



BUDGET 2024-25

OPINION 6
INDIA BACKS PHILIPPINES IN SOUTH CHINA SEA STANDOFF

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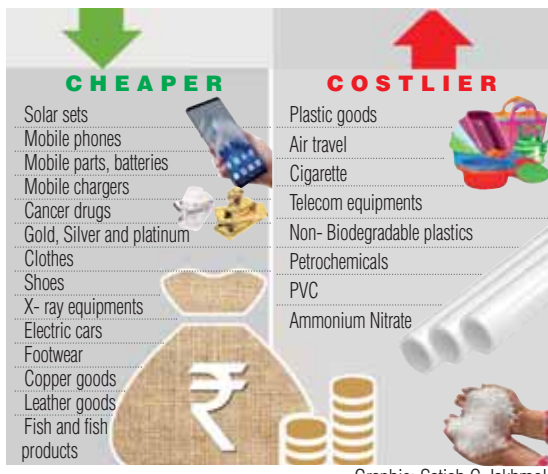
ASALANKA TO LEAD LANKA IN T20I SERIES AGAINST INDIA
11 SPORTS



LESS TAX, MORE JOBS

RAHUL DATTA ■ NEW DELHI

Reaching out to the middle class, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday announced major income tax relief from which four crore salaried individuals and pensioners stand to benefit. She also made it known that the Government will undertake a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act. Presenting Modi 3.0 Government's first Budget after the recently held general elections, the Finance Minister also abolished "angel tax" for all classes of investors in startups, cut customs duty on mobile phones and gold and simplified capital gains tax. Unveiling the Budget proposals in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said, "India's economic growth continues to be the shining exception (in a world that is gripped by policy uncertainties) and will remain so in the years ahead."



Elaborating upon the relief for the middle class, Sitharaman pointed to the hike in standard deduction — a flat deduction from total salary earned by an employee in a year before calculating applicable



Kursi Bachao Budget. Appear Allies: Hollow promises to them at the cost of other States. Appear Cronies: Benefits to AA with no relief for the common Indian. Copy and Paste: Congress manifesto and previous Budgets



Harnessing the power of Bharat's youth, Nari Shakti and farmers, the Budget fuels the nation's pace on the path of emerging as a developed nation by ushering in a new era of employment and opportunities

— RAHUL GANDHI
Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha said in a post on X

— AMIT SHAH
The Home Minister wrote on X with hashtag #BudgetForViksitBharat

income tax rate — by 50 per cent to ₹75,000 and tweaked tax slabs for taxpayers opting for the new income tax regime. This will lead to taxpayers under the new tax regime, which offers lower rates of taxes but permits limited deductions and exemptions, saving up to ₹17,500 in tax annually, she said. Sitharaman said the Government would release standard operating procedures for TDS defaults and simplify and rationalise the compounding of such offences. "The Budget proposes a comprehensive review of the customs duty structure over the next six months; reduction of TDS rate on e-commerce to 0.1 per cent besides, merger of two tax exemption regimes for charities into one. I propose to decriminalise TDS delay up to the filing of tax return," she said. "More than two-thirds of individuals have opted for the new income-tax regime," she revealed. The Finance Minister announced the Government has increased the income tax standard deduction for those who have opted for the new tax regime.

Big push to job creation

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Silencing the critics, the Narendra Modi government on Tuesday allocated a whopping ₹2.10 lakh crore for job creation and also likewise amount of ₹1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors to address the employment issue for which the BJP Government have faced flak during the last two tenure. Both the schemes, as announced by Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in her Budget, for employment will be based on enrollment in the EPFO [Employees' Provident Fund Organisation] and focus on first-time employees and employers." The scheme is expected to benefit 210 lakh youths. The second scheme for job creation in manufacturing will incentivise additional employment in the manufacturing sector, linked to the employment of first-time employees.

The scheme will provide incentives for companies, including paying for one-month salary for first-time employees, incentive at specified sale to both employee and employer with respect to their retirement fund contribution in the first four years of employment and reimbursing employers up to ₹3,000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution of each additional employee.

Continued on Page 8

Modi terms Budget visionary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday hailed the Union Budget for its measures for every section of society, asserting that it has heralded better growth and a bright future. "The Budget will act as a catalyst in making India the third-largest economy in the world and will lay a solid foundation for a developed India," he said in his televised remarks after Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the budget in Parliament.

Modi lauded the Budget's sharp focus on the youth, backward sections, women and middle class as also on manufacturing and infrastructure sectors, and asserted that the proposed employment-linked incentive schemes will create crores of new jobs. "This visionary Budget will uplift and empower every stratum of our society, paving the way for a brighter future for all," he said, stressing his government's commitment to generating employment and self-employment opportunities.



