

OPINION 6

HONOUR THE UNSUNG HEROES
OF OPERATION PAWAN

WORLD 8

7 KILLED IN CONGO'S MUSIC
CONCERT STAMPEDE

MONEY 10

REMOVAL OF ANGEL TAX FOR STARTUPS
TO HELP ATTRACT INVESTORS: GOYAL

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WHY? WHY? WHY?

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Phones kept buzzing with messages on WhatsApp groups with helpless students trying to find where their friends — studying at the Rau's Coaching centre's library on Saturday evening — were following the death of three civil services aspirants due to rain-induced flooding in the basement of the coaching centre.

While reports claimed only three lives were lost, students who were witness to the tragic incident unfolding before their eyes claimed a higher number. All the deceased had cleared their preliminary examination, the results of which was declared a few days ago and were burning midnight oil to prepare for the Mains examinations scheduled in October-November which is second stage of Civil Services Examinations to qualify to become an IAS, IPS or allied services officer.

Thousands like the ones who fell prey to lackadaisical civic amenities make national Capital their *karambhoomi* for a few years to get into elite Government services. "We have WhatsApp groups of UPSC aspirants. Those groups are full with students asking about the whereabouts of their friends. I am sure that the numbers are much higher



Police detain students protesting outside Karol Bagh metro station after three IAS aspirants died in the basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle at Old Rajinder Nagar area, in New Delhi, on Sunday

and the authorities are not giving us the full picture," said 27-year-old Ankit, adding that while protesting in the wee hours of Saturday, authorities also threw drainage water on them to disperse them. Old Rajinder Nagar, which is usually bustling with UPSC aspirants in haste to get to

their classes, witnessed protests of angry students who are worried about the whereabouts of their colleagues who are nowhere to be found. Albeit, police claiming three lives, students claimed on seeing at least four to five bodies being taken and the authorities shutting the lights

off regularly to not let the general public know the exact situation. Meanwhile, at the Ram Manohar Lohia (RML) Hospital, there was anger among the relatives of the deceased, who claimed they were not being allowed to see the bodies even though they have been waiting since

morning. Deceased Shreya Yadav's uncle Dharmendra Yadav shared his harrowing experience. "I saw the news about the incident late at night and called Shreya over phone, but she didn't answer," he said. A resident of Ghaziabad, he said when his niece did not

respond to his calls, he rushed to the institute in Old Rajinder Nagar. "When I reached the coaching centre, I was directed to RML Hospital, where I learned that a body identified as that of Shreya had been found, but I was not allowed to see her," he added.

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Library running illegally in basement

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Rau's IAS Study Circle centre in Delhi's Rajinder Nagar, where three students died in rain-induced flooding, was functioning illegally as a library. The coaching institute was issued a fire safety certificate just 18 days before the incident. Notably, the institute, had falsely shown that the basement was being used for parking and as a store room, as per the building plan and No Objection Certificate (NOC) of the fire department.

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Two arrested

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

After arresting two people, the Delhi Police has registered an FIR and formed multiple teams to probe the Rau's coaching centre flooding incident which claimed the lives of three IAS aspirants, who had already cleared their prelims exam and were preparing in the library of the coaching institute for the Mains exams of UPSC. According to the police on Sunday, they have arrested owner Abhishek Gupta and coordinator Deshpal Singh of the Rau's IAS Study Circle and booked them for culpable homicide and under other charges. "Multiple teams have been formed to investigate the entire incident. We have asked the Delhi Fire Services to provide us report about the building and the basement which was being used as a library but mentioned as 'store room'," a senior police officer said.

The officer said the basement was eight-feet below the ground level and more than 18 students were



present in it on Saturday evening when it got flooded after heavy rain. According to sources in the police department, the gate of the basement was closed, but due to high pressure of rain water, it got damaged and water gushed in. "We are checking CCTV footage from the area to ascertain the sequence of the events. After scanning the CCTV footage, we will identify the people who were standing close to the institute during the time of incident and will record their statements," said the officer.

Continued on Page 2

Govt clarifies on tax clearance certificate for going abroad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After social media outrage over a Budget proposal making it mandatory to get tax clearance certificates for going abroad, the Government on Sunday clarified that the proposed amendment is not for all, and only those accused of financial irregularities or having substantial tax arrears need such clearance.

The Finance Ministry, in the Finance Bill, 2024, has proposed to add the reference of the Black Money Act, 2015, to the list of Acts, under which any person should clear his liabilities to obtain the tax clearance certificate.

"The proposed amendment does not require all the residents to obtain the tax clearance certificate," the ministry said in a statement. As per section 230 of the Income-tax Act, 1961, every person is not required to obtain a tax clearance certificate. Only in the case of certain persons, in respect of whom circumstances exist, which make it necessary to obtain a tax clearance certificate will be required to obtain such a certificate.

Continued on Page 2

Manu first Indian shooter to win medal at Olympics

RISHABH MALIK/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/PARIS

A 22-year-old Haryana girl clinched the first medal for India. Manu Bhaker strikes the bronze medal in Women's 10m Air Pistol event in Paris Olympics in 2024. With her medal she becomes the first female shooter to win medal for India in Olympic games.

On July 27 Manu Bhaker had qualified for the final of her event with a score of 580 points, finishing third out of 45 competitors with the top-eight going through to Sunday's final. Bhaker scored 221.7 in the final round in which she fought hard against Korea's Kim Yeji who bagged silver and Jin Ye Oh bagged the gold with a games record of 243.2. Bhaker stated, "I was fighting with all the energy I have. Really grateful that I could win the bronze. I read Bhagwat Gita and always tried to do what I am supposed to do, left everything else to god." "We can't fight destiny," said Bhaker who appeared in her second Olympic stint. Previously she couldn't make it to the final and registered a bronze in this 2024 Olympic ending a drought in Olympic event.



Manu Bhaker poses for a photograph with her bronze medal after finishing third in the 10m air pistol women's final round at the 2024 Summer Olympics, France, on Sunday

This was fifth medal in shooting for India. Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore (silver in Athens Olympics, 2004), Bindra (gold, Beijing 2008), Gagan Narang (bronze, London 2012) and Vijay Kumar (silver, London) have brought prestige to the country in shooting. Bhaker is one of the favourite contenders for India to top the medals in the Olympic. Bhaker, who hails from Jhajjar district in Haryana, is an accomplished athlete with

a distinguished career, having secured 15 gold medals at various levels, including nine at the World Cups. At just 22, she made a stunning debut at the International Sport Shooting Federation (ISSF) World Cup in Guadalajara, Mexico, clinching gold in the 10m air pistol final against top competitors like Olympic gold-medalist Anna Korakaki and three-time World Cup medalist Celine Goberville and in her first appearance in

2018 Common Wealth Games she clinched gold in 10m air pistol at the age of 16. In 2018, Manu became the first Indian to win a gold medal at the Youth Olympic Games. She has competed in two Olympic Games but faced challenges during her debut in Tokyo three years ago when her pistol malfunctioned in the 10m air pistol qualification, preventing her from reaching the finals in both the mixed 10m pistol and 25m pistol events. Despite this setback, Manu is now on a redemption path, earning the distinction of being India's first female Olympic medalist.

With her historic achievement, Bhaker has not only inspired millions of young Indians but has also solidified her position as one of the country's brightest shooting stars. Her bronze medal is a testament to her dedication, hard work, and unwavering belief in her abilities. India is celebrating this momentous victory, with the entire nation joining in to congratulate the young champion. Her achievement is expected to give a significant boost to shooting in the country, encouraging more young talents to take up the sport.

Major gubernatorial reshuffle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Draupadi Murmu effected major gubernatorial appointments with changes in the Governors of some States with Lakshman Prasad Acharya appointed as the Governor of Assam with the additional charge of Manipur while Gulab Chand Kataria replaced Banwarilal Purohit as the Governor of Punjab. Acharya has replaced Kataria, who has also been appointed the administrator of the Union Territory of Chandigarh, according to a communique issued by the Rashtrapati Bhavan on Saturday night. According to a Rashtrapati Bhavan communication Murmu has accepted the resignation of Purohit as the Governor of Punjab and the administrator of Chandigarh, it said. "Lakshman Prasad Acharya, Governor of Sikkim, appointed as Governor of Assam and has been given additional charge of the Governor of Manipur," the statement said. Anusuyi Uikye has been serving as the Governor of Manipur since February last year. Veteran BJP leader Om Prakash Mathur will be the new Governor of Sikkim, the communique said. Jharkhand Governor CP Radhakrishnan, who was also holding additional charge of Telangana, has been appointed as the new Governor of Maharashtra, succeeding incumbent Ramesh Bais. Former Union Labour and Employment Minister Santosh Kumar Gangwar will be the new Jharkhand Governor in place of Radhakrishnan. Former Deputy Chief Minister of



Tripathi, Jishnu Dev Varma, will be the new Telangana Governor. Former IAS officer K Kailashnathan, one of the trusted aides of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has been appointed as Lt Governor of Puducherry with effect from the date he assumes charge of his office. Kailashnathan, chief principal secretary to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, stepped down on June 30 after holding the post for more than a decade after his retirement. Senior BJP leader from Maharashtra Haribhau Kisanrao Bagde has been appointed the Governor of Rajasthan, succeeding Kalraj Mishra. Former Lok Sabha member from Assam Ramen Deka has been appointed as the Governor of Chhattisgarh, and C H Vijayshankar, the former Lok Sabha member from Mysore in Karnataka, will be Meghalaya Governor, the communique said. These appointments will take effect from the dates they will assume charge of their respective offices, the statement added.

Row as students seek special space for namaz in Kerala college

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Nirmala College at Muvattupuzha (established in 1953) in Kerala finds itself in the middle of a new controversy as hundreds of Muslim students in the institution are on a warpath with the college management. On Friday, students under the leadership of SFI (the students' wing of the CPI-M) and Muslim League gheraoed the college principal Father Justin K Kuriakose, for almost two hours demanding special classrooms/auditoriums for offering namaz. This is a new development in the history of the 71-year-old college, which was established by the Catholic Church to make higher education accessible to students belonging to the State's high

ranges. "We were taken aback by the action of the students picketing the principal or gheraoing the teachers or management. Till now the Muslim students were making use of the mosques in the neighbourhood for offering Friday prayers. What made them demand for special classrooms or auditoriums remains a mystery," Kuriakose told *The Pioneer* on Sunday. The demand made by the students has been put up before the college management. "To set apart exclusive prayer auditoriums for students believing in different sects is not an easy task. Though ours is a Christian minority institution, we follow the directives issued by the university and Government,"



said a senior official of the management. Though the church is keen on resolving the issue amicably, the recent developments in the State have to be seen as factors that made the students resorting to extreme measures. The CPI (M)-led Kerala Government has recently appointed a senior IAS officer as the de facto foreign secretary of the State to communicate and coordinate with Governments in Europe, USA, Australia and Africa. Sources in Government Secretariat said the move has turned out to be a "treatment worse than the disease" as the External Affairs is an area that comes under the exclusive domain of the Centre. Another demand that has been overlooked by the media

in the State is the creation of separate district of Muvattupuzha and the bifurcation of the State itself as Kerala and Malabar. The change in Kerala's religious demography and the emergence of Muvattupuzha as a hotbed of religious extremism are seen as the factors contributing to the change in the attitude of the people. Christian Association and Alliance for Social action (CASA) has condemned the students picketing the principal of the college over an issue which has nothing to do with academics. "We have heard about people who disrupt normal life and traffic by forcibly occupying public places under the pretext of religious congregation and namaz.

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NTA announces CUET-UG results

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

National Testing Agency (NTA) on Sunday announced the results for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET)-UG, paving the way to begin the undergraduate admission process which has been delayed this year. The NTA had on July 7 released the provisional answer keys of the CUET-UG 2024. A retest for more than 1,000 candidates whose grievances were found genuine by the agency was conducted on July 19. The delay in the CUET-UG results came amid a row over alleged irregularities in competitive exams, including in the NEET-UG and the UGC-NET.

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LG raps AAP Govt for IAS aspirants deaths in Delhi

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A day after flooding in the basement of a UPSC coaching centre in Rajinder Nagar area, killed three students, Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Sunday attacked the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) Government, calling the incident "indicative of the larger malaise of misgovernance" in the national Capital over the last decade. Saxena also directed the divisional commissioner to submit a report covering every aspect of the flooding at Rau's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar and submit a report by Tuesday. The LG said the incident points to "criminal neglect" and lack of "basic maintenance" by concerned agencies. "What has been happening is unpardonable and such issues can no longer be glossed over, he said on X. Saxena paid his condolences to the families of the deceased and posted, "I am deeply anguished by the death of 3 Civil Services aspirants due to water logging in the basement of a coaching centre and that of another student due to water logging related electrocution. That this should happen in the Capital of India is most unfortunate & unacceptable." He said seven other people had also been electrocuted in the



Ranjan Dimri

last seven days. "My deepest condolences to the families of those who have lost their lives. You are in my thoughts and prayers," he said. Saxena said he has been keeping a close watch over the situation and has monitored the rescue operations by Delhi Police and the fire department personally. "These incidents clearly point towards criminal neglect & failure of basic maintenance & administration by concerned agencies & departments," he said in another post. "Drainage in the city and related infrastructure, as also required efforts and endeavours to address these have apparently collapsed, Saxena said. He added that the incident is indicative of the "larger malaise of misgovernance that Delhi has been subjected to during

the last decade or so". The role of coaching institutions and landlords in not ensuring basic safety of students, who pay hefty fees and rents, away from their homes needs to be looked into, the LG said. He emphasised that while nothing can bring back the precious young lives lost due to the negligence of the administration and the criminal misconduct of those running coaching institutions, the responsibility of those who caused the loss of lives will be determined, and the guilty will be held accountable. "What has been happening is unpardonable and such issues can no more be glossed over. I have asked the Divisional Commissioner to submit a report, covering every aspect of the tragic incident by Tuesday," he added.

BJP demands resignation of Atishi, Mayor

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Holding the AAP Government and the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri demanded resignations of Delhi Minister Atishi and Mayor Shelly Oberoi for the death of three IAS aspirants — two females and a male — who lost their lives as they were trapped inside the library running in the basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle in Old Rajinder Nagar area, which flooded due to rain and reportedly led to the failure of the single biometric entry and exit point. The Delhi unit of the BJP has demanded that a police case be filed against the Delhi government, Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), Delhi Fire Service, Delhi Jal Board, and the power distribution company (Discom) and the owner for investigation and action for the tragedy. Addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and MP Ms. Bansuri Swaraj demanded that for an impartial investigation, it is necessary that the concerned minister Ms. Atishi resigns and the local officials of these departments be suspended. Bidhuri said after this incident, Atishi and Mayor Shelly Oberoi have no right to remain in their positions and should resign immediately. Bidhuri also demanded the immediate dismissal of the failed Delhi government and the municipal corporation. He said that if the drains and



sewers had been cleaned on time before the monsoon, this tragedy could have been avoided. AAP leaders, including the area's MLA Durgesh Pathak, are blaming heavy rainfall for the incident, but the truth is that drains are cleaned to prevent flooding from monsoon rains. Sachdeva also demanded that the Delhi government pay Rs 1 crore ex gratia to the families of the deceased. "All the students' post-mortems should be done by Sunday afternoon, and their bodies should be assisted in being transported to their home regions. The government should also provide compensation of 1 crore rupees to the family affected by the South Patel Nagar incident," said Sachdeva. Sachdeva added, after the Mukherjee Nagar incidents, it was the responsibility of the Delhi Fire Service and Delhi Municipal Corporation to ensure that coaching or libraries operate only in basement buildings with two exits and paths at least 5 feet wide. Clearly, no surveys were con-

ducted, nor any actions taken in the coaching centres spread across Karol Bagh, Rajendra Nagar, and Patel Nagar in central Delhi. "If the Delhi Fire Service and Delhi Municipal Corporation had enforced the guidelines issued after the Mukherjee Nagar incident, this basement library would have been closed," he said. The BJP leader also accused the DJB of not desilting the sewer drains and said the New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj and former councillor Rajesh Bhatia also raised the matter with MLA Durgesh Pathak. Swaraj said that till 2015 Rajinder Nagar was considered to be a model assembly constituency of Delhi in terms of good roads, greenery, fine drainage and safe environment after 10 years of Arvind Kejriwal and periods of MLAs Vijendra Garg, Raghav Chadha and Durgesh Pathak the model assembly has been turned into a modern day slum with lack of drinking water haunting it in summers and waterlogging in the monsoon month.

Fix responsibility for coaching centre tragedy: Congress

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday called for fixing accountability over the death of three IAS aspirants due to waterlogging in a building in Old Rajinder Nagar in the national capital with Rahul Gandhi asserting that common people are paying the price for irresponsibility of institutions at every level. In a post in Hindi on X, Rahul Gandhi said, "The death of students preparing for competitive exams due to waterlogging in the basement of a building in Delhi is very unfortunate. A few days ago, a student died due to electric shock during the rains." He expressed heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families. "This collapse of infrastructure is a combined failure of the system. The common citizen is paying the price of unsafe construction, poor town planning and irresponsibility of institutions at every level by losing his life," the former Congress chief said. A safe and comfortable life is the right of every citizen and the responsibility of governments, he asserted.

SC to hear Sisodia's bail pleas today

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on Monday Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Manish Sisodia's bail pleas in corruption and money laundering cases linked to the alleged Delhi excise policy scam. The former deputy chief minister of Delhi has sought bail contending that he has been in custody for 16 months and the trial against him has not made any progress since October last year. According to the cause list of July 29 uploaded on the Supreme Court website, a bench of Justices B R Gavi and K V Viswanathan is slated to hear Sisodia's pleas. The apex court had on July 16 agreed to hear the pleas and sought responses from the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the Enforcement Directorate (ED). Sisodia has also filed an application seeking revival of his bail petitions in the excise policy-linked corruption and money laundering cases. The AAP leader was arrested by the CBI on February 26, 2023 in connection with alleged irregularities in the formulation and implementation of the now-scrapped Delhi excise policy 2021-22. The ED arrested him in the money laundering case stemming from the CBI FIR on March 9 last year.

IN BRIEF

RPF DETAINS 47 ILLEGAL MIGRANTS

Maligaon: Continuing the fight to detect illegal migrants (Bangladeshis and Rohingyas) the Railway Protection Force (RPF) of Northeast Frontier Railway has apprehended 47 illegal migrants and 5 Indian agents during checks across various stations of N.F. Railway during the month of June 2024. In the present month i.e. July 2024 till 23rd of July, RPF of N. F. Railway has detained 41 illegal migrants. On 02nd of July 2024, RPF team of Agartala conducted a routine drive at Agartala Railway Station. While checking they detected 11 persons of doubtful nationality (09 females & 02 males). On interrogation they could not produce any valid documents and later confessed that they entered India illegally from Bangladesh. In a recent incident at the Agartala station 04 male Bangladeshi nationals were detained on 23rd of July 2024 by RPF. The Bangladeshis were planning to proceed for Kolkata via train. Later, all the illegal migrants were handed over to Officer In-charge/Government Railway Police/Agartala for further legal action.



IIM ORGANISES FACULTY DEVELOPMENTAL PROGRAMME

Both Gaya: For the first time in Bihar, IIM Both Gaya organised three batches of the Nurturing Future Leadership Programme (NFLP) from June to July, 2024. This faculty leadership development program, namely NFLP, has been conceptualised by the Ministry of Education, under the aegis of Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme (MMTTP). It is a prestigious, selection-based 5-day residential leadership training program which is open for all levels of faculty of publicly funded higher educational institutes. This program is delivered by top institutes of the country in NIRF management ranking. Currently, 6 IITS and 14 IIMs are organizing this program to overhaul the capacity building in the country. The main objective of this program is to prepare faculty members to contribute effectively and proactively in collective decision-making, shared governance, developing initiatives, and problem-solving.



Deaths result of AAP Govt's negligence, claims Vijender

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi BJP President and MLA Vijender Gupta expressed his deepest condolences over the tragic deaths of three students preparing for the UPSC exams, caused by the flooding of RAU's coaching centre basement in Old Rajender Nagar. Gupta described the loss of these young lives as profoundly painful and heart-wrenching. He stated that the tragedy was not a natural calamity but a result of gross negligence by the AAP Government, both in the MCD and the state. According to Gupta, this incident underscores the absence of effective leadership and governance in Delhi. He pointed out that the coaching centre was permitted to violate building by-laws by using the basement as a library, with approvals granted just a month earlier by the AAP-led MCD. Despite repeated complaints from residents, the drains were not cleared before the monsoon season. A local UPSC aspirant had previously lodged a complaint about MCD officials colluding with building owners to grant illegal permissions, but the government ignored this warning. Gupta also recalled a recent



incident where a UPSC student's body was found soaked in water, having died from electrocution due to flooding in the same area. He argued that this should have served as a warning to the authorities, but no corrective measures were taken. He highlighted the dangerous conditions in which thousands of students from across the country are forced to study. Gupta accused the AAP leadership of shirking responsibility and engaging in a blame game instead of showing remorse. Nobody from the government has come to meet the students agitating. He criticized the lack of accountability, noting that no action has been taken against MCD officials, the minister in charge, or the local MLA, describing the situation as a case of daylight murder.

Drains for clearing rain water covered due to encroachment: MCD

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The storm drains built to carry away excess water due to heavy rains in the Old Rajendra Nagar area, where three civil services aspirants died after being trapped in the basement of a coaching institute, were covered by encroachers, a senior MCD official said on Sunday. The drainage system in the area was heavily clogged with silt and overflowed leading to a flood-like situation due to the rains that lashed parts of Delhi on Saturday, locals complained. Three civil services aspirants — two females and a male — lost



Ranjan Dimri

their lives as they were trapped inside the library running in the basement of Rau's IAS Study Circle, which flooded due to rain and reportedly led to the failure of the single biometric entry and exit point. The police, however, said it is yet to confirm the biometric lock claim and will investigate it.

