in Canada drone-spying scandal at Olympics

the 12th minute of added time in Saint-Etienne. But the win still left the defending Olympic champion pointless and in need of victory against Colombia in its final Group A game.

Canada's players celebrated wildly after the winning goal - likely in response to the pressure the team has felt after a turbulent first week at the Games.

Priestman led Canada to the Olympic title in Tokyo in 2021, but her reputation has been marred by the scandal, which has raised questions about the practices of the country's men's and women's soccer teams and how widespread the issue could be.

She also apologized to Canada as a nation, but appeared to try to defend her legacy.

"This program and team have allowed this country to reach the pinnacle of women's soccer, and their winning of the gold medal was earned through sheer grit and determination, despite reports to the contrary," she said. "I fought with every ounce of my being to make this program better, much of which will never be known or understood. I wish I could say more, but I will refrain at this time, given the appeals process and the ongoing investigation."

It has emerged that a complaint against the women's team for filming an opponent's training session was made at the 2022 CONCACAF W Championship, which served as a qualification tournament for last summer's Women's World Cup.



The revelation is part of the fallout of the drone scandal. FIFA banned Priestman - who had already been sent home

from France - and two of her coaches and imposed a hefty \$226,000 fine on Canada Soccer.

There was little sympathy from Germany coach Horst Hrubesch, who said Canada's behavior was "stupidity."

Canada was looking into an appeal, but said they suspected a "systemic ethical shortcoming"

Also Sunday, Canada sports minister Carla Qualtrough said the government will withhold funding "relating to suspended Canada Soccer officials for the duration of their FIFA sanction." Drone surveillance of a closed practice, she said, "is cheating." She called the episode a "significant distraction and embarrassment" for all Canadians.

Canada Soccer CEO and general secretary Kevin Blue said this week he learned of a possible drone incident

involving the men's national team at the recent Copa America.

He said it was his understanding that it did not have an impact on the competitive integrity of the tournament but would not offer details.

Asked whether men's coach Jesse Marsch was aware of possible drone usage at that tournament that ended this month in the United States, Blue said Marsch was aware after the fact and has "denounced it as a practice to his staff." Canada lost in the Copa semifinals to Argentina 2-0.

A CONCACAF official confirmed a complaint at the 2022 W Championship but offered few details. The United States defeated Canada in the

tournament final in Mexico, with both countries earning a berth in the Women's World Cup and Olympics.

The Sports Network in Canada reported other incidents of surveillance, including at the Tokyo Games, citing unnamed sources with knowledge of the filming. FIFA declined comment when asked by the AP if the matter would lead to a wider investigation into drone spying in soccer.

The case is an embarrassment for the Canadian federation, which is teaming with the United States and Mexico to host the 2026 men's World Cup across North America. Meanwhile, Canada's sanctions are likely heading for the Court of Arbitration for Sport's special Olympic court in Paris.

Canada Soccer and the Canadian Olympic Committee said late Saturday that they planned to appeal the points deduction, which makes it difficult, but not impossible for Canada's women to advance to the knockout round.



Players will fight tooth and nail to be there: Dravid on cricket's Olympic debut at LA 2028

PTI ■ PARIS

An ardent supporter of cricket's inclusion in the Olympics, former India head coach and batting legend Rahul Dravid says the "serious dressing room conversations" that he has heard indicate that players are going to "fight tooth and nail" to be there at the world's biggest sporting event. Dravid was in the French capital on Sunday to attend a panel discussion on 'Cricket at the Olympics: Dawn of a New Era', celebrating the sport's inclusion in the 2028 Los Angeles Games, at the recently inaugurated India House. "I've already heard a few conversations in the dressing room. People are talking about the 2026 T20 World Cup, there is an ODI World Cup in 2027, and you hear people saying there is the Olympics in 2028," Dravid, who also caught up on some tennis action at the Games before coming for the event, said during the discussion. "People are going to want to win that gold medal, stand on the podium, and be a part of the Games Village, a great sporting event, and interact with so many athletes. "As you get closer, I have no doubt that teams will be preparing and checking out facilities. They will take this seriously, and players will fight



tooth and nail to be out there," he added. The Test great had ICC CEO Geoff Allardice for company during the discussion at India House here. "You grow up watching the Olympics, seeing Carl Lewis winning the gold medal, watching the great athletes perform. You always want to be part of great events like this. The environment, the energy -- it's a dream come true." Dravid hoped that India would win both the men's and women's gold medals at the LA Games. "The dream for me to have a fantastic cricket tournament, hopefully Indian men and women winning the gold which would be nice.