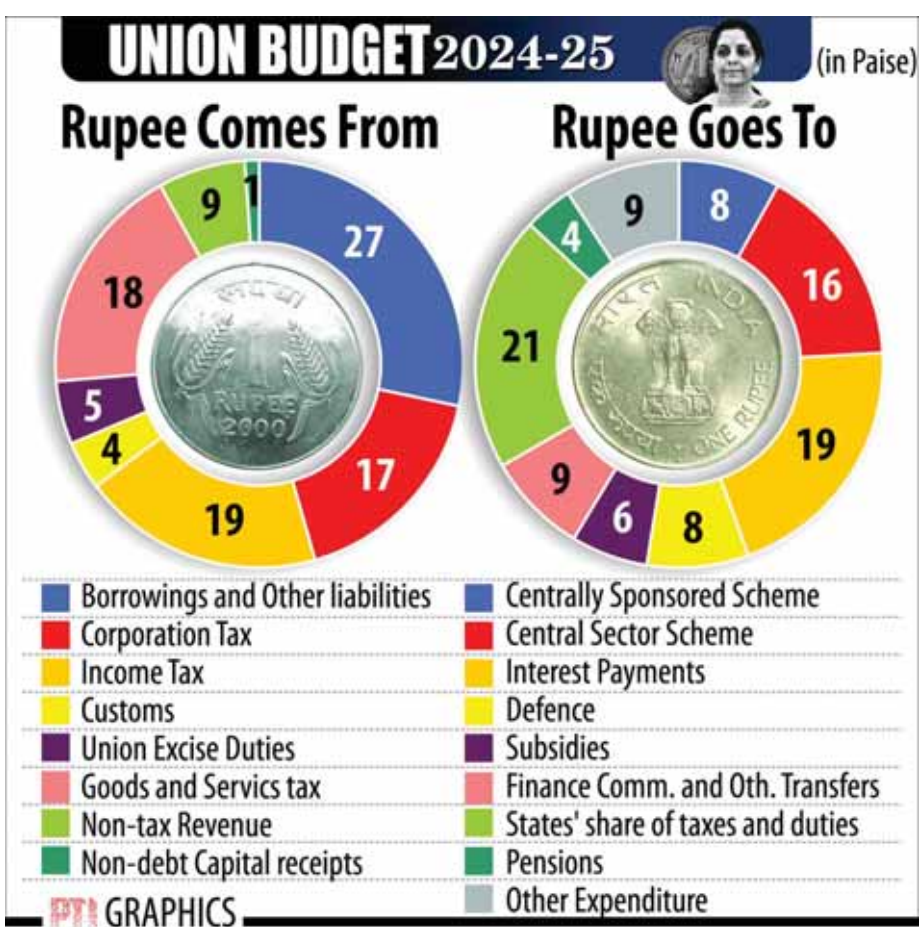
Continued on Page 8

SC rejects plea for NEET retest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Tuesday refused to order a reexamination for the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test undergraduate exam for the year 2024 (NEET UG 2024), saying the evidence before it was not sufficient to show a widespread leak of question paper and other malpractices as alleged by the petitioners who moved the court. A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra heard submissions from a battery of lawyers, including Solicitor General Tushar Mehta, appearing for the Centre and the National Testing Agency (NTA), and senior advocates Narender Hooda, Sanjay Hegde and Mathews Nedomapra for around four days. "At the present stage there is absence of material on record to lead to a conclusion that result of the exam is vitiated or that there is a systemic breach of the sanctity of the exam," the court said while rejecting the plea for retest. The interim verdict, to be followed by a detailed and reasoned order, came as a shot in the arm for the embattled NDA Government and the National Testing Agency (NTA), which were facing strong criticism and protests, on streets and in Parliament, over alleged large-scale malpractices like question paper leak, fraud and impersonation in the prestigious test held on May 5. Instead of reserving the verdict, the bench re-assembled around 4:50 pm and started dictating the order. It said "In a matter like this final conclusions of the court be recorded at the present stage since there is an urgent need to provide certainty and finality to the dispute which has occurred and affects the career of over 2 million students."

Continued on Page 8



Bihar, Andhra get special package

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

Although a "Special Package" for Narendra Modi's major allies — the JD(U) and TDP-ruled State Governments of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh was announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, a cryptic response by Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar on the Centre's refusal of "Special Category Status" set tongues wagging throughout the day, given the senior JD(U) leader's political maneuvering over the years. "You will get to know all things slowly, and slowly," Nitish said when asked by media in Patna a day after his demand for Special Status was completely denied by the BJP-led NDA regime at the Centre. Nitish led a resolution by his party recently which reiterated firm demand Special Status Category and the conditional support to BJP on the issue. By evening, however, Nitish claimed the Budget "meets our demand for special assistance, if grant of special status was



Bihar Chief Minister NITISH KUMAR



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister CHANDRABABU NAIDU

not possible because of practical difficulties." JD(U) lashed out at the Opposition RJD-Congress-Left combine for creating a ruckus over the demand for Special Status "forgetting that the UPA, of which they were a part, had rejected demand while it was ruling the Centre". "We were speaking of Special Status, and a lot of people said the provision for Special Status has been done away with much earlier. So, instead of that, aid should be given to help development in Bihar. Now, they have begun doing"

Nitish said. Keeping in mind the coalition politics and the key demands of the BJP-led NDA partners —TDP and JD(U), Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced special package for Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. The FM announced Rs 15,000 crore for Andhra Pradesh's new Capital, in her Budget speech. While TDP with 16 MPs is the biggest BJP ally in the NDA, the JD(U) has 12 members in Lok Sabha, making it the third largest constituent of the ruling alliance.