Harivansh urges MPs to be effective Parliamentarians

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Harivansh, on Sunday urged the MPs to adopt innovative technology to be effective Parliamentarians. "Rules are supreme in the House and members must follow it in letter and spirit," Harivansh said at the valedictory function of the two days orientation program of the upper house members. Utilising the Question Hour, Zero Hour, Special Mentions are important avenues for members to hold the Executive accountable, he added.

Revisit policy to deal with militancy, Centre told

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The Political Affairs Committee of the Congress party which met in Srinagar on Sunday urged the Union Government to revisit their policy of dealing with the militancy, dealing with the people, and dealing with the democratic systems in Jammu Kashmir. While taking stock of the prevailing political scenario in the Union territory, the PAC members also deliberated on the issue of forging any fresh alliance ahead of the forthcoming Assembly polls. The Congress and the National Conference contested the recent Lok Sabha polls in alliance. Both parties garnered majority votes from at least 41 out of 90 Assembly constituencies. The National Conference secured majority votes from 34 seats (27 in Kashmir and 7 in Jammu region) while the Congress party secured popular vote on seven assembly seats in Jammu. The Congress party leaders from both the regions of Jammu, Kashmir attended the meeting along with AICC Incharge Bharatsinh Solanki, JKPC Chief Vikar Rasool Wani, Chairman PAC Tariq Hameed Karra. Addressing media persons in Srinagar Chairman of the PAC Tariq Hamid Karra said the prevailing security situation, especially the recent surge in the terrorist activities in the Jammu region is a matter of great concern. Karra said the tall claims of the government and LG administration have fallen apart. Karra maintained that we have been saying for a long time there is no space for the politics of jingoism and the government must revisit its policy of dealing with the militancy and the people of Jammu Kashmir. Referring to the possibility of forming any alliance ahead of Assembly polls Karra said the PAC deliberated on a specific agenda and among several other issues we also discussed whether to go ahead and form an alliance or not during the Assembly polls.



Two arrested...

From Page 1 Deputy Commissioner of Police (Central) M Harsha Vardhan said, "We have registered an FIR at Rajinder Nagar Police Station under sections 105 (culpable homicide), 106(1) (death of any person by doing any rash or negligent act not amounting to culpable homicide), 115(2) (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt), 290 (negligent conduct with respect to pulling down, repairing or constructing buildings) and 35 of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS) and launched an investigation." "This FIR is against the coaching centre, management of the building, those who manage the drainage system and the people whose role will come up in the investigation," he added. The bodies of two female students and a male student were retrieved from the basement during the rescue operation. The deceased were identified as 25 year old Shreya Yadav of Ghaziabad in Uttar Pradesh, 25 year old Tanya Soni from Telangana and 24 year old Nevin Delvin from Ernakulam in Kerala, police said. According to reports, Nevin was also a research

scholar at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in Delhi. Students were also protesting against the death of the aspirants while sloganeering "We want justice". While they at first staged their demonstration near the Rau coaching centre, later the protestors went to Karol Bagh metro station that were later removed by the police authorities. DCP stated that since yesterday evening the road in Old Rajender Nagar was blocked by students who are protesting the incident of flooding of basement. "We understand their sentiments and thus are engaging with them constructively to remain peaceful in their protest," he said. A senior police officer said that it was important to remove the students who started protesting near the metro station in noon and stated, "Today around 2:30pm, some students blocked both carriageways of Pusa Road near Karol Bagh Metro Station, which is an arterial road with many hospitals in the vicinity. They were repeatedly requested to not block the main road by DCP Central as well as DM Central. Since they refused to clear

the main road even after an hour, they were removed from there, considering the massive public inconvenience and nearby hospitals." Teams from the local police, National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) and Delhi Fire Service (DFS) were part of the rescue operation, which went on till the early morning of Sunday and was ended after seven hours of rescue efforts. According to the DFS, a call about waterlogging was received from Rau's IAS Study Circle at around 7 pm on Saturday and that there was a possibility that some people were trapped. A fire department official said that a total of five tenders were rushed to the site. The basement was full of water when they arrived. Preliminary investigation suggests that the basement housed a library where several students were present. Water suddenly started flooding the basement. Ropes were used to evacuate the trapped students, officials said. The furniture in the coaching centre started floating when it was flooded and this created obstruction in the rescue operation, a police officer said.

NTA announces CUET-UG...

From Page 1 Initially, the CUET-UG results were scheduled to be declared on June 30, but the NTA delayed it, as it was grappling with allegations of paper leak allegations in the NEET-UG, UGC-NET and the CSIR-UGC-NET exams. Over 13.4 lakh candidates registered for the test for admission to undergraduate courses in 261 central, state, deemed and private universities this year. In the first edition of the exam in 2022, the test was plagued by technical glitches.

Library running illegally in...

From Page 1 Following the tragedy, Delhi Mayor Shelly Oberoi has directed the Commissioner of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi to take strict action against coaching centres across the national capital that are running commercial activities in basements. The three-storey coaching centre had its building plan approved by the concerned MCD department in 2021. The coaching centre received a No Objection Certificate (NOC) earlier this month, in which clearance was given for the three-storeyed building, a stilt parking space beneath the building and a basement, which was supposed to be used as a storage area. The NOC mentions that the basement shall be used strictly as per building bye-laws. "In the building completion certificate of the institute, it

is clearly written that it can only be used for parking and storage in the basement. It means that the library was running illegally in the basement," an MCD official said. The certificate issued on 9 July 2024 says, Certified that the building of Coaching center Located at Ground, 1st, 2nd & 3rd floor Plot No. 11B, Bara Bazar Marg, Old Rajinder Nagar, New Delhi. In the building comprised of Basement (Storage) Stilt (Parking) Ground + 3 upper floor have complied with the fire prevention and fire safety requirements in accordance with Rule 33 of the Delhi Fire Service Rule, 2010 and verified by the team of officers concerned of this department on 01/07/2024 in the presence of Sh. Ashok Narang and found that the said building is fit for occupancy class "Educational Coaching Centre".

WHY? WHY? WHY?

From Page 1 Shubham, a student of the coaching institute said that they had complained to MCD in June about the persistent waterlogging issue in the low lying area. However nothing changed since then and an hour of rain took the lives of young minds that had cleared their prelims and were preparing for their mains paper. Local residents and students also lament about the inaction of MCD in solving the drainage situation and state how the coaching centre owners and the civic authorities are hand in gloves over the illegal operation of libraries in the basement with only one exit and entry door. A resident who lives opposite to the coaching centre recounted how days ago, water was filled in the area and entered their house. "I slipped because of the water and then broke my hand. You can see the fracture. We have met the local councillor and MLA but of no

use. You see the locality filled with sludge and garbage even after yesterday's incident," he said, adding that nothing will change until the sewer is fixed. Sonam, who has lived in the area for more than 25 years, stated how there has been no cleaning of drainage since 15 years. Moreover, students said how almost all coaching centres have their library in basements. Ankit, who studies in the building next to the coaching centre, recounted how the students were studying in level 2 basement and water from the drainage was filled upto 12 to 13 feet. He also flagged how there is a police booth right outside the building and yet no one is ever present. "Authorities came about two hours later. If there was someone present in the booth, actions could have been taken at the earliest," he said, adding that he filed an RTI in March about the same issue and got no replies in return.

Govt clarifies...

From Page 1 The Ministry said the Income Tax department through a 2004 notification has specified that the tax clearance certificate may be required to be obtained by persons domiciled in India only in certain circumstances. These include - where the person is involved in serious financial irregularities and his presence is necessary in the investigation of cases under the Income-tax Act or the Wealth-tax Act and it is likely that a tax demand will be raised against him, or where the person has direct tax arrears exceeding Rs 10 lakh outstanding against him, which have not been stayed by any authority. The I-T department said that a person can be asked to obtain a tax clearance certificate only after recording the reasons for the same and after taking approval from the Principal Chief Commissioner of Income-tax or Chief Commissioner of Income-tax.

Row after students seek auditorium...

From Page 1 Colleges and schools should not be made part of their plans to carve out separate country," said Kevin Peter, founder, CASA in a statement released on Sunday. He pointed out that there are three big mosques in the vicinity of the college and the students are advised to make use of the facility. "College and school timings in the State are so planned that the Islamic students could offer prayers every day without causing any inconvenience to others," said Kevin. Big time political parties like the CPI (M) and the Congress are yet to react to the unrest among the student community. What is at stake is principal Fr Kuriakose's unique selling proposition to the students: "Welcome to Nirmala for an inspiring journey to the future".



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BJP top brass, CMs deliberate on governance



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Chief Ministers of BJP-ruled states made presentations on various development schemes going on in their states as the party's top brass, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, held deliberations with them over governance issues for a second consecutive day on Sunday. Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and J P Nadda, who is also the National President of the party, were part of the meeting. The two-day 'mukhyamantri parishad' began on Saturday. In his remarks, Modi emphasised the need to ensure saturation coverage of welfare schemes going on in the BJP-ruled states, saying they should be seen as an example of good governance.

He, sources said, noted the efforts of the BJP-run Governments to help different sections of society, especially the poor. "Our Party is working tirelessly to further good governance and fulfil the aspirations of the people," PM shared on social media. The "mukhyamantri parishad" organised by the BJP at regular intervals is aimed at reviewing key schemes in States, following the best governance practices and the delivery of Central Government welfare initiatives. Chief ministers Yogi Adityanath (Uttar Pradesh), Himanta Biswa Sarma (Assam), Bhajanlal Sharma (Rajasthan) and Mohan Charan Majhi (Odisha) were among the leaders who attended the meeting. The Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh,

Uttarakhand, Arunachal Pradesh, Goa, Haryana, Manipur and Chhattisgarh were also part of the deliberations. The leaders at times also take stock of the political situation. The meeting comes in the wake of the presentation of the Union Budget, with the opposition targeting the Government for allegedly ignoring other states at the expense of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. It is also the first meeting following the Lok Sabha polls in which the BJP's performance was underwhelming as the party lost its majority in the Lower House of Parliament. Party leaders, though, added that governance issues are at the centre of the discussions at the meeting. The last such meeting was held in February.

Khadi creating jobs, says Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that Khadi Gramodyog's business has crossed ₹ 1.5 lakh crore for the first time and asserted that the rising sales of Khadi and handloom were creating new job opportunities in large numbers. In his Mann Ki Baat monthly radio broadcast, Modi said many people who would not be using Khadi products earlier now wear them with great pride. "The Khadi Gramodyog's business has crossed ₹ 1.5 lakh crore for the first time. Do you know how much sales of Khadi have gone up '400 per cent'." The rising sales of Khadi and handloom are creating new job opportunities in large numbers," he said. Mostly women are associated with this industry so they are benefitting the most, he added. "You must be having different types of clothes and till now if you have not bought khadi clothes then start buying them," Modi said. With the start of the Paris Olympics, the prime minister said the games give our athletes a chance to hoist the national flag at the international level. He urged people to encourage them and 'Cheer for Bharat'. During the broadcast, he also interacted with Indian stu-



dents who performed very well in the recently held Mathematics olympiad. "A few days ago, an Olympics took place in the world of mathematics also: the International Mathematics Olympiad. Indian students have performed very well in this Olympiad. Our team won four gold medals and one silver medal," Modi said. The prime minister also hailed the inclusion of the 'Moidams' in Assam in the UNESCO world heritage list and said it is a matter of immense joy for every Indian. He also recalled unveiling the tallest statue of the great Ahom warrior Lachit Borphukan, a symbol of indomitable courage and bravery.

Mann Ki Baat

Locals' efforts to save tigers lauded

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

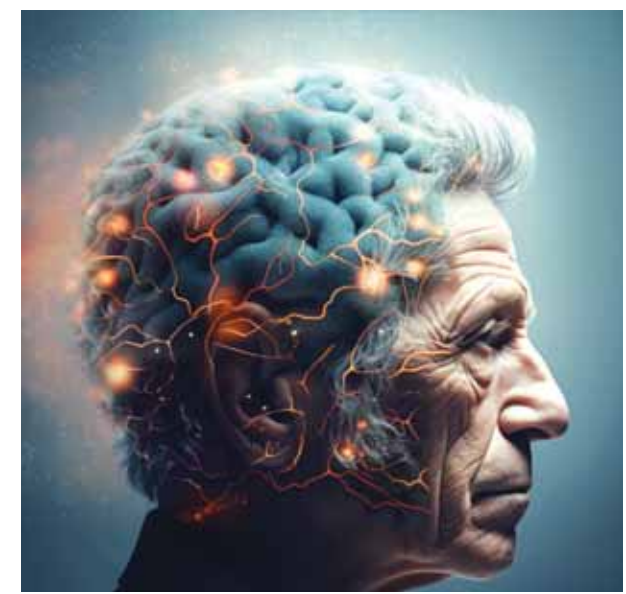
From Rajasthan's 'Kulhadi Band Panchayat' in Ranthambore tiger reserve to Maharashtra's eco-tourism initiatives by tribals in Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and Andhra Pradesh's diligent 'Chenchu' tribe to 'Baagh Mitr Karyakram' in Pilibhit, various communities across India are playing crucial role in safeguarding India's big cats. India has 70 percent of the global tiger population. On the eve of World Tiger Day observed on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday in his 'Maan Ki Baat' made special mention of these local initiatives, stating that "all of them play a crucial role in protecting the country's magnificent creatures." India is seeing positive impacts from these community-driven efforts, he said, adding that they are not only inspiring but also crucial for the preservation of our rich wildlife heritage. "Let us applaud and support these exemplary initiatives," the Prime Minister said.

"In India, Tigers have been an integral part of our culture. We all have grown up listening to stories of incidents related to tigers. In the villages around forests, everyone knows how to live in harmony with the tiger. In our country, there are many villages where there is no conflict between humans and



tigers. But where such a situation arises, unprecedented efforts are being made for the protection of tigers there as well. Modi praised the "Kulhadi Band Panchayat" in Ranthambore Tiger Reserve for its pledge that they will not go to the forest with axes and will not cut trees. Due to this one decision, the forests here are becoming green once again, and a better environment is being created for the tigers, he added. The Prime Minister also

noted the strides made by the Gond and Mana tribes in Maharashtra, whose reduced forest dependency has supported the tiger population's growth in Tadoba. In Andhra Pradesh, "You will also be surprised at the efforts of the 'Chenchu' tribe living on the Nallamalai hills in Andhra Pradesh. As Tiger Trackers, they have gathered every bit of information on the movement of wild animals in the forest. Along with that, they also keep monitoring illegal activities in the area. "Similarly, the 'Chenchu' tribe's role as Tiger Trackers is crucial for monitoring wildlife and preventing illegal activities while the 'Baagh Mitr Karyakram' in Pilibhit, Uttar Pradesh, exemplifies another successful community initiative by training locals as 'Tiger Friends' to mitigate human-tiger conflicts," Modi said. These efforts are not isolated. "Many such efforts are underway in different parts of the country. He also exhorted the county-trymen to participate in the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' campaign, which recently saw the planting of over 2 lakh saplings in Indore, promoting environment and honoring mothers.



High fat in belly or arms linked to higher risk of Alzheimer's, Parkinson's

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

If you have high levels of body fat, particularly in the belly or arms, it's important to be aware that this may increase your risk of developing neurological progressive conditions such as Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases (PD). Research suggests that excess fat in these areas can have adverse effects on neurological health, potentially contributing to the development of these conditions. The study's findings are particularly significant for India, where the combination of increasing life expectancy, younger age of disease onset, and a growing population with obesity creates a unique set of challenges. Effective preventive measures and healthcare strategies tailored to the Indian context are essential for mitigating the impact of these neurodegenerative conditions, according to the experts here. Conversely, as per the study, individuals who exhibited high levels of muscle strength were less likely to develop these neurodegenerative diseases. This suggests that greater muscle strength might offer protective benefits against the onset of Alzheimer's and Parkinson's, according to a study published in Neurology, the medical journal of the American Academy of Neurology. Managing fat levels through lifestyle changes and medical interventions might be crucial in reducing disease risk, said the study involving 412,691 people with an average age of 56 who were followed for an average of nine years. At the beginning of the study, researchers assessed participants' body composition

through measurements of waist and hip circumference, grip strength, bone density, and fat and lean mass. Over the study period, 8,224 individuals developed neurodegenerative diseases, including Alzheimer's, other forms of dementia, and Parkinson's disease. The findings revealed that male participants with high levels of belly fat developed neurodegenerative diseases at a rate of 3.38 per 1,000 person-years, compared to 1.82 cases per 1,000 person-years in those with lower levels of belly fat. Female participants with high levels of belly fat had rates of 2.55 per 1,000 person-years, versus 1.39 for those with lower levels. After adjusting for factors such as high blood pressure, smoking, alcohol consumption, and diabetes, the researchers found that individuals with high levels of belly fat were 13 per cent more likely to develop these diseases compared to those with lower levels, the study adding that those with high muscle strength were 26 per cent less likely to develop the diseases than those with low levels of strength. Study author Huan Song of Sichuan University in Chengdu, China said, "the study highlights the potential to lessen people's risk of developing these diseases by improving their body composition. Targeted interventions to reduce trunk and arm fat, combined with efforts to promote healthy muscle development, may offer more effective protection against neurodegenerative diseases like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's than general weight control alone.

Centre mulls making floodplain zoning law must for States to get funds

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With only four States complying despite repeated reminders, the Centre is contemplating making it mandatory for States to enact floodplain zoning legislation if they want to access central flood management funds, officials have said. The four States that have enacted such legislations are: Manipur, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and the erstwhile Jammu & Kashmir. A senior official said the Ministry of Jal Shakti has been in continuous communication with State Governments, urging them to notify the Flood Plain Zoning Act and demarcate flood zones. Recently, the Central Water Commission updated the Model Act, and the Ministry plans to initiate another round of consultations with States, the official said. The official said the Ministry has proposed making the enactment of the Flood Plain Zoning Act a prerequisite for States to access funds under the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme (FMBAP). "We are going for a Cabinet approval for the next phase of the Flood Management and Border Areas Programme. For that, now the condition for any State to access resources under the FMBAP will be that the state must have enacted the Flood Plain Zoning Act. So, you will not get money if you have not enacted the Flood Plain Zoning Act," the official said. The official said the Ministry has made several other efforts to address these



issues. "In May 2022, the Secretary of the Department of Water Resources, River Development & Ganga Rejuvenation wrote to State Chief Secretaries, urging them to enact appropriate legislation. In a meeting in January 2023, the Secretary emphasised the importance of flood plain zoning for comprehensive flood management and minimising flood damage," the official added. "The Ministry of Jal Shakti has been persistently urging States to take action. However, the progress remains limited to a few States. Water management, including flood management, is a State Subject under the Constitution. States need to take proactive measures in this regard," another official said. The legislation provided guidelines for flood zoning authorities, surveys, delineation of flood plain areas, notification of flood plain limits, restrictions on flood plain use, and provisions for compensation and removal of obstructions. Despite these comprehensive guidelines, many States are yet to take significant steps towards

legislation and enforcement, the official said. The official said even the States that have enforced the law are yet to fully implement it. "Manipur enacted flood plain zoning legislation in 1978, but the demarcation of flood zones is yet to be done. Rajasthan also enacted legislation in the state; however, enforcement thereof is yet to be done," the official said. Uttarakhand is one state which has enacted the law as well as undertaken some groundwork by demarcating different segments where development will take place only in regulated matter or will not take place at all. "So, this way they have done. Uttarakhand is the only state. Then, based on some an NGT (National Green Tribunal) order, even Uttar Pradesh has done some demarcation on the flood plains," the official said. Some States like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh have informed about difficulties in implementation of such a law due to large-flood affected areas and other States have yet not taken any action for enactment of a legislation, the official said.

Cong accuses Centre of bias in flood relief funds allocation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Congress on Sunday accused the Central Government of practising "double standards" in allocating funds to flood-afflicted States, alleging that it was exacting "revenge" on the people of Himachal Pradesh for not voting for the BJP in the Assembly elections. Congress General Secretary (In-charge, Communications) Jai Ram Ramesh said, "Yesterday, the self-anointed non-biological Prime Minister said that Viksit Bharat depends on Viksit states. Wow, such a profundity. If only he put the taxpayer's money where his mouth is!" "After the disastrous floods of 2023, the Government of Himachal Pradesh repeatedly demanded that the Union Government declare the floods a National calamity? a plea which Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman repeatedly rejected," Ramesh said in a post on X. "Now, in her Budget Speech, when allocating funds for irrigation and flood mitigation, the Finance Minister has provided a vivid illustration of the double standards at work in the non-biological PM's Government," he claimed. "Relevant extracts from this section for each flood-afflicted state: Bihar: 'Government' will provide financial support for projects with estimated cost of ₹ 11,500 crores. Assam: 'We will provide assistance to

Assam for flood management and related projects.' Uttarakhand: 'We will provide assistance to the state.' Sikkim: 'Our Government will provide assistance to the state.' Himachal Pradesh: 'Our Government will provide assistance to the state' through multilateral development assistance," he said. Basically, what the finance minister has said is that BJP-ruled states will get financial assistance in the form of grants but when it comes to the Congress-governed Himachal Pradesh, the assistance will be "arranged through multilateral development assistance", i.e., loans that it will have to repay, Ramesh said. Himachal Pradesh, which is historically a fiscally challenged state due to its remote geography and challenging terrain, will be burdened with more loans, he said. This is nothing but revenge on the people who did not vote for the BJP in Assembly elections, Ramesh said. In his address to the ninth Governing Council meeting of the NITI Aayog on Saturday, Modi observed that the vision of Viksit Bharat can be realised through Viksit States, and that the aspiration of Viksit Bharat should reach the grassroot level i.e to each district, block, and village. "For this, each state and district should create a vision for 2047 so as to realise Viksit Bharat @ 2047," he had said.