"Unfortunately, I won't be able to play, but I will make every effort to be in LA in some capacity or another. If not anything else, I will try to get a media job," joked Dravid, who ended his tenure as India head coach after the recent T20 World Cup triumph in the West Indies. The men's and women's cricket competitions will run concurrently at the LA Olympics. As far as Allardice is concerned, he said cricket will be one of the "star attractions" in LA four years from now. "It's quite surreal to be here in Paris, seeing the energy around sport and how it's getting together. Cricket is starting to dawn on the global sporting

community. "I think cricket will be one of the star attractions in Los Angeles...When you see global stars of big sports around the world competing in one city at a time -- watching Rafael Nadal at tennis this afternoon -- and then if you are in LA, you can watch the best tennis players, best golfers, and the best cricketers. "We are going to be very, very strong come 2028," he said. **WOMEN'S CRICKET IS GOING FORWARD:** Dravid also shared his thoughts on the growth of women's cricket, saying it is progressing well and increasing participation by young players is making the sport more inclusive and attractive. "Women's cricket is already going forward. I don't think it needs anything else. It's fantastic to have it going on concurrently. Even when you talk to people at the grassroots level, to coaches, one of the things they constantly tell you is the level of participation from young girls. "Every year in every academy, the percentage is growing exponentially, sometimes even more than the boys. Cricket is becoming a lot more inclusive and attractive. This could potentially be a career. You would not have said that five or six years ago. That's what we want to see."

Rohit, Kohli among India players to train ahead of ODIs against Sri Lanka

PTI ■ COLOMBO

India skipper Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and a few other players will start their training from Monday ahead of the three-match ODI series against Sri Lanka starting August 2. While the Indian T20I team under Suryakumar Yadav will

play the third and final match on Tuesday in Pallekele, Rohit, Kohli and a few others like rookie Harshit Rana will train in Colombo after reaching the island nation's capital on Sunday. Rohit, Kohli and Kuldeep Yadav will hit the ground running nearly a month after they helped India win the T20 World Cup in the

Americas for the second time. The ODIs against Sri Lanka will also mark the return of Shreyas Iyer into the national side. It was in late 2023 that Iyer last played a limited-overs match for India, against South Africa in December. The squad also features Delhi all-rounder Rana, who was a member of the IPL-winning

Kolkata Knight Riders' team earlier this year. These players will train under India assistant coach Abhishek Nayar in Colombo. Each of the three ODIs will be played at the R Premadasa Stadium here. While the first match is on August 2, the second and third ODIs are on August 4 and 7 respectively.

Clinical India eye series whitewash against wobbly Lanka in third T20I

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

There will be no let-up in intensity as a ruthless India, under the leadership of new coach Gautam Gambhir and captain Suryakumar Yadav, seek to exploit Sri Lanka's weaknesses and push for a series whitewash in the inconsequential third and final T20I here on Tuesday.

The fate of the series was decided after India swept aside Sri Lanka in the first two games, leaving the possibility of an embarrassing whitewash hanging over the hosts' heads. India secured a seven-wicket victory on Sunday in a rain-shortened match in the second T20I, thwarting Sri Lanka's charge once again.

Despite the hosts' flying start, their fight fizzled out for the second consecutive game due to subpar batting. On the same day, the Sri Lankan women's team beat tournament-favourites India in the final for their maiden Women's T20 Asia Cup title in Dambulla but it seemed to have no impact on the men's side which continued to grapple with existing issues.

Sri Lanka's embarrassing batting collapses in the middle overs is the prime reason of their undoing in this series so far, while India have gone about their business like a true world champion side.

India has proven to be the superior side by a significant margin, demonstrating greater confidence in their plans, skills, and execution, and never faltering under pressure. There have been moments when Sri



Lanka have appeared to be running away with the contest but each time India has found their way back, particularly with their incisive bowling, to keep their upper hand. The 'bowlers' captain' Suryakumar has not only marshalled his troops with precision to make effective bowling changes, but he has looked to lead from front with the bat having scored 58 and 26 in the two outings so far. India have remained aggressive right from the word go to reap rich benefits, putting a 200 plus score in the opener. In the second game, a slight change in the batting line-up delivered a seven-wicket win which helped them seal the series. It remains to be seen if vice-captain and opener Shubman Gill is fit in time for

this contest after he missed the second game due to a stiff neck. His replacement, Sanju Samson had to wait for over an hour to face his first ball due to a rain break and when his chance arrived, the right-hander missed one from Maheesh Theekshana for a golden duck. Samson and India will be seeking improved performances from the batter, who has been a fixture around the T20I squad for some time, including serving as a non-playing member of the World Cup-winning team. But at the other end, Yashasvi Jaiswal has looked to go all-out with his attacking game to rake up 70 runs in two outings and he remains one of the biggest threats for the Lankans.