Pvt Bill in LS seeks official status for Bhojpuri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Bhojpuri superstar and BJP MP Ravi Kishan has introduced a Private Member Bill in Lok Sabha to include Bhojpuri in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution so that it can be accorded the status of an official language. Kishan, who introduced The Constitution (Amendment) Bill, 2024, on Friday, said he wants to underline that the Bhojpuri language is not about crass songs but has a rich cultural history and literature which needs to be promoted. "So many people speak and understand this language. It is our mother tongue. I wanted to promote this language as a film industry is also being run in this language and lakhs are getting employment. The music industry is also very big," the BJP MP from Gorakhpur said. This Bill is about promoting Bhojpuri literature which is very rich, he said. "People will take the language seriously. The language is not about crass songs. The language is so rich, it also has literature," Kishan said. The literature of Bhojpuri needs to be popularised, the actor-cum-politician said. "I want to pay back to my community. This language is my identity." In its statement of objects and reasons, the bill notes that the Bhojpuri language which originated in the Gangetic plains of India is a very old and rich language having its origin in the Sanskrit language. Bhojpuri is the mother tongue of a large number of people residing in Uttar Pradesh, Western Bihar, Jharkhand and some parts of Madhya Pradesh as well as in several other countries, it further notes. In Mauritius, this language is spoken by a large number of people and it is estimated that around 140 million people speak Bhojpuri, the bill's note on objective states. The bill notes that Bhojpuri films are very popular in the country and abroad and have a deep impact on the Hindi film industry.

Conclave to advance development of world's largest museum

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Come next-week and curators, museum administrators, and domain experts from across the world will congregate at a three-day conclave from August 1-3 in the national Capital with an aim to advance the development of the proposed 'Yuge Yugeen Bharat National Museum' which is set to be the largest museum in the world. The conclave will be held at the Bharat Mandapam, currently the venue for the 46th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, being held for the first time in India. 'Yuge Yugeen Bharat National Museum' will span 154,000 square metres across the North and South Blocks in Delhi. It will feature eight thematic segments covering over 5,000 years of Indian history. Union Minister of Culture and Tourism, Gajendra Singh Shekhawat, will address the gathering. "The event will provide a platform for states to present their collections and contribute to the museum's narrative, reflecting India's rich cultural heritage. It will include master classes and work-



shops led by both Indian and international experts on topics like museum architecture, conservation practices, collections management, and curation," said an official from the Union Culture Ministry. Attendees will benefit from hands-on training and networking opportunities aimed at enhancing skills in museum management and administration. The Ministry of Culture will also provide information on avail-

able funding schemes to support state-level museum development, including the updated Museum Grant Scheme and the Scheme for Promotion of Culture of Science, the official added. This conclave is set to play a crucial role in shaping the future of India's museum landscape and ensuring that the 'Yuge Yugeen Bharat National Museum' meets global best practices in showcasing India's rich cultural heritage.

"This three-day gathering aims to foster collaboration among state museums and the central government in realising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for the 'Yuge Yugeen Bharat Museum' that aims to exemplify global best practices," the official said. "To foster a comprehensive understanding of India's artefact wealth for the 'Yuge Yugeen Bharat Museum', the states have been invited to provide detailed insights into their respective state's collections at the forthcoming state conclave," he said. Master classes will also be held with experts from India and abroad spanning various topics such as the architecture and materiality of the North and South Block, global best practices in conservation, fine arts handling, collections management, curation and museum management, the official said. Additionally, the Ministry will present an overview of available funding schemes, including the recently updated Museum Grant Scheme and the Scheme for Promotion of Culture of Science, to support state-level museum development initiatives.

Bring back Netaji's remains from Japan, Modi urged

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Legendary freedom fighter Subhas Chandra Bose's grandnephew Chandra Kumar Bose on Sunday appealed to Prime Minister Narendra Modi to bring back the "mortal remains of Netaji" from Japan's Renkoji temple by August 18.



"We have been writing to the prime minister for the last three-and-a-half years, that in order to honour the liberator of India, his remains must touch Indian soil," he said.

He also said a final statement should come from the central government on the matter so that "false narratives" about Netaji are laid to rest. Stating that the NDA-led government took initiative to declassify files related to the freedom fighter, Bose said after the release of all the "10 inquiries — national and international", it is evident that "Netaji perished on August 18, 1945" in an air crash in Taiwan. "It is therefore imperative that a final statement is made from the Government of India so that false narratives about the liberator of India are laid to rest," Bose wrote in a letter to Modi on Sunday. "My humble appeal to you is to bring back the mortal remains of Netaji from Renkoji to India by August 18, 2024," he said. In an interview to PTI Videos, Bose, also a former vice president of the West Bengal BJP, said the declassification process has exposed secret files and documents, "which conclusively establish that Netaji died in this air crash on August 18, 1945". He said that Netaji wanted to return to India after Independence, but could not as he died in the air crash. "It is highly insulting that Netaji's remains have been kept at the Renkoji temple," Bose said.

In his letter to Modi, Bose said the circumstances of Netaji's death from an air crash while leaving Taiwan in a Japanese military aircraft in the aftermath of Japan's surrender in August 1945, perhaps with a plan to make his way to the Soviet Union to continue the struggle, was seen by many as just another ruse to escape his enemies. He claimed that his brother Sarat Chandra Bose and widow Emilie, however, did not have any definite knowledge of Netaji being alive after August 18, 1945. There is no doubt of the genuine disbelief among some that Netaji perished in the manner described in a host of contemporary accounts from multiple sources, said Bose.

"After all, here was a man who had once given the slip to the British and undertook an arduous trek from Calcutta through north India to Afghanistan, eventually reaching Berlin by air through Moscow. Only a few years later in the midst of a raging world war, he survived an even more perilous voyage by submarine from Germany to South East Asia. How could such a man die?" he said in the letter. "The... Justice Mukherjee Commission of Inquiry 2005 finding that Netaji did not die in the said air crash was found to be based on fundamental errors and the Government of India thus rejected it," Bose said. Maintaining that an array of "unscrupulous persons" found plenty of scope and opportunities for exploitation over the issue, he said from around the mid-1960s began the phenomenon of the re-appearance of Netaji.

Valmiki scam: Is it Nyay to siphon SC/ST money, asks FM

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman lashed out at Chief Minister Siddaramaiah asking him whether it was 'Nyay' (justice) to siphon off money belonging to the tribal Valmiki community. Referring to the Rs 187 crore scam in the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribe Corporation including the illegal transfer of Rs 88 crore, Sitharaman, speaking to reporters at the BJP office here, accused Siddaramaiah of concealing facts and trying to pass the blame on to the central government because bank officials of a nationalised bank were involved. On Siddaramaiah's charge that the union finance minister should be held accountable because banks were involved, Sitharaman said, "He can say

that because he is used to talking like this... That's so irresponsible. You have your minister resigned. You have your people saying that the money has been siphoned into private accounts." The minister said that action has already been taken as a first step against the conniving bank officials and further action will be taken against them. "No protection will be offered to them for sure." She, however, sought to know, "A minister had to resign under whose oversight? Attempt to deny, attempt to shift blame, or to say that no scandal has taken place. It's SC/ST money. Whose money was taken away — Valmiki community's. Is there no sense of outrage?" "They (Congress) talk about 'Nyay' (justice) during election campaign. Is this Nyay for the SC/ST



communities?" Sitharaman said. During the Lok Sabha election, the Congress had the slogan 'Ab Hoga Nyay' to do justice for downtrodden communities and to enact policies for their upliftment. Stating that the bank is already on the job of taking action against the erring officials, the FM asked Siddaramaiah how the minister involved in the scam and the chief minister who holds finance portfolio did

not stop the bank from illegally transferring money. "You denied the whole thing, your minister did not even resign. And regarding the money which has gone into the private accounts, you go to the assembly to say it's not Rs 180 crore or Rs 140 crore, it's only some Rs 80 crore. You are concealing it, sir. This is the outrageous thing that is happening particularly with the SC/ST money," the FM said. Rs 187.33 crore of the Valmiki Corporation kept in different accounts, including Rs 40 crore in the government treasury, is said to have been diverted towards the Union Bank of India's MG Road branch in the scam. Of the Rs 187.33 crore, Rs 88.63 crore was illegally transferred to at least 217 bank accounts in Telangana including that of 18 firms. Former Karnataka

minister B Nagesh, who was arrested by the Enforcement Directorate, is in judicial custody in connection with the case. The scam came to light after the Accounts Superintendent of Valmiki Corporation Chandrasekharan P died by suicide. In his suicide note, he explained in detail how the money was transferred and what role the corporation and the bank officials had played in the scam. The opposition BJP has accused the ruling Congress of being involved in the scam. It has alleged that the transfer of money could not have happened without the knowledge of Siddaramaiah, who heads the finance ministry. The chief minister has rubbished the allegation and said he had no information about it.

Judges should use a 'sense of robust common sense' in bail petitions: CJI

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Sunday said the trial judges prefer playing safe by not granting bail on important issues of crime when it is looked at with a degree of suspicion. The Chief Justice underlined the need for a 'sense of robust common sense' to look at the nitty-gritty of each case. "People who should be getting bail in the trial courts and not getting it there, as a result of which, they have to invariably move the high courts. People who should be getting bail in the high courts will not necessarily get it, as a result of which, they have to move to the Supreme Court. This delay

compounds the problem of those who are facing arbitrary arrests," Justice Chandrachud said. He was replying to a question at the end of a keynote address during the 11th Annual Conference of the Berkeley Centre on Comparative Equality and Anti-Discrimination. The question was on the arbitrary arrests. The questioner said we seem to live in a society where one acts first and seeks forgiveness later. This has become particularly true for public authorities acting in a politically motivated manner by detaining activists, academics, journalists and even politicians, including the chief ministers of opposition parties, he said.

According to him, all of these actions are taken with deep trust in the face of justice coming very slowly. In reply, Justice Chandrachud said the Supreme Court has been constantly trying to convey that part of the reason for it is that there is an inherent distrust in the institutions within the country. "I think it's important that we learn to trust people who may be in a hierarchical legal system, like much below, which are the trial courts. We have to encourage trial courts to be more receptive to the need for accommodating concerns of people who are seeking liberty," the CJI said. "Unfortunately, the problem today is this, that we look at any

grant of relief by trial judges with a degree of suspicion. That means that the trial judges increasingly are playing it safe, not granting bail on important issues of serious crimes," he explained. According to the CJI, judges have to look at the nitty-gritties and see the fine prints of each case. "You (judges) have to have a sense of robust common sense. Now, unless we, therefore, separate the grains from the chaff in criminal jurisprudence, it's very unlikely that we will have just solutions and to allow for decision makers to separate the grain from the chaff, it's important that we also place a great deal of trust," Justice Chandrachud noted.

Toddler dies after falling into pit in UP

PTI ■ BALLIA (UP)

In a tragic incident, an 18-month-old boy died after falling into a pit while playing here on Sunday afternoon, police said. According to the police, the incident happened in the Ghuri Baba Tola village under the Sikandarpur police station area, where Avyansh Yadav fell into a pit made for draining dirty water. SO Sikandarpur Dinesh Pathak said that Avyansh's mother Amrita made him sit in the courtyard and got busy in her daily routine. After some time, when Avyansh was not seen in the courtyard, she started searching for him, and found him fallen in the pit.

Prohibition of Child Marriage Act applies to all Indian citizens: HC

PTI ■ KOCHI

The Kerala High Court has ruled that the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006 is applicable to every citizen of this country irrespective of his or her religion as every Indian is a citizen first and then becomes a member of a religion. Justice PV Kunhikrishnan in a recent order on a petition to quash a case registered in 2012 in Palakkad against a child marriage, said irrespective of religion, whether a person is Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi etc., the Act is applicable to all. The petitioners, including the father of the then minor girl, contended before the court that being a Muslim she enjoys the religious right

to marry after attaining puberty, i.e., at the age of 15. "A person should be a citizen of India first, and thereafter only his religion comes. Religion is secondary and citizenship should come first. Therefore, I am of the considered opinion that, irrespective of religion, whether a person is Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Parsi etc., Act 2006 is applicable to all," the court said in its July 15 order. It observed that child marriages deny children their basic human rights, including the right to education, health and protection from exploitation and early marriages and pregnancy can lead to health problems such as infant mortality, maternal mortality and sexually transmitted



infections. "Child marriage often forces girls to drop out of school, limiting their education and future opportunities. Child brides are more vulnerable to domestic violence and abuse. Child marriage can perpetuate poverty and limit economic opportunities for individuals and communities. "Child marriage can lead to

emotional and psychological trauma, including depression and anxiety to the children. Child marriage can lead to social isolation and disconnection from the family and community. Moreover, child marriage is a violation of international human rights law and conventions as well," the court said in its 37-page order. An Integrated Child Development Scheme Officer (ICDS Officer) had lodged a complaint to the Vadakkanchery police about a child marriage that took place on December 30, 2012. The court said it was sad to hear that even after the enactment of the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act decades ago, there are allegations of Child Marriage

in Kerala. "The saddest thing is that the petitioners herein are trying to justify the alleged child marriage stating that as per Mohammedan Law, a Muslim girl enjoys a religious right to marry after attaining puberty irrespective of age, even though the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act apply to all the citizens of India without and beyond India," the judge said. The high court urged the society to let the children study, travel and enjoy their life according to their wishes and when they attained maturity, let them decide about their marriage. "In the modern society, there cannot be any compulsion for marriage. "Majority of the girls are

interested in studies. Let them study and let them enjoy their life, of course with the blessings of their parents. When they attain majority and decided that a partner is necessary in their life, let it happen at the appropriate stage so that child marriage can be eradicated from the society," the court said. It also suggested that the print and the visual media can play a significant role in raising awareness and prohibiting child marriages. "It is the duty of the print and visual media to publish articles highlighting the evils of child marriage, sharing stories of survivors and victims, creating awareness about the loss and consequences of child

marriage, promoting education and empowerment of girls and exposing perpetrators and their actions," the order read. The court also noted that the complaint against the child marriage was filed by a person from the Muslim community itself. "The same will show that every citizen of this country

PUBLIC NOTICE
Notice is hereby given that my client Satendra Kumar Sharma is in process to purchase the Flat bearing No. 386A, on Ground Floor (without roof rights), area measuring 70.8 sq. mtres, Situated in Shilpa Sub City-I, Situated at Residential colony Indrapuram Ghanshad, Tehsil & Dist. Ghatsbad, U.P. from Natasha Tiwari by availing loan from SIFIL, who inherited the same via Will dated 06.07.2020 executed by Chandra Tiwari (whereas Chandra Tiwari was purchased the same via Sale Deed. Transferee Deed dated 27.10.2017 executed by Namrata Mayyar), whereas he has lost following documents pertaining to the said property, an FIR has already been lodged for that on dated 21/7/24.
1. Original Allotment letter dated 12.09.2002.
2. Possession Letter dated 26.07.2005 issued by GDA & M/s Shilpa Estate Ltd. in favour of Arun Bhan.
3. Original Lease Deed dated 11.07.2005 executed by GDA & M/s Shilpa Estate Ltd. in favour of Arun Bhan. (Doc. No. 14494)
4. Original Sale Deed Cum Transfer Deed dated 26.07.2005 executed by Arunbhan in favour of Namrata Nayyar. (Doc. No. 15275)
All persons having any claim against or in respect of the said Property, or any part thereof, by way of sale, exchange, mortgage (equitable/registered or otherwise), gift, trust, inheritance, family arrangement, maintenance, bequest, partnership, possession, lease, sublease, tenancy, license, lien, charge, pledge, easement or otherwise whatsoever, are hereby requested to notify the same in writing to us with supporting documentary evidence at the address mentioned below within 7 days from the date hereof, failing which the claim or claims, if any, of such person or persons will be considered to have been waived and/or abandoned.
Kamal Kant Gupta (Advocate)
Unit No. FF-2, First floor, Mahatma Metro Tower
Sec-4, Vaishali, Gzb., U.P., Mob. 9811063351

Bihar Govt directs officials to expedite land transfer for AIIMS Darbhanga

PTI ■ PATNA

Two days after the Centre's nod for the construction of AIIMS in Bihar's Darbhanga district, the state government has directed officials concerned to complete the process of transfer and hand over the identified land on an urgent basis. Senior officials of all concerned departments have been asked to complete all required work, including transfer and hand over of the identified land to the Union Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, for construction of Darbhanga AIIMS on an urgent basis, Bihar Health minister, Mangal Pandey told PTI on Sunday. "The Centre has given its approval for the construction of Darbhanga AIIMS. It's a great gift by the Centre to Bihar. We thank PM Narendra Modi Ji and Union Health Minister J P Nadda Ji, for giving the nod for the construction of Darbhanga AIIMS. Under the leadership of our PM and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the work of improving medical facilities in the state has progressed at a rapid pace and it will continue



further...," said Pandey. "The state health department received a letter from the Centre on July 25 in this regard. Darbhanga AIIMS will be the second in the state after Patna AIIMS. This will lead to a massive expansion of Darbhanga town and its surrounding districts and will also create a lot of employment opportunities," said the state health minister. The Director of Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY) of the Union Health ministry in a letter dated July 25 to the Additional Chief Secretary, Bihar Health department, said, "This is to inform that on the recommendation of the central technical team, the competent authority has approved the establishment of AIIMS at Shobhan in Darbhanga. The team visited Darbhanga on March 18-19,

2024 to assess the feasibility and suitability of the site at Ekmi Shobhan in Darbhanga for the establishment of AIIMS there." The state government is requested to transfer and hand over the required encumbrance-free land to this ministry and initiate necessary action for the provision of permanent electricity connection of 20 MVA from two alternate sources. Besides, four-lane road connectivity and potable water supply of 1.5 MLD required for the establishment of Darbhanga AIIMS, according to the letter. Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD(U), NDA alliance partner expressed its happiness over the Centre's permission for the construction of Darbhanga AIIMS. In a post on X, JD(U) national

working president, Sanjay Kumar Jha, wrote, "Darbhanga AIIMS will be built in Shobhan itself, construction will start soon. For this approval, I express my heartfelt gratitude to the respected PM, Union Health Minister and CM Nitish Kumar, on my behalf and on behalf of all the people of Mithila region. The state government will soon transfer the entire land (more than 150 acres) to the Centre free of cost." "Along with this, the state government will also take necessary steps to arrange electricity and water supply at the site from its own resources and will provide four-lane connectivity to it. This will create employment opportunities in the area. The state government is also redeveloping the Darbhanga Medical College Hospital. A plan of Rs 2,742.04 crore is underway to build a new 2500-bed hospital there. "After the construction of both the super specialty hospitals, Darbhanga will become a major medical centre not only for North Bihar but also for Nepal," wrote Jha, who also shared the Centre's letter on the micro-blogging site.

Mizoram seeks special package from Centre to implement flagship programme



PTI ■ AIZAWL

Mizoram has requested a special financial package from the Centre to implement its flagship programme, 'Bana Kail' or 'Hand-holding' policy, an official from the Chief Minister's Office (CMO) said on Sunday. During the NITI Aayog meeting chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday, Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma announced that his government will implement the hand-holding policy to reduce economic disparity between urban and rural populations and generate more employment in the state, according to an official. The policy aims to address the availability of institutional credit, particularly microcredit, for agricultural and small industrial endeavours. The programme

will integrate various central government schemes and initiatives. The Mizoram government has allocated Rs 200 crore for the policy for the fiscal year 2024-25, in addition to a Rs 110 crore corpus fund for agricultural assurance. The policy focuses on empowering various sectors, including supporting farmers through the purchase of local agricultural or horticultural produce, food processing, marketing agricultural and allied products, promoting entrepreneurship and skill development, creating employment opportunities for youths, and boosting small-scale and agro-based industries. Horticulture, fisheries, veterinary and animal husbandry, and sericulture activities, which are vital for many in the state, will receive renewed attention under the hand-holding policy. During the NITI Aayog meeting, Lalduhoma noted that Mizoram faces high living and project costs due to its remote location. Despite these challenges, the state government is striving to match the development levels of other states through aggressive implementation of sustainable development goals.

DEBTS RECOVERY TRIBUNAL-2, CHANDIGARH
CA/24/2024
DRY CHANDIGARH-1
PUNJAB AND SIND BANK
MS ALKA ENTERPRISES THROUGH ITS PROPRIETOR MRS ALKA AND OTHERS
4. MR. ISHANT SHARMA SON OF SHRI KHEM CHAND RHO H. NO. 824E, HE COLONY SECTOR-21D, FARIDABAD HARYANA-121001, MOBILE NO. 971624195
SUMMONS
WHEREAS, CA/24/2024 was listed before Hon'ble Presiding Officer Registrar on 09/07/2024.
WHEREAS His Hon'ble Tribunal has issued summons/Notice on the said Application under section 19(4) of the Act. (SA) filed against the recovery of debts of Rs.252846/25/- (application along with copies of documents etc. annexed).
In accordance with sub-section (4) of section 19 of the Act, you, the defendants are directed as under:
1. To show cause within thirty days of the service of summons as to why relief prayed for should not be granted.
2. To disclose particulars of properties of assets other than properties and assets specified by the applicant under serial number 3A of the original application.
3. You are restrained from dealing with or disposing of secured assets or such other assets and properties disclosed under serial number 3A of the original application, pending hearing and disposal of the application for attachment of properties.
4. You shall not transfer by way of sale, lease or otherwise, except in the ordinary course of the business any of the assets over which security interest is created under serial number 3A of the original application without the prior approval of the Tribunal.
5. You shall be liable to account for the sale proceeds realized by sale of secured assets or other assets and properties in the ordinary course of business and disposal such sale proceeds in the account maintained with the bank of financial institutions holding security interest over such assets.
You are also directed to file the written statement with a copy thereof in the application and to appear before REGISTRAR on 11/10/2024 at 10:30 A.M. failing which the application shall be heard and decided in your absence.
Given under my hand and seal of this Tribunal on this date 11/07/2024.
Signature of the Officer Authorized to issue summons

Chief Engineer, Uttarakhand Rural Roads Development Agency
First Floor, Directorate of Panchayati Raj,
Opp-IT Park, Sahasthradhara Road, Dehradun
Ref. No. 670/11-02(xix)-2/ITCO/URRDA/24 Dated : 25-07-2024
PRADHAN MANTRI GRAM SADAK YOJANA (PMGSY) e-Procurement Notice- 05(Relaying Works)/2024-25
The Chief Engineer, URRDA on behalf of Governor of Uttarakhand invites the item rate bids in electronic tendering system for construction of works under Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana in the Districts of Chamoli & Pauri for 02 number of Packages with estimated cost totaling to **Rs. 1.77 Crore** including their maintenance for five years from the eligible contractors (Class-A and above) registered with PWD/CPWD or equivalent".
Date of release of Invitation for Bids through e-procurement: 27-07-2024.
Availability of Bid Documents and mode of submission: The bid documents are available online and should be submitted online in www.pmgstendersuk.gov.in. The bidder would be required to register in the web-site which is free of cost. For submission of the bids, the bidder is required to have Digital Signature Certificate (DSC) from one of the authorized Certifying Authorities.
The bidders are required to submit original affidavit regarding correctness of information furnished with bid document as per provisions of Clause 4.4 B (ii) of ITB with **CONCERNED CIRCLE OFFICES, mentioned in SBD, on a date not later than three working days after the opening of technical qualification part of the bid**, either by registered post or by hand, failing which the bids shall be declared non-responsive. No physical documents will be accepted after the closing date and time of submission of bids.
Last Date / Time for receipt of bids through e-procurement: **02-08-2024 01:00 PM.**
For further details please log on to www.pmgstendersuk.gov.in.
Chief Engineer, URRDA, Dehradun
* Non Registered bidders may submit bids, however, the successful bidders must get registered in appropriate class with appropriate authorities before signing the contract.
Note : For e-Procurement for any sort of queries 0135-2608125 number may be contacted 10:00 AM to 05:00 PM.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Enough is enough

The tragic deaths of three students in basement flooding is a repeat story of administrative apathy and negligence

The incident is both tragic and surreal. It is difficult to comprehend that three students could lose their lives in a coaching centre operated in a basement that gets flooded. In a heartbreaking incident that has once again spotlighted the glaring deficiencies in urban infrastructure and governance, three civil service aspirants tragically lost their lives due to flooding in a basement. This avoidable disaster raises serious questions about official apathy, the flouting of safety norms, and the recurring nature of such incidents. On a fateful evening, heavy rains lashed the city, overwhelming the already inadequate drainage systems. The basement, where the students were studying, was rapidly filled with water. Despite desperate attempts to escape, the rising water levels led to the tragic drowning of the three young lives. The basement, meant for commercial storage, was illegally converted into a coaching centre. With no proper ventilation, emergency exits, or drainage systems, it became a death trap during the downpour. This incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies.



The deaths of these students could have been prevented had there been stricter enforcement of building codes and timely maintenance of drainage systems. However, the incident has laid bare the apathy of the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. Residents in the area had repeatedly complained about the poor drainage and the illegal conversion of basements into living spaces. Despite these warnings, no significant action was taken. The inaction of municipal authorities and the lack of accountability have resulted in yet another tragedy. After the death of three students, it is time for the crocodile tears to flood on the social media. A big section of political class would rather do nothing but just be concerned about such incidents. Indeed it is the nexus between the local politicians, bureaucrats and business owners of dubious credentials to indulge in flouting the norms and make a fast buck. They do not mind playing with the lives of innocent people. The incident is not an isolated one, similar incidents have happened in the past. This is part of a disturbing pattern where safety norms are routinely flouted by the powerful. Illegal constructions, unauthorized conversions, and poor maintenance of infrastructure are rampant in many urban areas including the capital city. Builders and landlords often bypass regulations, compromising the safety of residents for profit. Such incidents are alarmingly frequent, each time highlighting the same issues of poor infrastructure, negligence, and lack of accountability. Despite the public outcry and media attention that follows each tragedy, there seems to be little systemic change. Again, a customary enquiry would be instituted which would give its report when the incident is all but forgotten from the public memory and we as a nation wait for another one to happen.

The incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies. The deaths of these students could have been prevented had there been stricter enforcement of building codes and timely maintenance of drainage systems. However, the incident has laid bare the apathy of the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety and well-being of citizens. Residents in the area had repeatedly complained about the poor drainage and the illegal conversion of basements into living spaces. Despite these warnings, no significant action was taken. The inaction of municipal authorities and the lack of accountability have resulted in yet another tragedy. After the death of three students, it is time for the crocodile tears to flood on the social media. A big section of political class would rather do nothing but just be concerned about such incidents. Indeed it is the nexus between the local politicians, bureaucrats and business owners of dubious credentials to indulge in flouting the norms and make a fast buck. They do not mind playing with the lives of innocent people. The incident is not an isolated one, similar incidents have happened in the past. This is part of a disturbing pattern where safety norms are routinely flouted by the powerful. Illegal constructions, unauthorized conversions, and poor maintenance of infrastructure are rampant in many urban areas including the capital city. Builders and landlords often bypass regulations, compromising the safety of residents for profit. Such incidents are alarmingly frequent, each time highlighting the same issues of poor infrastructure, negligence, and lack of accountability. Despite the public outcry and media attention that follows each tragedy, there seems to be little systemic change. Again, a customary enquiry would be instituted which would give its report when the incident is all but forgotten from the public memory and we as a nation wait for another one to happen.

PICTALK



Kanwariyas carry Ganga water during their pilgrimage in the holy month of 'Shravan', in Haridwar

Honour the unsung heroes of operation Pawan



R S SIDHU

The lack of public commemoration for the 1,171 soldiers killed in action during Operation Pawan in Sri Lanka highlights a troubling apathy

India's future path to greatness shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA during Operation 'Pawan' in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during inevitable future military confrontations. To recall Operation 'Pawan', the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) operation in Sri Lanka, was the largest joint services military operation conducted by India, in the 1971 War. It led to the establishment of Headquarters IPKF, a Corps-size tri-service organisation with nearly 100,000 troops from the three services under its command. Had the proposed Maritime Theatre Command been in existence, Operation 'Pawan' would have come under its ambit. The intensity of this 32-month-long 'politico-military peace keeping' operation, undertaken from 29th of July 1987 to 24th of March 1990, is best gauged from the gallantry awards won and casualties suffered by this force. 1172 Indian soldiers were Killed In Action (KIA), and more than 3500 soldiers suffered grievous injuries. The IPKF was awarded 1 Param Vir Chakra, 6 Maha Vir Chakras, 98 Vir Chakras and scores of other gallantry awards. The ghost of the political failure to see through to the end of its first geopolitical foray in near abroad continues to impact Indian policy establishment even in the present times.



As of now, against the backdrop of a sustained Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, India is struggling to adopt a coherent strategy to deal with the continued intransigence by the Sri Lanka Government to implement the political solution of devolution to the Tamils enshrined in the Indian Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) of 29th of July 1987. India is bound to invite hostility from the dominant geopolitical forces in its neighbourhood. This will mandate it to be prepared for Out-of-area military operations to secure its economic and geopolitical interests. India's future path to greatness therefore shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during the inevitable future military confrontations. The Government is very vocal in pronouncing its nationalist credentials but sluggish in putting money into building deterrent capabilities. Last week's defence budget was a green signal for China to race even further ahead under the illusion there will be no war. Still, policy pronouncements are not enough unless backed by a revitalised and reorganised military competent to safeguard its economic interests, all aspirational talk is mere rhetoric. Building National War Memorials is one thing; honouring the fallen braves appropriately is quite another matter regardless of the outcome because victory or defeat on the battlefield is never complete unless it is surrendered as in 1971. This is where the IPKF comes into the picture because it was not permitted to complete its military mission. Its contribution to the preservation of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity is fully acknowledged; in Colombo especially. New Delhi must honour its sacrifices on 29 July as a tribute to



THERE IS ANGST AGAINST THE INJUSTICE OF THE GOVERNMENT AND THE ARMED FORCES NOT OFFICIALLY COMMEMORATING THE IPKF OPERATIONS AT THE NWM AS IS DONE FOR THE 1971 AND KARGIL WARS

the valour of the fallen brave. The political parameters of the ISLA had been achieved by the IPKF by December 1988. The ethnic Sri Lanka Tamil predominant Northern and Eastern Provinces were amalgamated into a unitary Northeastern Province, general elections to the North East Provincial Council were successfully conducted, with a duly elected EPRLF-led government sworn in. Had the IPKF stay been extended to tame the LTTE, the military mission could have created conditions for implementing a political solution short of Elam. This would have secured national interest, but the new Indian government should not have endorsed the new Sri Lankan government's demand to withdraw IPKF from the island in August 1989. Ascribing the failure of ISLA to IPKF, which was just a corollary to ISLA, is unfair. The failures lay in the diplomatic and government policy, which the establishment wishes to cover up by laying the blame at the doorstep of its military. The ISLA had weak foundations. The contingency of Sri Lanka and LTTE renegeing on the ISLA was not thought through. The withdrawal of IPKF left India without decisive influence to oversee the implementation of the promised political package by Sri Lanka to remove the discriminatory state practices

against its ethnic Tamil minority, impacting Indian policy towards Sri Lanka even in the present. The provision of weapons and allied support by R&AW to the LTTE even when militarily engaged against IPKF and the availability of physical infrastructure support to LTTE in Tamil Nadu, was against national interests. Similar primacy to political interests can be sensed by the refusal of the Indian state to commemorate KIA of Operation 'Pawan.' There is angst against the injustice of the government and the armed forces not officially commemorating the IPKF operations at the NWM as is done for the 1971 and Kargil wars. Graves of some of the Indian soldiers killed during Operation 'Pawan' are still in Sri Lanka. It is hard to understand the dichotomy of the Indian leadership, both political and military, paying public tributes at the IPKF war memorial in Colombo, in the heart of Sri Lanka, but failing to honour those KIA during Operation 'Pawan,' at the NWM at New Delhi. The IPKF war veterans are ever hopeful that the Govt will realise the injustice and consent to a befitting annual national homage to 1171 of its Bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice during 'Operation Pawan.' (The writer won Sena Medal in an Operation 'Pawan' veteran; he is strategic thinker, and author; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM MODI'S WARNING TO PAKISTAN

Madam — This refers to the report "Modi warns Pak on terrorism," The Pioneer, Jul 27. PM Narendra Modi, while addressing the 25th Kargil Diwas celebrations, has warned Pakistan against continuing its futile policy breeding and sponsoring cross-border terror. Both the message and the timing were perfect. PM Modi has given voice to the frustrations of most Indians, and was echoing the viewpoint of the entire Indian polity and the Parliament by expressing the national consensus that Kashmir belongs to India. No policy of terror or initiation of war-like action will ever deter India as his clear pronouncement. He also reflected our national resolve strongly that India would not think twice about doing all it takes to protect its territory and people. Nevertheless, as Mr Modi rightly said, Pakistan has not learnt its lessons. It continues to wage war in the garb of terrorism and proxy wars. And it still continues to be a sanctuary for anti-India terrorists, if the recent surge in attacks in Jammu is any indication. Indian leaders have time and again sought to mend relations with Pakistan and have made genuine overtures for peace. But each time we have received only deceit and backstabbing in return. In the last 25 years, the differential between India and Pakistan in terms of economic prosperity and global reputation has sharply widened. But Pakistan has still not grown out of its desire to be hyphenated with India and is, in the process, only harming its own people.

N Sadhasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

EMPOWERING MINERAL RICH STATES

Madam — Due to historic verdict on mining royalty and taxes now the state government is empowered to levy taxes on mining companies and due to this reason concerning States will be hugely benefited and the financial state of these States will be improved, and it is due to a landmark judgment on July 25, a nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court which upheld the right of States to levy taxes on mining activities, recognizing that 'royalty' and

The historic rise of women leaders



If Kamala Harris wins, she will become the first woman President of the USA. If Donald Trump wins, he will become the second president to serve non-consecutive terms (45th and 47th), following Grover Cleveland, who was the 22nd and 24th president. Franklin D. Roosevelt is the only U.S. president to have served three terms. Whether anyone will surpass that record remains a long-term puzzle. All eyes will be on

November 5th, 2024, ballot day in the USA. As of July 27, 2024, 29 nations around the world have women as heads of state or government (Presidents or Prime Ministers).

The history of women heads of state and government is fascinating. The world's first woman president was Maria Estela 'Isabel' Peron of Argentina (1974 to 1976). The first elected woman Prime Minister was Sirimavo Bandaranaike of Sri Lanka in 1960, who served three terms. In the 1970s, three women Prime Ministers—Bandaranaike (Sri Lanka), Indira Gandhi (India), and Golda Meir (Israel)—were known as the "Iron Ladies Trio." Later, Margaret Thatcher, the "Iron Lady No. 4," became the Prime Minister of the UK.

P V Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

'taxation' are different recognizing both as separate. In the case of Mineral Area Development Authority vs Steel Authority of India, the nine-judge constitution bench of the Supreme Court gave this decision in an 8:1 split. Eight judges including Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud voted in favor of this decision while Justice B V Nagarathana disagreed. The decision, pending for more than 25 years, finally clarifies that States can levy additional taxes on mining activities and land used for such purposes.

The decision is a significant development in empowering States to generate more revenue, which can be used to meet local needs and mitigate the adverse effects of mining. The distinction between royalties and taxes was at the centre of the court's decision. Royalties are payments made by mining leaseholders to the lessee on the basis of a specific agreement as stipulated under Section 9 of the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 (MMDRA). These payments are made in exchange for the right to extract minerals and are thus seen as compensation for the

use of land and resources. Taxes, on the other hand, are more commonly imposed by governments and used to fund public services and infrastructure.

Yash Pal Raihan | Jalandhar

MODI'S OLIVE BRANCH TO RSS

Madam — In the lead-up to its 100th year, Narendra Modi just gave a birthday gift to the RSS. Amidst speculations of a deepening rift between the RSS and the Modi-Shah-controlled BJP, the NDA government withdrew the order dated 1966 that prohibits government employees from participating in RSS activities.

Is this an olive branch, considering the inexplicable statement made by J P Nadda, almost declaring independence from the RSS in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections? This comes on top of several grants and appointments going to people and organisations belonging to or close to the RSS.

C K Ramanathan | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

How generative AI is transforming the workplace



ACHAL KHANNA

The rapid advancements in generative AI are revolutionising the workplace, reshaping job roles, and redefining the future of work

Automation has been at the core of human evolution since the beginning of time. Humans have always sought out ways to make their jobs faster and easier. From physical labour to mechanized tools and now artificial intelligence, the unprecedented rate at which this sector has evolved has been transformative. With every upgrade, the next set of expectations is demanded immediately. This leads us to the conclusion that the future of work is NOT in the future; it is NOW!



However, historical precedents show that technological advancements tend to transform rather than displace jobs. AI is no different. It will change how we work, introducing new methods and enhancing collaboration between humans and machines. According to a report by SHRM and The Burning Glass Institute on Generative Artificial Intelligence and the Workforce, the impact of Gen AI will be less about automation and more about augmenting workers' productivity and effectiveness. According to a Global Report by Thomson Reuters, 77% of professionals believe AI will significantly impact their work within the next five years.

The 'War for Talent' Will Be Fought on Newer Terrains: The traditional paradigms of skills and talent acquisition

are evolving rapidly. Organizations must look beyond conventional talent pools to find the right candidates.

Competitive Edge through Generative AI: A growing number of organizations are already incorporating generative AI into their HR processes, and many are exploring its potential in other functions. Organizations have already introduced the use of Generative AI in their HR processes, and many organizations are exploring possible uses.

Human Creativity: The Ultimate Differentiator As generative AI becomes more accessible, human creativity and ingenuity will become even more valuable. While AI can process data and provide insights, it is human attributes such as creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking that will set organizations apart. The ability to connect disparate ideas and develop innovative solutions beyond AI's capabilities will be crucial. Human ingenuity will be the key differentiator in a world where AI is a common tool. The case for Reverse

Augmentation AI's potential is best realized when combined with human intelligence (HI). This synergy enables more effective and differentiated applications of AI, resulting in higher return on investments. By leveraging the strengths of both AI and HI, organizations can achieve superior outcomes and drive innovation. **Investing in Leadership Development:** As generative AI enhances operational efficiencies, the focus on developing leadership talent will become increasingly important. Leadership development will require targeted investments to ensure they are equipped to navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing environment. Organizations must prioritize investments in both technology and human capability development to remain competitive. Organizations must stay agile, continuously adapting to the changes brought about by AI. The foresight to navigate these changes will be the key to sustaining growth and achieving long-term success. (The writer is CEO SHRM India, APAPC and MENA; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

A PATH TO PERSONAL LIBERATION

With unwavering determination and faith, one can conquer even the most persistent habits



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

We are what we repeatedly do, said Aristotle... If we have a look at the dictionary meaning of habit, then it says 'something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.' To define it simply, habits can be described as involuntary actions. They are a kind of 'automatic behaviour' as it were, for one does not do them after much thought. There is no doubt in it that almost everyone in this world has one or other bad habit. Don't we all have? Like, many people have the bad habit of smoking. But, if you tell them that it is a bad habit, some of them will bring in a little bit of philosophy and some would try to support it with medical opinion also.

They will say, "Smoking is very exhilarating. It is good for my brain because it brings me concentration." Others will say, "Smoking keeps my bowels free." Others still will confess that it is a bad habit that they find hard to give up. Little do most people realise that it is a bad habit that pollutes their physical system and the atmosphere and causes diseases like cancer. Similarly, some people have the habit of talking too much. They just can't keep quiet even for a couple of minutes. Little do these people realise that much breath and energy is wasted on useless talk.

This could usefully be spent in silent meditation. But the problem is that he who talks and talks is, today, considered as a smart, clever and wise person, and a person who talks less is thought to be lacking in general knowledge or to be deficient in the art of conversation! Such examples of bad habits can be multiplied, but, what we need to understand from these examples is that, in most cases, people do not realise that it is a bad or a harmful habit and where this truth is realised, there isn't the strong desire to get freed from its grip and that is why some people philosophically say; This habit of mine will die only when I die.

So what is the solution to get over one's bad habits? Is it practically possible? Yes! With a little effort and attention, it is indeed possible. To start with one needs great enthusiasm which is very essential for leaving bad habits. There is a well-known proverb in English: "Well-begun is half done". So, after realising that the habit which you have decided to give up is



really bad, you should put up a brave and enthusiastic fight against this evil. From the very outset, call forth all your latent energies not only to cut its root and branch but also to destroy its seed, for if the seed remains, the tree is likely to grow up again. When a house is on fire, how promptly and energetically the inmates react? At that time, they are fully concentrated and they use all the means to extinguish the fire.

Put your resolve into action immediately. Secondly, remove the words 'impossible', 'difficult', 'I cannot' etc. from your mind. These are the expressions of a weakling or a timid person. Cheer yourself up. Realize the truth that the evil habit is your own creation, you have given birth to it and nourished it to bring its growth and now you should not say with a weak will that it is difficult to control it.

Always remember! habits are not your original nature; they are your second nature. You have acquired them and you say that you cannot give them up? You are their Master and you believe yourself to be their slave? 'Faith, it has been rightly said, "can move mountains and this your habit is only a molehill. Therefore, rise and take up the bow of endeavour and become an instrument to the Divine to shoot this devil—your bad habit—for, God is with you as He always is on the side of the virtuous. But, remember! A mere wish or desire to eradicate evil is not enough. You must have pure and strong will besides a definite aim and purpose. Wish or desire is a small, temporary ripple in the lake of mind but Will is the power that executes the desire to fulfilment. There is nothing impossible for a man of strong willpower to achieve. So let's make a resolve that we will liberate ourselves in the true sense.

(The writer is a spiritual educator and a popular columnist views are personal)

Budget is pro-growth but stability concern remains



UTTAM GUPTA

Major expenditure items may go out of control, raising concerns about the budget's feasibility; moreover, the Government's gross tax revenue target of Rs 38.40 lakh crore is overly ambitious



On top of a GDP (gross domestic product) growth of 8 per cent plus for three consecutive years, the Union Budget for FY 2024-25 presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on July 23, 2024, has all the ingredients to sustain the momentum during the current year as well. For the current year, she has proposed capital expenditure at Rs 111,111 crore, which is 17 per cent higher than the revised estimate (RE) for FY 2023-24. In her Budget for 2019-20, she had laid a roadmap for catapulting the Indian economy to US\$5 trillion by 2024-25. In sync with this target, she had projected an investment requirement of over Rs 100 lakh crore to build the infrastructure over five years.

Out of this, 39 per cent or Rs 39,00,000 crore was to come from the Centre and states each and the balance was Rs 22,00,000 crore from the private sector. The Centre's capital spend during the previous four years was 2020-21: Rs 439,000 crore; 2021-22: Rs 554,000 crore; 2022-23: Rs 750,000 crore; 2023-24: Rs 1000,961 crore. This adds up to Rs 2700,000 crore. Add to this Rs 111,111 crore for 2024-25, the total over five years comes to Rs 3800,000 crore which is more or less close to the amount the Centre intended to contribute. The Central government has also been helping the states to boost their capital spend. During 2022-23, it provided them with 50-year Rs 100,000 crore interest-free loans. During 2023-24, such transfers were Rs 130,000 crore. For the current year, the transfers are kept at Rs 150,000 crore.

To promote investment in the private sector, the Centre has reduced the corporate tax rate to 15 per cent for new manufacturing enterprises and 22 per cent for existing enterprises. In this year's budget, the corporate tax rate on foreign firms has been reduced from extant 40 per cent to 35 per cent. With this and assuming that private consumption/demand remains strong (a relief of around Rs 17,500/- in personal income tax or PIT resulting from the change in tax slabs under the New IT regime and increase in a standard deduction by Rs 25,000/- will give some boost) besides exports getting a leg up, courtesy



THE GROSS TAX REVENUE TARGET OF RS 3840,000 CRORE IS OVER-AMBITIOUS AND THE BUDGET ASSUMES RECEIPTS OF RS 50,000 CRORE FROM DISINVESTMENT OF GOVERNMENT SHARES IN PSUs, A PROGRAM IT HAS DECIDED NOT TO PURSUE. EVEN MAJOR EXPENDITURE ITEMS COULD GET OUT OF CONTROL

rebound in the US economy, India could achieve growth even higher than 6.5-7 per cent projected in the Economic Survey for 2023-24. But, there is a flip side to it. This has to do with the fiscal deficit or FD (excess of total expenditure over total receipts). Sitharaman has set it at 4.9 per cent of the GDP which is 0.2 per cent less than a target of 5.1 per cent fixed in the interim budget. This has been made possible due to a mammoth dividend transfer of Rs 210,000 crore by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) to the Central Government from its operations during the FY 2023-24 which is Rs 130,000 crore higher than the provision of Rs 80,000 crore made in the interim budget. It won't be easy to achieve the 4.9 per cent target during the current year. This is because the gross tax revenue (GTR) target of Rs 3840,000 crore is over-ambitious and the budget assumes receipts of Rs 50,000 crore from disinvestment of government shares in PSUs, a program it has decided not to pursue. Even major expenditure items could get out of control as the year progresses.