For the hosts, Pathum Nissanka (111 runs) and Kusal Perera (73) have provided the fireworks at the top but Sri Lanka's middle-overs struggles have led to their downfall. India spinner Ravi Bishnoi, who helped script a win in the second game with 3/26, highlighted Sri Lankan batters' inability to navigate spin bowling in the series.

"They play spin really well but I do not know what (has) happened, they are collapsing in the middle overs," Bishnoi said after the second T20I. "They are known as a good spin-batting team but I think something has gone wrong," said Bishnoi, possibly hinting at the lack of skills and aptitude among Sri Lankan players generally which has led to their struggles across formats. With the ball, Matheesha Pathirana returned an expensive 4/40 in the opening game but Sri Lanka will want a lot more from their bowlers.

TEAMS (FROM):

India: Suryakumar Yadav (c), Shubman Gill, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh, Riyan Parag, Rishabh Pant (wk), Sanju Samson (wk), Hardik Pandya, Shivam Dube, Axar Patel, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Arshdeep Singh, Khaleel Ahmed, Mohammed Siraj. **Sri Lanka:** Dinesh Chandimal, Avishka Fernando, Kusal Mendis (wk), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Perera, Charith Asalanka (c), Wanindu Hasaranga, Kamindu Mendis, Dasun Shanaka, Chamindu Wickramasinghe, Binura Fernando, Asitha Fernando, Dilshan Madushanka, Matheesha Pathirana, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunith Welalage.

Covering 22,000 kms in 2 years, Kerala cyclist reaches Paris to cheer for Neeraj

PTI ■ PARIS

India's star athlete Neeraj Chopra will have a special supporter at the Paris Olympics: a Kerala cyclist who has travelled all the way from Calicut, riding more than 22,000 kilometers over two years.

Fayis Asraf Ali's arrival in the French capital was the culmination of a long journey on his Surly bicycle that took him across 30 countries, beginning on August 15, 2022.

Ali set off with a mission to cycle from "India to London to spread peace and unity". Having cycled across 17 countries, he stopped in Budapest one August afternoon last year, when he came to know that the Tokyo Olympics gold medalist was staying across the street. The ace javelin thrower was with the athletics contingent for the World Championships in which claimed another historic win. A few hurried calls to a "known Kerala coach" led to a "dream meeting" with his sporting idol.

"I got a few minutes to talk to the Indian athletes and Neeraj told me since you are going to London why don't you come to Paris for the Olympics," Ali told PTI

during an interaction after ending his journey at India House here on Sunday.

"I thought it would be a wonderful opportunity to see him again in Paris so I altered my plan a bit and procured the required visa and cycled to the UK before ending my journey here.

"I am so excited to meet him again. I've requested PT Usha ma'am (IOA chief). I'm here to see him create history again. We will cheer for him (on August 8)," he added. He carries four pairs of clothes, a tent, a sleeping bag and a mat that takes the total weight of the cycle to 50kgs.

"I never stay in a hotel and get some sponsors on the way and that's it. In between twice, I flew to Kerala to arrange visas. "Visa is all you need to cross the border, a cyclist does not need any other documentation," he added. Is he not tired or facing any health issues?

"No, never. The love of the people and the warm reception I get everywhere keeps me going. I'm here and so excited," added Ali, who was greeted by star cricketers Chris Gayle, Harbhajan Singh and Suresh Raina while he was in the UK.

An engineer by profession, Ali was into his fourth year in Saudi Arabia when his father

was diagnosed with a heart ailment in 2015. His father died in 2018.

Being the only son, he had to return to India to look after his father. He had quit his job and was back home in Calicut. His wife is a medical professional and he has two sons.

He also has a thyroid issue that makes him put on weight.

"Those three years made me realise that health is the most important thing in life, not money. One fine morning I saw a couple of cyclists touring and thought of starting riding," he recalled. He first bought a Rs 1.3K bicycle to get used to riding and then chalked out plans for his maiden solo ride: Calicut to Singapore. Then he upgraded it to a Rs 1 lakh cycle, especially designed for long trips. For the trip to Paris, he had to buy a more advanced bicycle, costing Rs 2.5 lakh. He set out on his first trip on August 7, 2019 and reached Singapore on November 21, clocking 8000kms across seven countries.

"Rotary arranged my trip and I got a few sponsors. But my biggest supporter was my wife who took care of both my kids and the family. So I just had to embark on my journey," he said.

India's tennis campaign at Olympics ends in single day

PTI ■ PARIS

India's tennis campaign at the Paris Olympics lasted just one day as Sumit Nagal and the men's doubles pair of Rohan Bopanna and N Sriram Balaji bowed out after losing their respective opening matches to French challengers, here Sunday.

Nagal was first to take court, but his strong baseline game didn't seem to be enough against mercurial Corentin Moutet, who earned a stylish three-set win.