For instance, the 'fertilizer subsidy' is budgeted at Rs 164,000 crore during 2024-25. This is based on the assumption that the declining trend in the international price of fertilizers and raw materials used in their production seen during 2023-24 continues during the current year as well. It takes a small disruption in the global supply chain (given the current highly uncertain geo-political situation, this is quite likely), for this assumption to go haywire. That apart, to go down from 4.9 per cent to 4.5 per cent next year set by the FM her 2021-22 budget (this by itself is far more generous than FD of 3 per cent that was to be achieved in 2020-21 as per the amendment to the FRBM Act, 2018) can be daunting, all the more when the

RBI is unlikely to repeat its bonanza/gift to the Centre. During an interactive with the press, Sitharaman alluded to the Centre's plan to design fiscal trajectory in a manner such that from FY 2026-27 onward, its debt to GDP ratio starts declining. Sans target setting, this may not instil confidence. Yet, she won't set the target as these are often missed. The Centre's debt-to-GDP ratio is currently around 57 per cent against the 40 per cent mandated for 2024-25 under the FRBM Amendment Act (2018).

Meanwhile, to address the concerns on employment, MSMEs (micro, small and medium enterprises) and agriculture, the budget has proposed several initiatives. For MSMEs, it proposes a new credit guarantee scheme to facilitate term loans to enable them to purchase machinery and equipment without requiring collateral or third-party guarantees (a self-financing guarantee fund is mooted that could provide each applicant with guarantee coverage of up to Rs 100 crore); increase in the limit of Mudra (Micro Units Development Refinance Agency, a subsidiary of SIDBI) loans to Rs 2000,000 for those who have repaid previous loans; expanding SIDBI branches to provide the much-needed access to credit and additional support for further growth.

The initiatives on employment all aligned to the EPFO (Employees Provident Fund Organization) enrollments include Scheme A: a one-month wage payout of up to Rs. 15,000 per month (payable in three instalments) to first-timers in the workforce, with all formal sectors with an eligibility limit of a salary of Rs 100,000 per month. Scheme B: meant for creating 'additional' jobs in the manufacturing sector linked to first-time employees; it includes an incentive to employees and employers con-

cerning EPFO in the first 4 years of employment.

These schemes are expected to benefit 240 lakh youth. Scheme C meant support to employers to enable them to give additional employment in all sectors for those earning up to Rs 100,000 per month. The government will reimburse employers up to Rs. 3000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution for each additional employee. This Scheme will benefit 50 lakh persons. To make the youth employable, Sitharaman has announced a new centrally sponsored scheme for skilling in collaboration with States and industry. 2000,000 youth will be skilled over five years under this scheme. One thousand industrial training institutes (ITIs) will be upgraded in the hub and spoke arrangement, with course content aligned to the skill needs of the industry. In agriculture, the measures include initiating 10 million farmers into natural farming in the next two years; releasing 109 climate-resilient new seed varieties across 32 field and horticulture crops in the next 100 days; Jan Samarth-based Kisan Credit Card in five States to give a boost to shrimp farming and export; launch a national cooperation policy; digital public infrastructure (DPI) to create a registry of 60 million farmers with the details of their land over the next three years; developing large-scale vegetable clusters closer to major consumption centres; promoting FPOs, cooperatives and start-ups for vegetable supply chains; pursuing the mission for pulses and oilseeds production etc. All the above announcements sound like the proverbial 'Many a slip between the cup and the lip'. For instance, on employment, Sitharaman clarified 'the government can only nudge private firms.'

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

Flying towards sustainability: The aviation industry's tryst with carbon neutrality

Through technological innovation and green solutions like adoption of sustainable aviation fuel, the aviation sector is becoming environment friendly

The global aviation industry is undeniably a significant contributor to carbon emissions, accounting for about 2.5-3.0% of the world's carbon output. Recognising this impact, initiatives like IATA's "Fly Net Zero" are crucial steps towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Airlines are actively pursuing various strategies to reduce their environmental footprint, with fleet modernization being a cornerstone. One key pillar of the industry's sustainability strategy is investment in a modern, fuel-efficient fleet. Jazeera Airways, for instance, has invested in the Airbus A320 neo aircraft, known for its 20% reduction in fuel consumption and emissions. The



ROMANA PARVI

airline was also the first to order over 2000 of the world's lightest aircraft seats from Explesiat. These seats will contribute to a weight saving of 1.2 metric tons per aircraft resulting in enhanced fuel efficiency and reduced emissions per flight. Beyond fleet upgrades, airlines are implementing carbon offsetting programs as part of their sustainability efforts. These programs allow passengers to mitigate the environmental

impact of their air travel by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Jazeera Airways' carbon offsetting initiatives specifically support projects in renewable energy and reforestation, allowing passengers to contribute to environmental conservation efforts directly linked to their flights.

Technological innovation also plays a pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and passenger experience. Airlines are increasingly adopting digital solutions such as paperless ticketing, digital baggage tracking, and personalized sustainable travel options. These technologies not only streamline operations but also minimize waste and carbon emissions associ-

ated with traditional paper-based processes. Addressing plastic waste is another important aspect of the industry's sustainability efforts. Airlines are replacing single-use plastics with biodegradable alternatives and exploring sustainable options like Palmade products made from palm leaves. Energy efficiency is another critical focus area for airlines, extending to both aircraft operations and airport infrastructure. State-of-the-art airport terminals are designed with sustainability in mind, incorporating energy-efficient lighting, climate control systems, and renewable energy sources.

The airline industry is actively leading the way towards a more sustainable future for air



travel, setting a precedent for environmentally responsible practices that extend beyond its operations. The adoption of CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation) marks a substantial advancement in its commitment to mitigating environmental impact and combat-

ing climate change. CORSIA ensures that international aviation contributes to global efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while continuing to support global connectivity and economic growth. Additionally, the development and adoption of Sustainable Aviation Fuel (SAF) and the utilization of

advanced software solutions like those offered by NAVBLUE are critical milestones in the airline industry's efforts to achieve net-zero emissions and address climate change.

Achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 requires collaboration among airlines, governments, and passengers. Through ongoing innovation, investment in sustainable technologies like SAF, reduction of plastic waste, and improvements in operational efficiency, the aviation industry is actively leading the way towards a more environmentally friendly future for air travel. These efforts not only aim to reduce the industry's carbon footprint but also set a precedent for sustainable practices

that can inspire broader global initiatives beyond aviation.

Aviation industry today is dedicated to collaborating closely with partners, passengers, and communities to foster a greener and more sustainable future for air travel. This commitment drives us to innovate and implement initiatives that reduce our environmental footprint, promote sustainable practices, and contribute positively to the global effort against climate change.

Together with our stakeholders, we aim to lead by example and inspire lasting change in the aviation industry and beyond.

(The writer is regional manager South Asia - Jazeera Airways; views are personal)

Strike in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights kills at least 12

Landslide in China kills 15, injures 6

AP ■ TEL AVIV

A rocket strike on Saturday at a soccer field killed at least 12 children and teens, Israeli authorities said, in the deadliest strike on an Israeli target along the country's northern border since the fighting between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah began. It raised fears of a broader regional war. Israel blamed Hezbollah for the strike in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, but Hezbollah rushed to deny any role. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned that Hezbollah "will pay a heavy price for this attack, one that it has not paid so far". The Israeli military's chief spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, called it the deadliest attack on Israeli civilians since the Hamas attack on October 7 that sparked the war in Gaza. He said 20 others were wounded. "There is no doubt that Hezbollah has crossed all the red lines here, and the



A boy walks past bicycles left next to the area that was hit by a rocket on a soccer field in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, in the Israeli-annexed Golan Heights, Saturday, July 27, 2024. A rocket strike Saturday at a soccer field killed at least 11 children and teens, Israeli authorities said, in the deadliest strike on an Israeli target along the country's northern border since the fighting between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah began. It raised fears of a broader regional war. AP/PTI

response will reflect that," Katz told Israeli Channel 12. "We are nearing the moment in which we face an all-out war."

Hezbollah chief spokesman Mohammed Afif told The Associated Press that the group "categorically denies carrying out an attack" on the town of Majdal Shams. It is unusual for Hezbollah to deny an attack. The office of Netanyahu, who was on a visit to the United States, said he would cut short his trip by several hours, without specifying when he would return. It said he will convene the security Cabinet after arriving. Far-right members of Netanyahu's government called for a harsh response against Hezbollah. But an all-out war with a militant group with far superior firepower to Hamas would be trying for Israel's military after nearly 10 months of fighting in Gaza. Footage aired on Israeli Channel 12 showed a large blast in one of the valleys in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, in the Golan Heights, which Israel captured from Syria in the 1967 Mideast war and annexed in 1981. Some Druze have Israeli citizenship. Many

still have sympathies for Syria and rejected Israeli annexation, but their ties with Israeli society have grown over the years. Video showed paramedics rushing stretchers off the soccer field toward waiting ambulances. Ha'il Mahmoud, a resident, told Channel 12 that children were playing soccer when the rocket hit the field. He said a siren was heard seconds before the rocket hit, but there was no time to take shelter. Jihan Sfadi, the principal of an elementary school, told Channel 12 that five students were among the dead: "The situation here is very difficult. Parents are crying, people are screaming outside. No one can digest what has happened." Israel's military said its analysis showed that the rocket was launched from an area north of the village of Chebaa in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military said early Sunday that it struck targets deep inside Lebanon as well as in southern Lebanon. There

were no reports of casualties and the strikes were no more intense than what has become routine over the past 10 months. The strike at the soccer field, just before sunset, followed earlier cross-border violence on Saturday, when Hezbollah said three of its fighters were killed, without specifying where. Israel's military said its air force targeted a Hezbollah arms depot in the border village of Kfar Kila, adding that militants were inside at the time. Hezbollah said its fighters carried out 10 different attacks using rockets and explosive drones against Israeli military posts, the last of which targeted the army command of the Haramoun Brigade in Maaaleh Golani with Katyusha rockets. In a separate statement, Hezbollah said it hit the same army post with a short-range Falqah rocket. It said the attacks were in response to Israeli airstrikes on villages in southern Lebanon.

Beijing (PTI): A landslide caused by heavy rains from a tropical storm hit a house in central China's Hunan on Sunday, killing 15 people and injuring six others. The provincial emergency command centre said the landslide hit Yuelin village in Hengyang city at about 8 am. It washed away part of a residential house, burying 18 people. Fifteen people were killed and six others injured in the landslide, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported. The landslide was reportedly caused by flash flooding on a mountain. The injured have been taken to hospital. Over 300 rescuers have been dispatched and rescue efforts have concluded, the report said. China has suffered a summer of extreme weather, with flash floods in the north and southwest.

US-Japan security talks focus on bolstering military cooperation

AP ■ TOKYO

Japanese and US defence chiefs and top diplomats agreed to further bolster their military cooperation by upgrading the command and control of US forces in the East Asian country and strengthening American-licensed missile production there, describing the rising threat from China as "the greatest strategic challenge". US Forces Japan headquartered in Yokota in the western suburbs of Tokyo, tasked with managing their bases, has no commanding authority. Instead, instructions come from the US Indo-Pacific Command in Hawaii. The plans will give the USFJ greater capability while still reporting to INDOPACOM. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin joined their Japanese counterparts, Yoko Kamikawa and Minoru Kihara, at the Japan-US Security Consultative Committee in Tokyo, known as "2+2" security talks where they reaffirmed their bilateral alliance following President Joe Biden's withdrawal from the November presiden-

tial race. "We are standing at a historic turning point as the rules-based, free and open international order is shaken to the core," Kamikawa said. "Now is a critical phase when our decision today determines our future." Austin, in his opening remarks, said China is "engaging in coercive behaviour, trying to change the status quo in the East and South China Seas, around Taiwan and throughout the region", adding that North Korea's nuclear program and its deepening cooperation with Russia "threaten regional and global security". In the joint statement issued after the talks, the ministers said China's foreign policy "seeks to reshape the international order for its own benefit at the expense of others" and that "such behaviour is a serious concern to the alliance and the entire international community and represents the greatest strategic challenge in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond". China has been at odds with many countries in the Asia-Pacific for years because of its sweeping maritime claims

over the crucial South China Sea. It also claims self-governing Taiwan as its territory, to be annexed by force if necessary. In March, Beijing announced a 7.2 per cent increase in its defense budget, already the world's second-highest behind the United States, marking a massive military expansion. The ministers said the US command reorganisation, set for March to be in line with Japan's own command updating, aimed "to facilitate deeper interoperability and cooperation on joint bilateral operations in peacetime and during contingencies" and enhance intelligence coordination, surveillance, reconnaissance and cybersecurity. Japan has long suffered from cybersecurity threats that Washington believes are of grave concern. Lately, Japan's space agency revealed it suffered a series of cyberattacks, and though sensitive information related to space and defence was not affected, it has triggered worry and pushed the agency to pursue preventative measures. The ministers in a joint statement reaffirmed the US commitment to "extended deter-

rence", which includes atomic weapons — a shift from Japan's earlier reluctance to openly discuss the sensitive issue, as the world's only country to have suffered atomic attacks, amid nuclear threats from Russia and China. Japan has been accelerating its military buildup and has increased joint operations with the US as well as South Korea while trying to strengthen its largely domestic defense industry. Tokyo has significantly eased its arms export restrictions and in December accommodated a US request for shipment of surface-to-air PAC-3 missile interceptors produced in Japan under an American license to replenish US inventories, which have decreased due to its support for Ukraine. The ministers said they will pursue efforts to expand Japanese production of PAC-3 interceptors for export to the United States, as well as co-production of Advanced Medium-Range Air-to-Air Missiles to meet "critical demand" for such systems to be ready when needed "to deter aggression".

Ultra-liberal Kamala Harris will deliver crime, chaos, mayhem and death to US: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Kamala Harris will deliver crime, chaos, mayhem, and death to the US, Donald Trump has said, intensifying his attacks on his Democratic rival as the 2024 presidential election campaign entered a critical final 100 day stretch. Vice President Harris, 59, is the new presidential candidate of the Democratic party after incumbent President Joe Biden, 81, withdrew from the race. Trump, a former US president and the 2024 Republican presidential candidate, painted his new chief rival, Harris, as worse than President Biden at a rally in Minnesota on Saturday along with his running mate Senator JD Vance. "Ultra-liberal Kamala Harris will deliver crime, chaos, mayhem, and death to our country. I will restore law and order, justice in America," Trump, 78, said. Trump said on his very first day back in the White House, that he would terminate every single open border policy of the Biden-Harris Administration. "And we will seal the border

'Biden's exit from 2024 race was a coup'

Washington (PTI) Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said incumbent US President Joe Biden was forced to exit the presidential race, describing it a "coup" by the Democratic Party. The former president's remarks came during an election rally in Minnesota on Saturday. "This was really a coup of and by the Democrats. This was a coup of a man that had 14 million votes. He wanted to run. They wouldn't let him run. They treated him horribly. They said to him, we can do it the nice way, or we can do it the hard way. To Joe, he's president," Trump claimed. This was a coup with the presidency, he said. "They threatened him with the 25th Amendment. They said, Joe, we're going to threaten you with the 25th Amendment. You're cognitively and physically a mess. And if you don't get out, we're going to take you out with

the 25th Amendment," Trump, 78, alleged. The 25th Amendment of the US Constitution was passed by Congress to determine the presidential succession after the assassination of former President John F Kennedy. It also gives power to the vice president as well as the Cabinet to remove a president from office if they are deemed physically incapable. "And he said, I'll go. And then the fake news said, oh, he was so brave. He was so brave. No, he was forced to leave," Trump claimed. Biden, 81, on July 20 announced his decision to withdraw from the 2024 presidential elections and endorsed Kamala Harris as Democratic Presidential nominee. This followed a series of fast-moving developments after his disastrous debate performance in Atlanta on June 27 and a failed assassination attempt on Trump.

and we will stop the horrible invasion into our country... No person in American politics has been more of an open border zealot than Border Czar Harris," he said. He slammed Harris' political record, saying that she "destroyed San Francisco" as county district attorney. "Kamala Harris was the original Marxist district attorney. She destroyed San Francisco and she will destroy our country," he alleged. "This November, the American people are going to reject Kamala Harris's crazy liberal extremism in a massive landslide... We're not going to let her turn the United States into communist San Francisco," he said. "Harris is so extreme and unbridled that she has even declared the terms 'illegal alien' and 'radical Islamic terrorism' to be forbidden and unacceptable," he alleged. Describing her as a "radical left lunatic," Trump alleged that Harris is "the most incompetent, unpopular, and far-left vice president in American history, probably the most far-left person in American history."

UK is 'broke and broken', new govt says

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's new left-leaning government said Sunday that the nation is "broke and broken", blaming the situation on its predecessors ahead of a major speech on the state of the public finances that is widely expected to lay the groundwork for higher taxes. In a sweeping assessment three weeks after taking power, Prime Minister Keir Starmer's office professed shock at the situation they inherited after 14 years of Conservative Party rule, while releasing a department-by-department analysis of the perceived failures of the previous government. The critique comes a day before Treasury chief Rachel Reeves is expected to outline a 20-billion-pound (\$26 billion) shortfall in public finances during a speech to the House of Commons. "We will not shy away from being honest with the public about the reality of what we have inherited," Pat McCadden, a senior member



of the new Cabinet, said in a statement. "We are calling time on the false promises that British people have had to put up with and we will do what it takes to fix Britain." Starmer's Labour Party won a landslide election victory earlier this month following a campaign in which critics accused both major parties of a "conspiracy of silence" over the scale of the financial challenges facing the next government. Labour pledged during the campaign that it wouldn't raise taxes on "working peo-

ple," saying its policies would deliver faster economic growth and generate the additional revenue needed by the government. The Conservatives, meanwhile, promised further tax cuts in the autumn if they were returned to office. As proof that the previous government wasn't honest about the challenges facing the country, Starmer's office pointed to recent comments from former Treasury chief Jeremy Hunt confirming that he wouldn't have been able to cut taxes this year if the Conservatives had been returned to power. Those comments came in an interview with the BBC in which Hunt also accused Labour of exaggerating the situation to justify raising taxes now that they've won the election. "The reason we're getting all this spin about this terrible economic inheritance is because Labour wants to raise taxes," Hunt said on July 21. "If they wanted to raise taxes, all the numbers were crystal clear before the election... They

should have levelled with the British public." The government on Sunday released an overview of the spending assessment Reeves commissioned shortly after taking office. She will deliver the complete report to Parliament on Monday. Those findings led the new government to accuse the Conservatives of making significant funding commitments for this financial year "without knowing where the money would come from." It argued that the military had been "hollowed out" at a time of increasing global threats and the National Health Service was "broken", with some 7.6 million people waiting for care. And despite billions spent to house migrants and combat the criminal gangs ferrying migrants across the English Channel on dangerous inflatable boats, the number of people making the crossing is still rising, Starmer's office said. Some 15,832 people have crossed the Channel on small boats already this year, 9%

more than during the same period in 2023. "The assessment will show that Britain is broke and broken - revealing the mess that populist politics has made of the economy and public services," Downing Street said in a statement. The quandary the government finds itself in should be no surprise, said Paul Johnson, the director of the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent think tank focused on Britain's economic policies. At the start of the election campaign, the institute said that the UK was in a "parlous fiscal position" and the new government would have to either raise taxes, cut spending or relax the rules on public borrowing. "For a party to enter office and then declare that things are worse than expected" would be fundamentally dishonest," the IFS said on May 25. "The next government does not need to enter office to open the books." Those books are transparently published and available for all to inspect.

Cooler weather aids firefighters in battling blaze larger than LA

Forest Ranch (AP): Thousands of firefighters battling a wildfire in Northern California received some help from the weather hours after it exploded in size, scorching an area greater than the size of Los Angeles. The blaze was one of several tearing through the western United States and Canada, fuelled by wind and heat. Cooler temperatures and an increase in humidity could help slow the Park Fire, the largest this year in California. Its intensity and dramatic spread led fire officials to make unwelcome comparisons to the monstrous Camp Fire, which burned out of control in nearby Paradise in 2018, killing 85 people and torching 11,000 homes. Paradise again was near the danger zone on Saturday. The entire town was under an evacuation warning, one of several communities in Butte County. Evacuation orders were also issued in Plumas, Tehama and Shasta counties. An evacuation warning calls for people to prepare to leave and await instructions, while an evacuation order means to leave immediately. Temperatures are expected to be cooler than average through the middle of next week, but "that doesn't mean that fires that are existing will go away," said Marc Chenard, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Centre in College Park, Maryland. As of Saturday night, the Park Fire had scorched 547 square miles (1,416 square kilometers) and destroyed 134 structures since igniting Wednesday, when authorities said a man pushed a burning car into a gully in Chico and then fled. It was 10 per cent contained and moving to the north and east near Chico. The fire is larger than the city of Los Angeles, which covers about 469 square miles (1,214 square kilometers), and now ranks seventh on the list of the state's top 10 largest wildfires by acreage, Cal Fire said in a social media post. Nearly 2,500 firefighters were battling the blaze, aided by 16

helicopters and numerous air tankers. Jeremy Pierce, a Cal Fire operations section chief, said firefighters were taking advantage of the cooler weather while it lasts: "We're having great success today." Susan Singleton and her husband packed their SUV with clothes, some food and their seven dogs and rushed to evacuate their home this week in Cohasset, a town of about 400 northeast of Chico. They have since learned that their house burned down. "Everything else we had burned up, but getting them out, getting us out, was my priority," Singleton said on Saturday, standing outside her SUV as her dogs rested. They have all been sleeping in the car outside a Red Cross shelter at a church that does not allow animals, and Singleton, 59, said the next thing is to find a place for her pets to stretch out. "We've got to have a place to land and stop doing this, because this is what's stressing me out," she said.

7 killed in Congo's music concert stampede

AP ■ KINSHASA

Seven people were killed and many others were injured during a stampede at a music concert in Congo's capital Saturday, authorities said. The stampede occurred at the 80,000-capacity Stade des Martyrs stadium in the heart of Kinshasa where Mike Kalambayi, a popular Congolese gospel singer, was performing, Kinshasa Gov. Daniel Bumba said. State television RTNC said seven people were killed in the chaos and some of those injured were admitted to intensive care. Authorities did not comment on what caused the stampede, saying an investigation into the incident was underway. However, the



local music management company that organised the event said the chaos erupted when "the security services

tried to neutralise some troublemakers." An estimated 30,000 people attended the concert, which featured several other musicians and pastors, the management company Maajabu Gospel said in a statement. Videos that appeared to be from the scene and broadcast of the event showed large crowds gathered outside the stadium in front of barricades as they waited to enter. Inside, people could be seen rushing to the centre stage. Congo has witnessed such stampedes in past years, often blamed on poor crowd control measures such as excessive use of force. Eleven people died in a similar crush at the same stadium last October during a music concert.

New British Sikh MP wants to strengthen Labour Party's connection with India

PTI ■ LONDON

Jeevun Sandher, one of Britain's newest members of Parliament elected in the Labour Party's landslide general election victory earlier this month, is determined to restore trust in politics and strengthen his party's connection with India and its diaspora communities. The British Sikh first-time MP was elected from Loughborough in the East Midlands region of England, considered a bellwether constituency which has reflected the national result in UK general elections over the years. He referenced the visit of UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy to

India earlier this week as a symbol of the high level of priority the incoming government places on the relationship as it gets on with the job of "delivering change". "From a personal perspective, I am a part of the Indian diaspora so I see it as a natural connection, for the Labour Party and the incoming Labour government," he told PTI in an interview at the Parliament complex in London this week. "It is a hugely important strategic partnership for us, which is why David has gone out there to stress that it is an incredibly important partnership for us in the region and globally. India is the world's largest democracy, there is a trade

deal in the works as well. It is about ensuring that we achieve a lot together for the mutual benefit of both nations," he said. Sandher, in his mid-30s, was born in the eastern England town of Luton to parents who migrated from Punjab and regularly travels back to the region with his family. While these India visits will now face a few more protocol hurdles given his new parliamentary role, his work with voluntary organisations such as Labour Indians keeps him closely connected to the country of his heritage. "I think Labour Indians has helped inform policy, helped me personally as well. I'm incredibly proud of what we've

achieved and look forward to achieving even more in the weeks, months and years to come," he said of his party's diaspora outreach. "I am really proud of my Indian roots and really proud of the way our contribution is reflected and recognised in this country. We watch football and then go for a curry, that is the country we live in and it says a lot about our culture," he noted. As an economist and political strategist who also spent some time as a teacher in classrooms with disadvantaged children in Somaliland, Sandher feels he has been training all his life for this new challenge in the House of Commons.

Ukraine strikes oil depot in Russia, Moscow claims new gains

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine on Sunday said it struck an oil depot in southern Russia that supplies the Kremlin's troops as Russian strikes in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, where Moscow claimed further gains, left five civilians dead and 15 others wounded. Ukraine's General Staff said in a statement Kyiv's security services were responsible for a drone strike in Russia's southern Kursk region that morning on an oil depot used to meet the needs of the Russian military, and contains 11 tanks with a total volume of 7,000 cubic metres (about 247,202 cubic feet), after the attack prompted "powerful explosions and a fire...probably involving containers with oil products". "The defence forces continue to take all measures to undermine the military and economic potential of the Russian occupiers and force the Russian Federation to stop its armed aggression against Ukraine," the statement said. Earlier on Sunday, Russia's Defence Ministry said seven Ukrainian drones were shot down overnight over Russian territory, while a regional official said a drone strike set fire

to the oil depot in the Kursk province. Firefighters were battling the blaze on Sunday morning after three fuel tanks went up in flames, according to acting regional Gov Alexey Smirnov. Smirnov said nobody was hurt. The Kursk region lies on the border with Ukraine's Sumy province where Ukraine has in recent months repeatedly targeted various sites, including oil depots and other military infrastructure, inside Russian territory, with drones and other weapons. Ukrainian officials have been pressuring Western allies to be able to use their modern and more sophisticated weapons to strike more valuable targets inside Russian territory. Also on Sunday, Russian troops continued to eke out gains in Ukraine's war-torn eastern Donetsk province as they pushed westward toward the towns of Pokrovsk and Kurakhove. Russia's Defence Ministry on Sunday said that its forces had taken control of two neighbouring villages some 30 km (19 miles) east of Pokrovsk, Prohres and Yevhenivka. The day before, Moscow claimed the nearby village of Lozuvatske, one of nearly a dozen it says it has captured in

the province this month. Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in Feb 2022, sending millions of people fleeing to neighbouring countries. Taking control of all of Donetsk, part of the country's industrial heartland that now bears the scars of years of fighting, is one of the Kremlin's main war goals. Five civilians died and 15 more suffered wounds following Russian strikes in the Donetsk region on Saturday and overnight, local Gov Vadym Filashkin reported on Telegram Sunday. Shortly later, other Ukrainian officials said Russian shelling wounded more civilians, including children, in the east and south. At least eight people suffered wounds after Moscow's forces on Sunday struck the eastern Ukrainian city of Nikopol, local Gov Serhii Lysak reported that same day. Lysak said a toddler and a 10-year-old girl were among the victims, six of whom had to be hospitalised. Russian shelling on Sunday also wounded eight further civilians, including a 10-year-old and two teenagers, in a village in Ukraine's southern Kherson province, local official Roman Mrochko reported.

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia may deploy new strike weapons in response to the planned US stationing of longer-range and hypersonic missiles in Germany, Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Sunday. Speaking at a naval parade in St Petersburg, Putin vowed "mirror measures" after the US earlier this month announced that it will start deploying the weapons in 2026, to affirm its commitment to NATO and European defence following Moscow's all-out invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. "If the US implements such plans, we will consider ourselves free from the previously imposed unilateral moratorium on the deployment of intermediate and shorter-range strike weapons, including increasing the capability of the coastal forces of our navy," Putin said. He added that Moscow's development of suitable systems is "in its final stage". Both Washington and Moscow have in recent weeks signalled readiness to deploy intermediate-range ground-based weapons that were banned for decades under a 1987 US-Soviet treaty. The US pulled out of the agreement in 2019, accusing Moscow of conducting missile

Putin pledges 'mirror measures' in response to US missiles in Germany



Russian President Vladimir Putin, centre, Russian Defense Minister Andrei Belousov, second right, and Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Admiral Alexander Moiseyev, right, greet sailors prior to the main naval parade marking Russian Navy Day in St. Petersburg, Russia, on Sunday

tests that violated it. The allegations, which Russia denied, came as tensions mounted between Moscow and the West in the wake of the

downing of a Malaysian airliner carrying 298 people over war-torn eastern Ukraine. Two Russians and a pro-Moscow Ukrainian were ultimately con-

victed over their role in the attack. Washington and Berlin said in a joint statement this month that the US weapons to be

placed in Germany would ultimately include SM-6 missiles, Tomahawk cruise missiles, and "developmental hypersonic weapons", including those with a significantly longer range than the ones currently deployed across Europe. Most of Russia's missile systems are capable of carrying either conventional or nuclear warheads. Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov, said last week that the Kremlin did not rule out new deployments of nuclear missiles in response to the US move. Ryabkov added that defending Kaliningrad, Russia's heavily militarised exclave wedged between NATO members Poland and Lithuania, was of particular concern. Putin has for years cast US deployment of missile infrastructure in Europe as an aggressive move aimed at hamstringing Moscow's capabilities. The news about the planned stationing of new weapons in Germany came at a NATO summit in Washington earlier this month. At the same event, allies announced that a new US base in Poland, Ukraine's western neighbour, is ready to enter operation and will be capable of intercepting ballistic missiles.

Lawmakers from 6 countries pressured not to attend conference in Taiwan

AP ■ BEIJING

Chinese diplomats are pressuring lawmakers from at least six countries not to attend a China-focused summit in Taiwan, participants told The Associated Press. Politicians in Bolivia, Colombia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and one other Asian country that declined to be named, say they are getting texts, calls and urgent requests for meetings that would conflict with their plans to travel to Taiwan, in what they describe as efforts to isolate the self-governed island. The summit begins Monday and is being held by the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, a group of hundreds of lawmakers from 35 countries concerned about how democracies approach Beijing. The Associated Press spoke to the organizers and three lawmak-

ers, and reviewed texts and emails sent by Chinese diplomats to the lawmakers asking whether they were planning to participate in the summit. "I'm Wu, from Chinese Embassy," read a message sent to Antonio Miloskoski, a member of parliament in North Macedonia. "We heard that you got an invitation from IPAC, will you attend the Conference which will be held next week in Taiwan?" In some cases, lawmakers described vague inquiries about their plans to travel to Taiwan. In other cases, the contact was more menacing: One lawmaker told AP that Chinese diplomats messaged the head of her party with a demand to stop her from going. "They sent a direct message to the President of my party, to stop me from traveling to Taiwan," said Sanela Klaric, a member of parliament in Bosnia and Herzegovina. "He

showed me the message from them. He said, I will advise you not to go, but I cannot stop you, it's something you have to make a decision." China routinely threatens retaliation against politicians and countries that show support for Taiwan, which has only informal relations with most countries due to Chinese diplomatic pressure. Klaric said the pressure was unpleasant but only steered her determination to go on the trip. "I really am fighting against countries or societies where the tool to manipulate and control peoples is fear," said Klaric, adding that it reminded her of threats and intimidation she faced while suffering through the Balkans war in the 1990s. "I really hate the feeling when somebody is frightening you." China vehemently defends its claim to Taiwan, a self-governed island that Beijing views as its own territory to be

annexed by force if necessary. Last week, Beijing criticized Taiwan for its annual Han Kuang military drills, saying that Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party was "carrying out provocations to seek independence." "Any attempt to whip up tensions and use force to seek independence or reject reunification is doomed to failure," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning told reporters. The Chinese Foreign Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment. The Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China, which aims to coordinate diplomacy in response to perceived threats from Beijing, has long faced pressure from the Chinese government. Some members have been sanctioned by Beijing, and in 2021 the group was targeted by Chinese state-sponsored hackers, according to a U.S. indictment unsealed earlier this year.

Mobile internet restored in B'desh

PTI ■ DHAKA

The mobile internet connection was restored in Bangladesh on Sunday, 10 days after it was restricted by the authorities across the country to stop the spread of fake news on social media amidst the deadly nationwide violence over reforms in the quota system in government jobs. Addressing a press conference here, Minister of State for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Zunaid Ahmed Palak announced that 5GB internet will be given for free to all users for three days after the connection is restored, the Dhaka Tribune newspaper reported. The mobile internet connectivity was restored at around 3:00 pm local time. Users of Robi, Grameenphone, Banglalink and other operators in Dhaka said they could access the internet through their phones around 3 pm, the

report said. On July 18, the government shut down mobile internet following the escalation of violence across the country. At the time, Palak said the decision was made "in light of the current crisis in the country and to stop the spread of fake news on social media", The Daily Star newspaper reported. The next day, amid escalating violence, the Department of Disaster Management building was set on fire, adjacent to which was a data centre. While Internet Service Providers Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) officials said that the fire might cut 30-40 per cent of the bandwidth supply, broadband internet connection for the entire country was disrupted within an hour. Bangladesh stayed disconnected from both broadband and mobile internet between July 18 and July 23, when broadband internet was restored in stages. However, mobile internet

remained unavailable until Sunday. Regarding access to social media platforms, Palak said the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission (BTRC) has sent letters to authorities of social media platforms, including Facebook, Tiktok and YouTube. "Their representatives have to come to Dhaka by July 31 to give explanations. Then, after discussing it with them, we will make a decision," he said. The BTRC is responsible for regulating all matters related to telecommunications in Bangladesh. Bangladesh witnessed violent clashes between the police and mostly student protesters demanding an end to a controversial quota system that reserved 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971. The internet and mobile services were snapped following

the countrywide violence. On Monday last, the apex court slashed the veterans' quota to just 5 per cent. Thus, 93 per cent of civil service jobs will be merit-based while the remaining 2 per cent reserved for members of ethnic minorities, transgender and physically challenged people. The violence has reportedly killed more than 100 people, according to local newspapers. However, there are no official figures available for deaths. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Tuesday defended her decision to enforce a curfew with a shoot-on-sight order following the clashes, asserting that tough measures were taken to ensure the security of the lives and properties of the people. Bangladesh crawled back to normalcy on Wednesday with rush hour traffic returning to streets in the capital, and limited reopening of banks, garment factories and internet services.

Reformist formally takes over as Iran president



In this photo released by an official website of the office of the Iranian supreme leader, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, centre, gives his official seal of approval to newly elected President Masoud Pezeshkian, as acting President Mohammad Mokhber stands at left, in an endorsement ceremony in Tehran, Iran, on Sunday

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's supreme leader on Sunday formally endorsed Masoud Pezeshkian as president, allowing the reformist politician and heart surgeon to take charge of a country weakened by economic sanctions over its nuclear programme. During an endorsement ceremony, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei urged Pezeshkian to prioritise neighbours, African and Asian nations as well as countries that have "supported and helped" Iran in Tehran's foreign relations policies. Khamenei criticised European nations for "behaving badly to us" by adopting sanctions, an oil embargo and for calling out alleged human rights abuses. He also condemned Israel for its actions in Gaza in the deaths of children, women and hospitalised people "who did not shoot a single bullet" against Israeli forces. "The Zionist regime is showing

its ugliest face as a war criminal," said Khamenei, accusing Israel of setting a "new record in assassinations" and cruelty. He also denounced the US Congress for allowing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to address the legislative body. Speaking at the same ceremony, Pezeshkian paid homage to Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the architect of Iran's regional military activities, who was killed in US drone attack in 2020. He reiterated his promise to pursue a "constructive and efficient" foreign policy, bolster the rule of law offer equal opportunities to citizens, support families and protect the environment. In his first official act in office, Pezeshkian appointed Mohammad Reza Aref, 72, as his first vice-president. Aref, who's considered a moderate reformist, held the post between 2001-2005 under former president Mohammad

Khatami. Aref holds a doctorate in engineering from Stanford University. Pezeshkian takes over from his predecessor Ebrahim Raisi whose death in a May helicopter crash that sparked the early election. He will take the oath of office in parliament Tuesday and will have two weeks to form his own cabinet for a vote of confidence in parliament. The new Iranian president pledged in his election campaign that he would make no radical changes to Iran's Shiite theocracy, embracing Khamenei as the final arbiter in all matters of state. Pezeshkian could bend Iran's foreign policy toward either confrontation or collaboration with the West and faces the constant challenge of hard-liners still pulling the strings in government. Pezeshkian has tried to walk the line between hard-liners and reformists with whom he has identified.

Meloni aims to reset ties on China visit

Beijing (AP): Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni is on an official visit to China this week to try to reset relations as fears of a trade war with the European Union are interwoven with continued interest in attracting Chinese investment in auto manufacturing and other sectors. Meloni met Chinese Premier Li Qiang in the Chinese capital on Sunday ahead of a forum with Italian and Chinese business leaders. Her five-day visit comes several months after Italy dropped out of China's Belt and Road Initiative, a signature policy of Chinese leader Xi Jinping to build power and transportation infrastructure around the world to stimulate global trade while also deepening China's ties with other nations. Italy's decision to join in 2019 appeared to be a political coup

for China, giving it an inroad into Western Europe and a symbolic boost in a then-raging trade war with the United States. But Italy says the promised economic benefits didn't materialise, and its membership created friction with other Western European governments and the United States. Still, Italy remains keen to pursue an otherwise strong economic relationship with China. Stellantis, a major automaker that includes Italy's Fiat, announced in May that it had formed a joint venture with Leapmotor, a Chinese electric car startup, to begin selling EVs in Europe. Electric vehicles have become a symbol of growing China-EU trade tensions, with the European Union imposing provisional tariffs of up to 37.6 per cent on China-made electric vehicles in early July.

Bilawal's party says ready to talk with Imran Khan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The Pakistan Peoples Party-led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari has said that it is ready to talk with jailed former prime minister Imran Khan if the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder is willing to engage, amidst heightened political instability in the cash-strapped country. "It is being said that the PTI founder is ready to talk. If Imran Khan is ready to talk then that's a positive thing," Senior PPP leader Khurshid Shah said while speaking to the media in Quetta, the provincial capital of Balochistan. Shah welcomed the possibility of talks as a positive development. "President Asif Ali Zardari has always tried to solve problems through nego-

tiations, and the PPP would play its role if needed," Shah was quoted as saying by the Express Tribune newspaper. The PPP's willingness to engage with Khan's party comes amidst heightened political instability, following the PTI's hard-line stance against the incumbent Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) led government. The PPP, along with the Muttahida Quami Movement-Pakistan (MQM-P) and other allies, supports the PML-N of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. The two former rivals recently witnessed a war of words. The ruling PML-N accepted all the demands of PPP over the federal budget and allocation of development funds. Since Khan's ouster through a vote of no confidence in 2022,

the PTI has maintained a strong opposition to the PPP-PML-N alliance. Political tensions increased after the February 8 elections, which saw the two parties forming a coalition government in the Centre. Calls for reconciliation have been growing from various societal and political quarters, urging the PTI to negotiate with the government. Khan's party had previously rejected talks with what it termed the "Form-47 government," instead showing a preference for dialogue with the military establishment. In April, PTI's Shehryar Afridi indicated a preference for negotiations with Army chief Gen Asim Munir and the Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence (DG ISI).

Venezuelan poll to have ripple effects throughout Americas

AP ■ CARACAS

Polls have opened in Venezuela, where people are voting Sunday in a presidential election whose outcome will either lead to a seismic shift in politics or extend by six more years the policies that caused the world's worst peacetime economic collapse. Whether it is President Nicolás Maduro who is chosen, or his main opponent, retired diplomat Edmundo González, the election will have ripple effects throughout the Americas. Government opponents and supporters alike have signalled their interest in joining the exodus of 7.7 million Venezuelans who have already left their homes for opportunities abroad should Maduro win another term. Polls open at 6 am local time. The number of eligible voters is estimated to be around 17 mil-

lion. 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. Maduro, 61, is facing off against an opposition that has 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. González is representing a coalition of opposition parties after being selected in April as a last-minute stand-in for oppo-

sition powerhouse Maria Corina Machado, who was blocked by the Maduro-controlled Supreme Tribunal of Justice from running for any office for 15 years. Machado, a former lawmaker, swept the opposition's October primary with over 90% of the vote. After she was blocked from joining the presidential race, she chose a college professor as her substitute on the ballot, but the National Electoral Council also barred her from registering. That's when González, a political newcomer, was chosen. Sunday's ballot also features eight other candidates challenging Maduro, but only González threatens Maduro's rule. Venezuela sits atop the world's largest proven oil reserves, and once boasted Latin America's most advanced economy. But it entered into a free fall after Maduro took the

helm. Plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages and hyperinflation that soared past 130,000% led first to social unrest and then mass emigration. Sanctions from US President Donald Trump's administration seeking to force Maduro from power after his 2018 reelection - which the US and dozens of other countries condemned as illegitimate - only deepened the crisis. In recent days, Maduro has crisscrossed Venezuela, inaugurating hospital wards and highways and visiting rural areas where he had not set foot in years. His pitch to voters is one of economic security, which he underscores with stories of entrepreneurship and references to a stable currency exchange and lower inflation rates. The capital, Caracas, saw an increase in commercial activity after the pandemic, bolstering an economy the

International Monetary Fund forecasts will grow 4% this year - one of the fastest in Latin America - after having shrunk 71% from 2012 to 2020. "They tried to subjugate our people," Maduro said of the United States during his closing rally Thursday in Caracas, "but today we are standing tall and ready for victory on the 28th of July." But most Venezuelans have not seen any improvement in their quality of life. Many earn under \$200 a month, which means families struggle to afford essential items. Some work second and third jobs. A basket of basic staples - sufficient to feed a family of four for a month - costs an estimated \$385. The opposition has tried to seize on the huge inequities arising from the crisis, during which Venezuelans abandoned their country's currency, the bolivar, for the US dollar.

Making exaggerated, bogus claims to get refunds punishable offence: I-T Department

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The I-T Department has asked income tax return filers to not make bogus claims for expenses, under-report their earnings or exaggerate deductions as this is a punishable offence and causes a delay in issuance of refunds.

The ITR filing season for assessment year 2024-25 will end on July 31 for all categories of taxpayers whose accounts are not supposed to be audited.

According to the Income Tax Department and its administrative body Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT), over five crore ITRs have been filed, as of July 26. In a recent public communication, the Income Tax Department asked taxpayers to file their returns correctly to get timely refunds. "Refund claims are subject to verification checks, which may cause delays. Accurate filing of ITR leads to quicker processing of refunds. Any discrepancies in the claims made will prompt a request for a revised return (to be filed by the taxpayer)," it said.