In his second appearance at the Olympic Games, Nagal bounced back after losing the first set but fell 2-6 6-4 5-7 in two hours and 28 minutes at the Roland Garros. In the Tokyo Games, Nagal had lost in the second round to Russian Daniil Medvedev but could not make the most of a manageable opener today. He was up 2-0 in the decider with an early break but allowed Moutet to claw his way back and win.

Later in the day, Bopanna and Balaji went down fighting 5-7 2-6 against Edouard Roger-Vasselin and Gael Monfils, who replaced injured Fabien Reboul in the home team at the last minute. India have won only one Olympic medal in tennis,

when Leander Paes bagged a bronze in the 1996 Atlanta Games. Monfils' big-hitting helped the home team that was egged on by the partisan crowd.

It was probably the last time Bopanna represented India in a multi-sport event. The 44-year-old has already announced his retirement from Davis Cup. The doubles match featured several fiery baseline exchanges between Bopanna and both the French players.

The French ploy of engaging Bopanna in long rallies from the back took Balaji out of the picture on many points, and it largely denied the debutant opportunity of a quick finish at the net. The Indians dropped serve first when Bopanna went down 0-40 in game six following a long rally that ended with Indian team's unforced error. Bopanna and Balaji though got the break back in the next game on Roger-Vasselin's serve. Down by a breakpoint, Monfils could not put away a volley. The match was back on serve. Eventually, Balaji came out to serve at 5-6 to stay in the set. Feeling the nerves, he struggled to put first serves in and committed a double fault to get to 15-30. A long rally

ensued, which ended in home team's favour. At second set point, Bopanna netted a backhand volley. Balaji could not hold serve in the second set, as Bopanna too struggled to cope with the powerful strokes of the French players.

The match ended with Indian team's unforced error. It has always been a battle of attrition between Nagal and Moutet with three of their last four outings being three-set affairs and it was no different today.

Nagal had got the better of Moutet in their last meeting in Grand Prix of Hassan in the Moroccan city of Marakkech in April this year. Nagal didn't seem to have a plan B but Moutet had a few tricks in his bag to unsettle his rival. He served underarm a number of times and used the drop shots, the forehand slice and the backhand slice very effectively. The chants of Coco-Coco, Aaale-Aaale and Moutet-Moutet certainly gave the home player the energy required in such a slugfest. Nagal had a nervy start with a boisterous crowd behind Moutet. A drop volley error at 30-all put him down by a break point. Another unforced error cost him the opening game.



The French player began with an underarm serve, much to the amusement of the home fans. He, however, ended up serving a double fault. It was an easy hold for the southpaw even as Nagal also bounced

back with a hold at love. Nagal said he was expecting underarm serves from him but obviously didn't appreciate that. Moutet struggled a bit with his first serve but fed Nagal a

lot of high balls and attacked his backhand more to build on the break. Nagal had his chances to get the break back in game four but squandered four breakpoints.

He was down by another break point in game five but saved and held when Moutet just missed the line with his return. The crowd favourite again amused the gathered supporters at court seven as he crossed over the court to check the spot if the ball landed inside the line.

It was crucial for Nagal to hold serve after falling behind 2-4 but he erred on overhead volley at breakpoint. Moutet pocketed the opening set when Nagal's forehand return soared over the baseline.

The second set was not a one-way traffic with Nagal finding his rhythm. The free points were not given. The set remained in serve till game five. After playing two deuce points, Moutet again served underarm, and this time he got the point as Nagal netted the return. Nagal was furious but the crowd loved the moment.

Nagal finally had his first break of the match when Moutet's dropped shot crashed into the net. Before that on the second break point, when he netted the return, Nagal had banged his racket on the court, letting go of the frustration. However, he gathered himself with the crucial break. The

crowd stood and began singing the national anthem to egg on their favourite. Nagal though, consolidated the lead with a hold and levelled the match by breaking his rival in game eight when Moutet netted a volley return.

The French player yet again resorted to giving high balls and drop shots to Nagal to break the momentum, and almost succeeded, but Nagal too stuck to his guns, avoiding an early break.

He then broke Moutet when he double faulted while facing his fourth break point. Leading 2-0 in the decider, Nagal had a perfect opportunity to run away with the match but found himself down 0-40. He saved the first breakpoint but a drive volley error from him meant that the set was back on serve. Serving at 5-5, Nagal began by netting a forehand, and Moutet found a stunning forehand slice passing-winner on the run. Another forehand error put Nagal down by three break points. He lost fourth point in a row when he could not pick up a half volley. It was not difficult from there for Moutet to close the match. He will play either Australian world number six Alex de Minaur or Germany's Jan-Lenard Struff next.