It cautioned ITR filing



taxpayers to not claim "incorrect" Tax Deducted at Source (TDS) amounts, not "under-report" their income or "exaggerate" deductions or submit claims for "bogus" expenses. The department informed the taxpayers that their claims should be "correct and accurate." "Filing a false or bogus claim is a punishable offence," the public communication said. Taxpayers can claim a variety of deductions and exemptions to lower their tax liability under the old ITR filing regime while those opting for the new regime will get a lower tax rate but cannot avail

these benefits. CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal had recently told PTI during a post-Budget review that more than 66 per cent of ITR filings this time were under the new regime which is being promoted by the government to make the direct tax system better and simpler. The communication stated that in case due refunds are delayed, taxpayers should check their e-filing account to see if the I-T department has sent them any message in this context and if yes, then it should be responded through the "pending action and worklist section" tab.

CBDT chief Agrawal was also asked about the recent Budget proposal of withholding the refund being extended up to 60 days, from the existing thirty days, from the date on which such assessment or reassessment is made. He said such cases "would not be very substantial in numbers."

"This is basically in those cases where there is already a demand in the case of the same assessee or the demand is likely to arise," Agrawal said. "Suppose, he said, the refund has been generated but the assessment proceeding is going on and it is felt that there is a demand that is likely to come. 'The provisions are that once the assessment is completed, then an assessee gets 30 days to pay the demand. So, demand gets due 30 days after the assessment and therefore, to adjust the refund, that 30-day period has to be there, and therefore, this timeline. 'It is just rationalising that effectively. But then those refunds would be not very substantial in number, they would be very minuscule. It is only enablement," the head of the direct taxes body said.

PSU banks may get another 2-year extension to comply with MPS norms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Public sector banks are expected to get another two-year extension to comply with Sebi's minimum public shareholding (MPS) norms, a top Government official has said.

Out of 12 public sector banks (PSBs), five are yet to comply with MPS norms and the government's holding is beyond 75 per cent.

As per the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi), all listed companies must maintain an MPS of 25 per cent.

However, the regulator gave special forbearance to state-owned banks till August 2024 to meet the requirement of 25 per cent MPS.

"We have written to the Department of Economic Affairs for the extension," Financial Services Secretary Vivek Joshi told PTI in an interview.

Generally, he said, a two-year extension is given and hopefully it should come sooner than later. Five banks have minimum public shareholding of less than 25 per cent.

Currently, government holding in Delhi-based Punjab & Sind Bank is 98.25 per cent. It is followed by Chennai-based Indian



Overseas Bank at 96.38 per cent, UCO Bank 95.39 per cent, Central Bank of India 93.08 per cent, Bank of Maharashtra at 86.46 per cent.

It is expected that the government holding in Bank of Maharashtra could come below 75 per cent during the current fiscal, he said.

However, Joshi said, the banks will take decision on share sale through Qualified Institutional Placement (QIP) or other route depending on their capital absorption needs.

Depending on market conditions, each of these banks will take a call in the best interest of shareholders, he added.

Asked about the Budget announcement of the financial sector vision and strategy document, Joshi said

it will be anchored by the Department of Economic Affairs (DEA) and released during the current fiscal.

"The strategy we have for Vision 2047 will be covered in this document. For example, how many banks will be needed for a Viksit Bharat, and how many global banks like SBI and ICICI Bank will be required by 2047.

"We need a strategy to modernise regulations and regulators in anticipation of changes where banks will not only be banking companies but also information-technology companies," he said.

The Department has done some work while legislation is another big area being reviewed, he said, adding, the document would be completed during the current financial year.

WTO accepts India, Taipei's request on ICT import duty dispute ruling

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The WTO's dispute settlement body has accepted a request from India and Chinese Taipei not to adopt the ruling against New Delhi's import duties on certain information and technology products till October-end, as both sides are engaged in resolving the matter mutually, an official said.

The issue came up during a meeting of the dispute settlement body (DSB) in Geneva on July 26.

"The DSB agreed to the latest requests from Chinese Taipei and India," the Geneva-based official said.

At the July 26 meeting, India and Chinese Taipei once again requested additional time from the DSB to consider the adoption of the panel rulings in the case initiated by Chinese Taipei regarding India's tariffs on certain high-tech goods.

The two sides had asked that the DSB further delay consideration of the panel reports until October 28, 2024, to help facilitate the resolution of the disputes.

The dispute body had earlier agreed to four previous such requests from India and Chinese Taipei to delay consideration of the reports.

As per the rules of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the panel's ruling will have to be adopted by the DSB for implementation within 60 days of the release of the order. However, countries can mutually request the body to delay the adoption of the ruling.

In its report, a dispute panel of the WTO on April 17, 2023, said import duties imposed by India on certain information and technology products violate global trading norms.

The ruling followed a case filed by the EU, Japan and Taiwan against these duties in WTO.

In May 2019, Chinese Taipei filed a case against India in the WTO over the import duties imposed on certain electronic goods, including telephones for cellular networks; machines for reception, conversion and transmission or regeneration of voice, images or other data; and parts of telephone sets.

India has stated that these ICT products are part of WTO's Information Technology Products (ITA-2) agreement, and New Delhi is not a part of this pact. India is a part of ITA-1, signed in 1997, which did not have any obligation to eliminate customs duties on these products.

DLF-GIC JV firm DCCDL's office rental income rises in April-June

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm DLF's rental arm DCCDL has posted an 11 per cent annual increase in office rental income to Rs 942 crore during the first quarter of this fiscal on better demand for its premium workspace.

DLF Cyber City Developers Ltd (DCCDL) is a joint venture between DLF and Singapore sovereign wealth fund GIC.

DLF holds a 66.67 per cent stake, while the GIC has a 33.33 per cent stake in DCCDL.

According to the latest investor presentation, DCCDL's rental income from office buildings rose to Rs 942 crore during the April-June period of the current fiscal from Rs 851 crore in the year-ago period.

The rental income from retail real estate space grew 9 per cent to Rs 210 crore in the first quarter of this fiscal from Rs 192 crore a year ago.

On the commercial real estate segment, DLF said it has achieved "double-digit rental



growth through organic growth and new developments." "Significant increase in retail presence; portfolio to grow to 2 times in the next 4-5 years," it added.

DLF said it is unlocking the development potential and also modernising existing assets.

At present, DCCDL has a portfolio of 42 million square feet with occupancy levels at 93 per cent.

On the financial performance front, DCCDL's revenue has grown 10 per cent annually to Rs 1,553 crore in the April-June period of 2024-25 from

Rs 1,411 crore in the year-ago period. Its profit after tax increased 20 per cent to Rs 470 crore from Rs 391 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year.

"We continue to have a positive outlook on the rental business and are accelerating our capex commitments to further strengthen our rental portfolio and deliver healthy growth," DLF said.

DLF is India's largest real estate developer in terms of market capitalisation. In the past seven decades, DLF has developed more than 178 real estate projects comprising more than 349 million square feet of area.

DLF Group has 220 million square feet of development potential across residential and commercial segments.

It is primarily engaged in the business of the development and sale of residential properties (the Development Business) and the development and leasing of commercial and retail properties (the Annuity Business).

FPIs invest ₹33,600 cr in equities in July amid continued policy reforms, good earnings season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Foreign investors injected over Rs 33,600 crore into Indian equities so far this month on the expectation of continued policy reforms, sustained economic growth and a better-than-expected earnings season.

However, they pulled out over Rs 7,200 crore from equities in the last three trading sessions (July 24-26) after the government hiked taxes on Futures and Options trades (F&O) and capital gains from equity investments in the Budget.

Market experts believe that Indian equity is well-positioned for the year to attract foreign investments. However, there may be some monthly volatility due to short-term news.

"Indian equity market and bond market are favourably placed for the year. This should attract foreign flows into the country. There could be some volatility in the flows on a month-on-month basis due to short-term news flows," Nimesh Chandan, CIO of Bajaj Finserv AMC,



said. According to the data with the depositories, foreign portfolio investors (FPIs) have made a net inflow of Rs 33,688 crore in equities this month (till July 26). This came following an inflow of Rs 26,565 crore in equities in June, driven by political stability and the sharp rebound in markets.

Before that, FPIs withdrew Rs 25,586 crore in May on poll jitters and over Rs 8,700 crore in April on concerns over a tweak in India's tax treaty with Mauritius and a

sustained rise in US bond yields.

"Economically, India stands on a strong footing. Moreover, the better-than-expected earnings season so far has improved corporate India's balance sheet that would help in building investor confidence.

"Furthermore, there is growing anticipation of an interest rate cut by the US Federal Reserve in September," Himanshu Srivastava, Associate Director - Manager Research at Morningstar Investment

Research India, said. Upward revisions in India's GDP forecast by the IMF and ADB, and a slowdown in China work in India's favour, he added.

A key trend in FPIs and domestic institutional investors' (DII) investment in equity over the last 30 months is that whenever FPIs were consistent sellers, DIIs were consistent buyers.

The large inflow of money into domestic mutual funds and the growing influence of retail investors have strengthened domestic investors compared to their foreign counterparts, VK Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist, Geojit Financial Services, said.

Apart from equities, FPIs invested Rs 19,223 crore in the debt market during the period under review. This has pushed the debt tally to Rs 87,847 crore this year so far. With the inclusion in the international bond indices, foreign flows are expected to come into the Indian bond market. This is likely to push G-Sec yields lower, Bajaj Finserv AMC's Chandan said.

UltraTech to acquire additional 32.72% stake in India Cements

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leading cement manufacturer UltraTech will acquire an additional 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements Ltd from the promoters of the South-based company for Rs 3,954 crore.

The board of the Aditya Birla firm on Sunday approved the proposal to acquire the promoters' 32.72 per cent stake at Rs 390 per share, UltraTech said in a regulatory filing on Sunday.

It has entered into three share purchase agreements to acquire 32.72 per cent of the equity share capital of ICL from the promoter family led by Srinivasan N and Gurunath, along with the holding entities.

After the completion of the Rs 3,954 crore deal, UltraTech's stake in India Cements Ltd (ICL) will reach over 55 per cent, mandating it to go for an open offer as per the Sebi regulations.

The board UltraTech has also approved an "open offer for up to 8.05 crore equity shares representing 26 per cent of the equity share capital of the target, at a price of Rs 390 per equity share from the public shareholders of Target", the filing said.

The price offered by UltraTech is 4.1 per cent higher than the ICL shares' closing price of Rs 374.60 last Friday.



"Post signing of SPA and obtaining regulatory approvals, UltraTech will pay Rs 3,954 crore at Rs 390/share for buying 32.72 per cent stake in India Cements from the promoters & their associates.

"This will trigger a mandatory open offer at Rs 390/share. The Open Offer will be done subsequently after obtaining all regulatory approvals," said a statement from the company.

Earlier, in June, UltraTech acquired 23 per cent shares of ICL. It had acquired Damani-group's stake in India Cements Ltd (ICL) through two block deals, estimated at around Rs 1,900 crore.

"The proposed transaction is, therefore, an endeavour to extend the company's footprint and presence in the highly fragmented, competitive and fast-growing Southern market in the

country, particularly Tamil Nadu, where it has limited presence," said UltraTech. This primary acquisition is subject to the receipt of applicable statutory and regulatory approvals from the Competition Commission of India and others.

Aditya Birla Group Chairman Kumar Mangalam Birla said the India Cements opportunity is an exciting one as it enables UltraTech to serve the Southern markets more effectively and also accelerates our path to over 200 MTPA capacity.

"UltraTech Cement's investments over the years, both organic and inorganic, have been designed to propel India to become a building solutions champion globally. Every investment in a core sector like cement accelerates economic activity and drives progress." These investments have also

facilitated India's nationwide infrastructure upgrade, powering the country's growing need for housing, roads, and other vital infrastructure. This, in turn, has had a tremendous impact on the lives and aspirations of people," he added.

ICL has a total group capacity of 16 MTPA, including 1.5 MTPA from its subsidiary Trinetra Cement Ltd. While UltraTech has a consolidated capacity of 152.7 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) of grey cement.

It has 24 integrated manufacturing units, 33 grinding units, one clinkerisation unit and 8 bulk packaging terminals. Its capacity, over the past two decades, "has grown 11x, far outpacing the industry growth of 4x", according to an earlier statement by the company.

"It took 36 years for the cement business of Aditya Birla Group to get to a capacity of 100 MTPA. And UltraTech has subsequently added the next 50 mtpa in less than 5 years with an investment of around Rs 32,000 crore," it added. In the last AGM in 2023, Birla had set a target for 200 MTPA, aiming to become one of the largest cement companies in the world. UltraTech Cement Limited is the cement flagship company of the Aditya Birla Group.

Removal of angel tax for startups to help attract investors: Goyal



PTI ■ MUMBAI

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Sunday said that removal of angel tax, which was introduced in 2012 by the UPA government, for all classes of investors will help startups attract investments.

He also said that the customs duty reduction for gold and silver from 15 per cent to 6 per cent will not only help small artisans but also promote the country's gems and jewellery exports.

"The Budget 2024-25 has removed the angel tax and through it, we will be able to attract investors into the country," he said here at a post-budget interaction with the industry. Further Goyal informed that the budget has announced the setting up

of 12 industrial townships in the country.

He said that one of these will be in Maharashtra and it will help create jobs and a strong ecosystem for the industry and trade.

The budget has also announced steps to promote diamond trade. India is a world leader in the diamond cutting and polishing industry, which employs a large number of skilled workers.

The budget has announced that India would provide for safe harbour rates for foreign mining companies selling raw diamonds in the country.

Angel tax (income tax at 30 per cent rate) was imposed on funding raised by unlisted companies, or startups, if their valuation exceeded the company's fair market value.

Bill for NFIR at advanced stage, likely to be introduced in next session: DEA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Bill for setting up a National Financial Information Registry (NFIR) is in the advanced stage of preparation, and it may be introduced in the next session of Parliament, Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth has said.

"It is at an advanced stage. It is in the closing stages of inter-ministerial consultation. We will finalise the Bill soon," he told PTI in a post-budget interview.

However, he said, it cannot be introduced in the ongoing session of Parliament but may be in the next session.

The objective is to build a public infrastructure for credit-related information, and the right information can be made available by the NFIR to lending agencies.

A National Financial Information Registry will serve as the central repository of financial and ancillary information. This will facilitate the efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion, and foster financial stability.

The passage of the Bill will enable in setting up of a registry and thus help in consolidating all financial information and facilitating financial inclusion, and take the Indian economy onto a faster growth trajectory. The Budget 2023-24 proposed setting up of NFIR as a central repository of



financial information to facilitate the efficient flow of credit, promote financial inclusion and foster financial stability in the country. Talking about growth projection in the Budget, Seth said it has assumed a reasonable nominal GDP growth rate of 10.5 per cent, as a higher assumption could have led to a larger fiscal deficit.

"As far as the current year is concerned, fiscal prudence places the demand on us that we are realistic or a bit conservative in assuming what the potential revenues may be while at the same time providing adequate provisions for productive priorities of the government. That is what this Budget does," he said. Compared to the interim Budget, he said, there is a higher provision of about Rs 90,000 crore, including for newer schemes. In that context, he said, "10.5 per cent, we feel, is a reasonable estimate of nominal growth in the economy."

India set for double-digit medal haul at Paris Olympics, says Nita Ambani

PTI ■ PARIS
 After the highs of Tokyo Olympics where India secured their best ever medal haul, the country is poised to get medals in double digits in Paris, sports administrator and IOC member Nita Ambani has said.
 Talking to PTI in an exclusive interaction on the sidelines of the opening of 'India House' at La Villette, she also said the day India hosts the Olympics is "not far".
 In October last year, Prime

Minister Narendra Modi had announced India's bold intent to bid for the 2036 Olympics, pledging to spare no effort to fulfil the dream of 1.4 billion people in the country.
 "We are going to do very well. Forty seven per cent of our athletes are girls. All for women power and all for our young boys and girls, we are rooting and cheering for them. I hope we can see double digits in medals for the first time. Go India go, make India proud," Nita said.
 A day after the Paris Olympics began with a



glimmering opening ceremony that had the attention of the world, the India House, the first-ever country house at the Olympics, had a star-studded opening ceremony attended by BCCI secretary Jay Shah and IOC officials and administrators.
 "India has arrived. It is time that the flame that was first lit in Athens must light the sky in our ancient land - Bharat. The day is not far when India will host the Olympic Games. Let this be our collective resolve at the

opening of the India House," she added.
 "For the first time, India has its own house at the Paris 2024 Olympics. It's a place where we are going to honour our athletes, celebrate their achievements, and wish them well.
 "We will celebrate our heritage and our culture, with many of our artisans present and cultural programs scheduled. This is going to be a home away from home for our athletes.
 Asked how this idea came to her mind, she said: "When I

went to Brazil, Korea Winter Olympics, and then Tokyo, we didn't have an India House. "I just felt that India, with its 1.4 billion people, needed a house of its own. So that's when I started thinking about having an Indian House at the Olympics for our athletes and everyone to see what the spirit of India really is.
 "Envisioned as a symbol of India's Olympic aspiration, we hope that it becomes a home away from home for our athletes where we honour them and salute their achievements," she added.

Ramita qualifies for women's 10m air rifle final at Olympics



PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE)
 India's Ramita Jindal gave a strong display of marksmanship to qualify for the women's 10m air rifle final in fifth place even as Elavenil Valarivan succumbed to pressure to miss out despite being among the contenders, finishing 10th at the Olympic Games here on Sunday.
 Ramita, the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medallist in the event, aggregated 631.5 to become

the second shooter from the country after pistol exponent Manu Bhaker to secure a berth in the final, while Elavenil scored 630.7. Ramita had a sluggish start and was not among the top-eight till the sixth and final series but she rallied superbly to book a berth in the final while stalwart Elavenil, who had finished 16th at the Tokyo Olympics three years back, held on to the fifth position for much of the qualification round. But a poor last series of 103.8 saw the 24-year-old former

junior world champion take a mighty tumble from fifth to 10th slot and miss the eighth-shooter final.
 Ramita, who had scored 636.4 points, 0.1 more than the world record during the Olympic Selection Trials in New Delhi and Bhopal, was patchy initially, shooting a below-par 104.6 in the opening series before she shot 106.1 in the next round. Another ordinary 104.9 was followed by two successive 105.3 and a 105.7 which fetched her a dream entry into the final.
 South Korea's Ban Hyojin smashed the Qualification Olympic Record (QOR) with a superb score of 634.5, eclipsing the previous mark of 632.9 set by Norway's Jeanette Hegg in Tokyo Games.
 Elavenil, who had struggled following the Tokyo Games and could not enter the squad for the Hangzhou Asian Games last year, kept averaging a score of 10.5 throughout the qualifying round as she shot superb series of 105.8, 106.1, 104.4, 105.3, 105.3 but a rank poor final series of 103.8 saw her bowing out.

Sindhu opens campaign with dominant win over Fathimath

PTI ■ PARIS
 Two-time Olympic medallist Indian shuttler PV Sindhu began her Paris Olympics campaign with a resounding straight games win over Maldives' Fathimath Abdul Razzaq in the women's singles group stage match, here on Sunday.
 The gulf of class between the two players was evident as Sindhu, who is vying for a third Olympic medal, took just 29 minutes to dispatch her lower-ranked opponent 21-9 21-6 in the Group M fixture.
 "It was a good start, I am happy. I was able to get used to the court and the atmosphere. It has been a long time, coming back after three years, it's a very special one. 2016 (Olympics) was different and 2020 (2021) was completely different. It is a sort of mixture of both," said Sindhu about her Olympic journey.
 "I am enjoying and looking to the second match." After a couple of unforced errors, Sindhu was quick to assess the condition and took control of the proceedings, racing to a 11-4 lead.
 The world No 111 Fathimath



was no match against the former world champion who finished the first game in a mere 13 minutes.
 The second game followed a similar manner with Sindhu claiming the first four points in the blink of an eye to take an early lead.
 However, Razzaq capitalised on Sindhu's error to bridge the gap to make it 3-4. But it

became a one-sided contest once again as the Indian increased the gap to 10-3. In the end, Sindhu had as many as 14 match points but the world No 13 needed only one to seal the tie.
 The 10th seeded Indian, who won the silver medal in the Rio Games in 2016 and a bronze in the last edition in Tokyo, will take on World No 75 Kristin

Kuuba of Estonia in her second group match on Wednesday. Sindhu has been mentored by the legendary Prakash Padukone in the past few months, and she said the association has been beneficial to her.
 "I have been with Prakash sir for more than six months now and it's going on very well. Everything is coming together.

We have to know each other very well to work together," she said.
 "Prakash sir is a legend, he is very experienced and he will come and tell me what is required, what I need to change."
 Asked about the aspects of her game which has improved since she started working with Padukone, she said, "Overall, it has not changed the way I feel but there have been add-ons. "When after I got injured it was getting difficult to move well on court and it was at times getting hard to get the momentum back. We worked on that, we worked on strokes, not just on net and defence but on overall game. You need to be at your 100 per cent in every big tournament or on every stroke."
 She said mental strength is very important for players, especially during a big event like the Olympics.
 "It is very important to be mentally strong. You at times don't know what is happening, everything gone from you. We worked on the mental things also. I tried to be positive, keep myself calm and do yoga."

US women's Olympic basketball team fine-tunes its defense ahead of first game

AP ■ PARIS
 One of the challenges that the U.S. Women's basketball team faces at the Paris Olympics with limited practice time is getting everyone on the same page defensively.
 There's no doubt that all 12 players on the roster can score at will, but it takes time to build the chemistry and trust necessary to be a great defensive team.
 For now, it's a work in progress, with the first test coming Monday against Japan.
 "We spent a little more time on it," U.S. Coach Cheryl Reeve said before practice Sunday. "Each team that you play poses a different challenge. Certainly Japan, you know plays different than the rest of the group. We have to tweak our scheme a little bit."
 Japan plays a style with all five players on the perimeter, which negates a little bit of the Americans' interior advantage. That means that players like Brittney Griner, Aja Wilson and Breanna Stewart may have to guard more on the outside with no true post player for the Japanese team.
 "I know I may have to play



outside more defensively and I'm ready for it," Griner said.
 The two teams met for the gold medal in the Tokyo Games and the Americans came away with a 90-75 victory. Griner finished with 30 points, making 14 of her 18 shots. It was the most points ever by a U.S. Player in a gold medal game, surpassing the 29 by Lisa Leslie in 1996.
 While the Americans have been able to outscore their opponents easily during the 55-game Olympic winning streak that dates to the 1992 Barcelona Games, being able to stop the opponent certainly has helped.

The U.S. Gave up an average of 68.7 points at the Tokyo Games, the most since the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, when the streak of seven straight gold medals started.
 There is a wealth of talented defenders on the U.S. Team. It just takes a little bit of time to get used to playing with one another and the defensive plan that Reeve has installed. The U.S. Had only about 14 hours of practice time together before the Olympic opener.
 "I think the biggest thing was taking away our schemes that we may have with our (WNBA) teams where we just know how to guard people and just trust the process," two-time WNBA defensive player of the year Aja Wilson said. "Sometimes we're just so used to schemes and this player wants to get here versus overseas is like literally just play everyone honest."
 Wilson said the biggest thing is trust and that just takes time. "The more we play alongside each other, the better," she added. "I think we're slowly starting to trust each other and getting an understanding of just knowing we have to have layers and we're starting to get it."

Olympics pre-race triathlon event in Seine River cancelled over water quality concerns

AP ■ PARIS
 Concerns over the water quality of Paris' Seine River have continued into the 2024 Olympics, with a pre-race triathlon event there canceled Sunday.
 Organizers said they nixed the swimming leg of the triathlon familiarization scheduled for Sunday morning after a meeting about water quality among authorities tasked with carrying out water quality tests. That included representatives of World Triathlon, as well as city and regional authorities.
 Swimming in the Seine has been banned for over a century in big part due to poor water quality. Organizers have invested \$1.5 billion to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and the government has said the river would be clean enough to hold events, including the swimming portion of the triathlon and the marathon swimming event.
 Daily water quality tests in early June indicated unsafe levels of E. Coli bacteria, followed by recent improvements. Parisian Mayor Anne Hidalgo took a famous dip in the river less than two weeks before Olympic events were set to start, fulfilling a promise to show that the long-polluted waterway was clean enough to



host swimming competitions. Heavy rain during the opening ceremony revived concerns over whether the long-polluted waterway will be clean enough to host swimming competitions, since water quality is deeply linked with the weather in the French capital. Since 2015, organizers have invested heavily to prepare the Seine for the Olympics and to ensure Parisians have a cleaner river after the Games. The plan included constructing a giant underground water storage basin in central Paris, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants.
 Triathletes have expressed hope that the waters would be clean enough for them to swim in.
 "Hopefully we get to swim, bike and run because I don't swim this much to just run and bike," Spanish triathlete Alberto Gonzalez said.

Australian cyclist undergoes abdominal surgery after fall during Olympic time trial

AP ■ PARIS
 Australian cyclist Lucas Plapp underwent abdominal surgery overnight at a Paris hospital following a hard crash on rain-slicked roads during the Olympic time trial on Saturday, the Australian team said.
 AusCycling, Australia's cycling governing body, confirmed the procedure early Sunday. No other details were available.
 Plapp was among the last riders to start on the 32.4-kilometer (20-mile) course and was laying down a medal-worthy ride at the first time check, trailing then-leader and eventual bronze medalist Wout van Aert by just two seconds. But when Plapp reached a technical portion of the course, his bike slid out from under him and he crashed hard onto the pavement.
 The crash was not shown on the race broadcast, but AusCycling said Plapp was conscious and moving afterward. He was lifted into the team vehicle and taken to the hospital for precautionary scans, and later he required the abdominal procedure.
 "Plapp slid under a barrier fence shortly after passing the first checkpoint approximately 14 kilometers into the 32-kilometer course," AusCycling said. "His parents



and an Australian team doctor were at the hospital with him."
 The 23-year-old Plapp, who won bronze at the Tokyo Games as part of the Australian pursuit team, is the reigning national time trial and road race champion. He was supposed to ride alongside Simon Clarke in support of teammate Michael Matthews in the Olympic road race next Saturday.
 Remco Evenepoel won the time trial, giving Belgium two riders on the podium, while Filippo Ganna of Italy finished second. But both the women's and men's races were marred by a series of crashes on a course made treacherous

by the rain. Among those who fell was American rider Chloe Dygert, the reigning time trial world champion, who remounted her bike and rallied to finish third behind gold medalist Grace Brown of Australia and Anna Henderson of Britain.
 "If we were in Britain, these (conditions) would be absolutely perfect. The roads are better to take corners on. When we're in Spain, France or Italy, I feel like it's a little more icy," said Dygert, who still plans to compete in the road race and team pursuit this Olympics. "But for sure it definitely plays a factor into the race itself."

Small town comes to life for Olympics but with fair share of organisational hurdles

PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE),
 Norway shooting coach Tore Brovold, the silver medallist at the 2008 Olympics, is being forced to stay away from skeet shooters in the national team as there are not enough rooms available at the Athletes' Village here.
 Chateauroux, a quiet town in central France with a population of less than 50,000, is hosting all the shooting events of the Paris Olympics. It is a two-and-a-half hour train ride from the bustling French capital, leaving 340 Olympians pretty much cut off from the Games

hub.
 After completing the 270km long journey from Paris, one would struggle to commute within Chateauroux due to limited public transport, which is free for everyone. For athletes, coaches, officials and media staying outside the Village, the only way to commute between the Games' venues is via the transport provided by the Organising Committee.
 "These Games have been a disaster on the transport front. I went to the bus stop near the train station last night but this morning they changed the timings and the athletes had to go ahead with



the training in my absence," Brovold, who has also worked with Indian shotgun shooters, told PTI.
 Due to limited availability of rooms, he had a choice to make: either stay at the Games' Village at the expense of a shooter or stay at a hotel outside. Keeping in mind the best interest of the team, he chose the latter.
 "I have also come to know that the organisers are offering free accommodation to visiting teams outside the village as they are short on rooms," said the 54-year-old. Emin Jafarov, the deputy chef de mission of the Azerbaijan

contingent, too is staying in a hotel due to shortage of rooms.
 "I am in staying in a hotel as there are not enough rooms at the Village and the athletes need it more than me," said Jafarov.
 A majority of Great Britain's shooting squad is staying outside the Athletes' Village by choice as that ensures them the food of their choice.
 "It just works better for us. The hotel staff takes care of our individual requirements and we can also go out to eat in different places," said a support staff from Team GB on condition of anonymity.

The 21-member Indian team too is going out to eat everyday as the shooters are not getting the food of their choice.
 "If you want food like home, then it is not possible. The shooters have been going out for meals and that is totally fine," said a coach with the Indian team.
 On Sunday, a team doctor associated with the Portugal team arrived here due to a transport delay.
 "It has only been a day so far. I can tell you more about the challenges we are facing here after three four days," the doctor said without wanting to be named.

Suryakumar is a bowlers' captain, says Axar Patel

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

India all-rounder Axar Patel says new T20I skipper Suryakumar Yadav is a bowlers' captain who allows them the freedom to execute their plans. The spin all-rounder also said that the team will look to maximise its batting combinations in the ongoing series against Sri Lanka. Suryakumar and India made a winning start to the three-match series here on Saturday when they crushed hosts Sri Lanka by 43 runs in a high scoring opening T20I. "I played in the last Australia series with Surya bhai (as captain). I know that he is a bowlers' captain. He gives you free hand (in a way) that you decide first," Axar said at the post-match press conference on Saturday. "Whenever you get hit, he comes and says that it was a good ball. He keeps giving you inputs. As a player, there is a good bond with him." Axar recalled the experience of playing under Suryakumar in the five-match T20I series against Australia in India late last year which the hosts won 4-1. "As a captain, I have also played with him in the last five matches (against Australia) and when I was playing today, I didn't feel



much change," he said. "In the first three overs when we were going for runs, he was telling me that we can do this or do that and how we can take a wicket. There is no problem if a four or six goes in it. As a bowler, you get confidence from that if the captain is backing you and telling you that you can do

this." Axar said India's batting lineup in the opening T20I which did not feature Rishabh Pant at the top was formulated with the idea that the team maximises its left and right-hand options. In the last assignment, the T20 World Cup which India won, Pant batted at No 3

whereas on Saturday skipper Suryakumar came out at the coveted spot and the wicketkeeper-batter dropped down to No 4. "Our team has four lefties and four righties. If there is a left-right combination (in the middle), it becomes very hard for the bowlers to maintain the line and lengths

consistently especially with rotations with singles." "Now if there are four lefties, how can you use them? If you have that chance (to ensure) that there are no two lefties or two righties (in the middle) at the same time." "If you have that chance, if you have those players in batting, then why not use

them? You also have to keep changing the batting order as per the bowling options that the opposition has got," he added. The spinner said the message from India's new staff under head coach Gautam Gambhir has been that the team will not experience a major overhaul in the way it operated. While fielding coach T Dilip has continued in his role, Abhishek Nayar, Sairaj Bahutule and Dutchman Ryan ten Doeschate are now a part of Gambhir's support staff for this tour of Sri Lanka as positions will be finalised after the tour ends. "I have been playing for 10 years. I have played with different coaches and captains. I don't think a lot will change in the team," he said. "When we were talking in the team meeting, they also said the same thing that the coach and captain keep changing but the team remains the same and the 11 or 15 players who stay, they have to do it," he said. "They have told us that we will play the way we have been playing. Obviously, the coach and his input can be different, they keep telling you here and there. But there is not much change in the team's atmosphere," he added.



USA Cricket fulfils critical requirement, appoints Jonathan as CEO

PTI ■ NEW YORK

USA Cricket has fulfilled one of the two critical requirements to avoid being disqualified as an ICC Associate nations by appointing Jonathan Atkinson as its chief executive officer effective August 1. The USAC was 'put on notice' by the ICC earlier this month for breaching two norms. While not having a CEO was one, the other was USAC not fulfilling the governance norms which are set by the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC). As per the norm, it is necessary for every sport governing body to earn the National Governing Body (NGB) status which is needed for all sports added in the Los Angeles 2028 Olympic Games. The International Olympic Committee during its 141st Session and Executive Board meeting in Mumbai last year had given its nod for the inclusion of cricket in the Los Angeles Games. "USA Cricket has announced the appointment of Johnathan

Atkinson as its new CEO, effective August 1st, 2024," the USAC said on its website. Atkinson most recently served as the Chief Operating Officer of USA Rugby. He joins USA Cricket with over 15 years of national governing body experience. "I'm honoured to join the team at USA Cricket. It's an incredible time for the sport here in the United States with the historic performance of the men's national team in the recent T20 World Cup, the completion of the second season of Major League Cricket, and the first opportunity to showcase cricket in the Olympics here on home soil during the LA28 games," Atkinson said. "Our goal is to build a world-class organisation to capitalise on that momentum, and firmly establish cricket's position in the American sporting landscape," he added. Atkinson is credited for leading USA Rugby through a financial restructuring in 2020 followed by a four-year period of rapid growth and development.



US stays alive with 4-1 win over New Zealand in men's soccer

AP ■ MARSEILLE (FRANCE)

Djordje Mihailovic converted a penalty as the United States pounced early in a 4-1 victory over New Zealand to stave off possible elimination at the Olympics. Mihailovic calmly hit the penalty in the eighth minute after Nathan Harriel was brought down in the box by Matthew Garbett. Four minutes later, senior player Walker Zimmerman, a defender, made it 2-0 when he poked in a goal in a scramble in front of the net following a free kick. Gianluca Busio scored on a rebound at the half-hour mark and celebrated by dancing with teammate Kevin Paredes. Busio later left the game with what appeared to be a hamstring injury, but he said it was just a precaution. Paxton Aaronson added a fourth goal for the United States in the 58th and New Zealand avoided the shutout with Jesse Randall's late goal. New Zealand's 2-1 opening victory over Guinea had put the team in a strong position to advance. The OlyWhites, as they are known, started the day second in the group to France. The United States is set to play Guinea in its final group match Tuesday in Saint-Etienne. New Zealand plays France in Marseille. Mitrovic said he's not scoreboard watching. New Zealand advanced to the quarterfinals of the Tokyo Games three years ago. Ukraine 2, Morocco 1 There was no reprieve for

Morocco this time. After the chaos and violence that marred the end of its 2-1 win over Argentina in the Olympic men's soccer tournament, Morocco conceded late again against Ukraine on Saturday - and this time the goal stood. On Wednesday, Morocco fans rushed the field and threw bottles in protest when Cristian Medina appeared to score an equalizer in the 16th minute of stoppage time for Argentina - causing the game to be suspended for around two hours. That goal was later disallowed by VAR for offside. But there was no sign of a repeat of those scenes when Ihor Krasnoprir scored in the eighth minute of stoppage time to seal a 2-1 win for 10-man Ukraine at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard. Morocco looked like it was edging closer to the quarterfinals after Soufiane Rahimi's 64th-minute penalty leveled the game at 1-1. The forward, who took his total to three goals for the Paris Games, won the spot kick when he was fouled by Volodymyr Saliuk. Saliuk was sent off for the offense. Ukraine had taken the lead in the 22nd through Dmytro Kryskiv. Ukraine's late win left all four teams in Group B tied on three points after Argentina shook off defeat to Morocco by beating Iraq 3-1. Argentina 3, Iraq 1 While Iraq threatened to pull off another surprise when Aymen Hussein leveled the game 1-1 in first-half stoppage time, goals from Luciano Gondou and Ignacio Fernandez sealed victory for Argentina.

Swiatek, Alcaraz and Djokovic start Olympics with win at French Open's site

AP ■ PARIS

Iga Swiatek and Carlos Alcaraz got the Paris Olympics tennis competition started with first-round victories under closed roofs at Roland Garros, the site of their French Open titles less than two months ago. Novak Djokovic also won in straight sets as he, like Swiatek and Alcaraz, opened a bid for a first Olympic gold medal. Djokovic's second-round opponent could be longtime rival Rafael Nadal, who was scheduled to play his opening singles match Sunday - but said he isn't sure whether he will remain in that event. "Tomorrow, I don't know

what's going to happen," Nadal said Saturday. "I don't know if I'm going to play or not." In Saturday's last match, Angelique Kerber defeated Naomi Osaka 7-5, 6-3 in a contest between two women who have been ranked No. 1 and own multiple Grand Slam titles. Kerber has said she will retire after representing Germany at these Games; Osaka was hoping for a deeper run than her third-round exit at the Tokyo Olympics three years ago after lighting the cauldron during the opening ceremony in her native Japan. Nadal, the Spaniard who won a record 14 of his 22 Grand Slam titles at the French Open

and owns two Summer Games golds, was a surprise torch carrier during the rain-soaked opening ceremony along the Seine River on Friday night. He won his doubles opener alongside Alcaraz on Saturday night. Nadal has not made entirely clear whether or not these Summer Games will be the final event of his career. He is 38 and has been dealing with injuries for much of the past two seasons. Nadal and Alcaraz never had played doubles together, but they got past the sixth-seeded Argentine duo of Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni 7-6 (4), 6-4. The No. 1-ranked Swiatek claimed four of her five career



major championships in Paris and grabbed the last four games to beat Romania's Irina-Camelia Begu 6-2, 7-5, while reigning French Open

and Wimbledon champ Alcaraz defeated Lebanon's Hady Habib 6-3, 6-1. Serbia's Djokovic, who is seeded No. 1 in the men's field after Jannik Sinner pulled out with tonsillitis, needed less than an hour for a 6-0, 6-1 win against Australia's Matthew Ebden - a doubles player participating in a tour-level singles match for the first time in two years. Ebden got into the singles bracket because he was in Paris to play doubles and thus available when 16th-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark withdrew with an injured wrist. Ebden's lone game came after he was already down 6-0, 4-0 - and he celebrated by pulling

the front of his yellow shirt over his head and baring his chest to roars from the flag-dotted crowd. The last time Djokovic was in Paris, early last month, he needed surgery for a torn meniscus in his right knee after getting injured during the French Open. He managed to not only play at Wimbledon but also reach the final before losing to Alcaraz. "I do feel more ready now than I was before Wimbledon and I really do feel better prepared," Djokovic said Saturday. "Olympics, from the beginning of the year, was one of the highest goals and objectives and priorities for this year. So let's see how it goes."

Australia takes early lead against US On Day 1 of swimming

AP ■ PARIS

Australia took the lead in its swimming showdown against the United States at the Paris Olympics by claiming two of three gold medals on the first full day of competition. Ariarne Titmus turned one of the most anticipated races of the Games into a blowout when she left Katie Ledecky in her wake at La Defense Arena. Titmus led from start to finish in the 400-meter freestyle Saturday night. The Australian star known as "The Terminator" handed Ledecky a second straight Olympic defeat in an event the American won at Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Titmus faced her stiffest challenge from 17-year-old Canadian phenom Summer McIntosh, but she won comfortably as McIntosh claimed the silver. Ledecky settled for bronze. Titmus swept the 200 and 400 free in Tokyo, and she is going for the same double in Paris. Ledecky is going for a double in the 800 and 1,500. Australia then made it 2 for 2 against the Americans in the women's 4x100 freestyle relay, claiming its fourth straight Olympic title in that event. The quartet of Mollie O'Callaghan, Shayna Jack, Emma McKeon and Meg Harris set an Olympic record with a winning time of 3 minutes, 28.92 seconds. The Americans - Kate Dougllass, Gretchen Walsh, Torri Huske and Simone Manuel - rallied to take silver.

China took bronze. The U.S. Finally got its first gold in the men's 4x100 freestyle relay. The Americans were anchored by Caleb Dressel, who won the eighth gold medal of his career. Australia took the silver. CHINA TAKES FIRST GOLD OF GAMES The first gold medal of the Paris Olympics went to China when Huang Yuting and Sheng Lihao beat South Korea's Keum Jihyeon and Park Hajun in the final of the 10-meter air rifle mixed team event Saturday morning. Shortly before that, Kazakhstan's Alexandra Le and Islam Satpayev became the first medalists of the games when they beat Germany's Anna Janssen and Maximilian Ulbrich 17-5 for the bronze. FRANCE'S FIRST MEDALS Luka Mkheidze and Shirine Boukli won France's first two medals of the Olympics when Mkheidze claimed silver and Boukli earned bronze in judo. Mkheidze lost 1-0 to Yeldos Smetov of Kazakhstan in the final of the men's 60-kilogram division - a disappointing result for the raucous crowd at Champ-de-Mars Arena. About 30 minutes before Mkheidze's loss, Boukli claimed France's first medal of its home Olympics with a victory over Spain's Laura Martinez in a bronze-medal match. Paris will have plenty of chances to cheer on its vaunted judo team, which has a competitor in all 14 weight classes in these Olympics. France is one of the world's top judo nations.



TENNIS CONTROVERSY Novak Djokovic was perplexed by the Olympics rules after his 6-0, 6-1 rout in less than an hour against an overmatched Matthew Ebden, a 36-year-old doubles player from Australia who hadn't competed in a tour-level, main-draw singles match since June 2022. Djokovic felt other singles players deserved a spot at the Olympics instead of Ebden. Ebden was in Paris to compete in men's doubles, where he's been as high as No. 1 and currently is No. 3 and has won two major championships. That made him available for the singles competition when 16th-ranked Holger Rune of Denmark pulled out because of a wrist injury. Ebden was not the first doubles player asked to fill in, but he was the first to say yes. He hadn't even practiced singles in about two years until playing a tiebreaker in training on Friday. In other tennis action, Rafael Nadal is not sure whether he

will compete in singles, saying after he paired with Carlos Alcaraz to win their first-round doubles match Saturday night that he wants to "make the smartest decision possible to have the best chances to bring (a) medal back home." Nadal's first match in singles, against Hungary's Marton Fucsovics, is scheduled for Sunday. Also, Angelique Kerber eliminated Naomi Osaka 7-5, 6-3 in the first round in a matchup between former No. 1-ranked players with multiple Grand Slam titles. RAIN DISRUPTIONS Rain continued from the opening ceremony through the first full day of competition and caused several postponements and delays at the Paris Olympics. Men's street skateboarding was supposed to start Saturday but was pushed to Monday because of the showers. The start of play in the scheduled

tennis matches on the 10 smaller courts at Roland Garros was delayed because of rain, but action started as scheduled in the two main stadiums that have retractable roofs. The rain could threaten the water quality for swimming in the Seine when the triathlon begins Tuesday with the men's event at the Alexander III bridge next to Grand Palais. 10-TIME OLYMPIAN Georgian shooter Nino Salukvadze made history as the first woman to compete at 10 Olympic Games in a career which began representing the Soviet Union. She has competed at every Summer Olympics since 1988, when she won gold as a 19-year-old Soviet prodigy. She set her latest record when she stepped into the shooting range for qualification in the women's 10-meter air pistol. Salukvadze placed 38th and didn't advance to Sunday's eight-shooter final. She gets another shot at a medal Friday in qualification for the 25-meter pistol event. In a career spanning five decades, the 55-year-old has competed on three different Olympic teams: the Soviet Union in 1988, then the Unified Team which was organized for ex-Soviet athletes in Barcelona in 1992 after the Soviet Union collapsed. She has represented her home country of Georgia following its independence for the last eight Olympics.

Boxer Preeti beats Vietnam's Vo Thi Kim Anh to enter pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS

Indian boxer Preeti Pawar picked up an unanimous decision win against Vietnam's Vo Thi Kim Anh to enter the women's 54kg category pre-quarterfinals at the Paris Olympics. The Asian Games bronze medalist, competing in her maiden Olympic Games, opened the proceedings for India in the boxing arena as she won her first round by a 5-0 margin on Saturday night. The 20-year-old from Haryana, who had been hospitalised for a few days ahead of the Games due to illness, was unimpressive in the first round as her Vietnamese opponent dictated the proceedings. But the Indian made amends in the next two rounds, attacking and landing clear blows on her opponent. "Happy that we started on a winning note! Despite falling ill before the Games, Preeti not only recovered but fought brilliantly and showed exceptional courage," Boxing Federation of India President Ajay Singh said. Preeti will face second seed and world championships silver-medallist Marcela Yeni Arias of Colombia in the round of 16 clash on Tuesday.