Continued on Page 8

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LIC/RI/2023-24/25/ENG

Man blackmailing women through AI, deepfake held

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a significant breakthrough, a Special Task Force (STF) team claimed to have apprehended a cyber criminal involved in blackmailing young women using artificial intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology. The arrest was made at Matiyari crossing in Chinhat on Tuesday evening.

The accused, identified as Rabbani from Barabanki, had been under surveillance for some time. During the operation, law enforcement officials recovered a laptop, a mobile phone, and various electronic gadgets from the suspect. They also found an Aadhaar card and 36 screenshots containing chat conversations and nude images of various women, all of which were part of the blackmail scheme.

According to Rabbani's confession, he acquired skills in computer editing during a six-month stint in Qatar. After returning to India, he delved into cyber crime. He joined platforms such as Telegram and Bot Nubee AI to enhance his expertise in creating fake nude images. His methods involved using websites, fake Aadhaar cards, fake GPS locations, and advanced photo and video editing tools, all while utilising VPNs to remain anonymous.

Rabbani revealed that he would steal photos from Instagram profiles of young women and manipulate them using AI and deepfake technology to produce explicit content. One notable case involved a girl whose images he used to create nude pictures. He sent these images to her through a fake ID and demanded money in exchange for not sharing them further. When the girl, a student, pleaded with him, he demanded a meeting at a hotel

Woman poisoned by husband

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A man in Lavkush Nagar, Indira Nagar, allegedly poisoned his wife on Tuesday. The woman, who survived the attack, is currently recovering at RML Hospital. Her condition, however, is reported to be critical. The police have registered a case against the husband and are investigating the matter.

The incident occurred in the new colony of Lavkush Nagar. The woman, originally from Kanpur, was married to Rashu from Lucknow. The couple had been experiencing frequent disputes since marriage, with a particularly severe argument taking place on Monday.

to discuss the payment required to delete the photos. In another instance, Rabbani was blackmailing a resident of Vikas Nagar while simultaneously contacting other victims. The police action followed a complaint lodged at Ghazipur police station by a woman whose daughter had been blackmailed by Rabbani. The woman reported that her daughter had suffered severe emotional distress due to the cyber criminal's actions.

The STF has sent the recovered electronic devices and gadgets for forensic testing to gather further evidence. The investigation is ongoing, with authorities working to uncover the full extent of Rabbani's criminal activities and identify additional victims.

Meanwhile, in a brazen incident in Gomti Nagar, a robber deprived a woman of her gold chain in Khargapur on Sunday night. The victim was targeted while buying pani-puri from a local vendor. The robber pushed her down and snatched her gold chain before fleeing the scene.

Following this, the husband allegedly force-fed her some poisonous substance, causing her condition to worsen. Neighbours, who were aware of the couple's argument, found the woman in a critical state and immediately informed her family. They rushed her to RML Hospital, where she is under treatment. The Ghazipur police are conducting an investigation to determine the motive behind the dispute and are currently searching for the accused husband.

Meanwhile, a 44-year-old man, Pintu Yadav of Mehndi Khera, died under mysterious circumstances in Manka Nagar on Tuesday. According to the police, Yadav was brought to

Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital in a poisoned state around 3:30 am and he died by 7 am. He was undergoing treatment for a mental illness. The Vibhuti Khand police have registered a case and initiated an investigation. In another incident, a 30-year-old woman named Puja was found hanging at her home in Dudhra village under BBD police station on Tuesday. Her husband Anil, a delivery man for an online shopping company, was not at home at that time. Police suspect the woman might have taken this step due to family discord. The body has been sent for autopsy, and investigations are underway.

The victim was identified as Geeta Gupta from Viram Khand. As she stopped near a pani-puri vendor, the robber approached from behind, shoved her to the ground, and snatched the chain, which broke due to the force.

TWO KILLED IN MISHAP

Two people were killed on Tuesday after their bike was hit by a UPSRTC bus on Delhi highway in Muzaffarnagar, police said. The police identified the victims as Sumit (24) and Aman (21). The accident occurred near the Dewal check post when the victims were returning from Binjor on their bike and were hit by the Uttar Pradesh roadways bus, SHO Ramraj Deepak Chaudhary said. They died on the spot. The driver managed to flee from the spot. Efforts are being made to arrest him, Chaudhary said. In a separate incident, two passengers were injured when a Uttarakhand roadways bus lost control and overturned in the Kotwali police station area here. The bus carrying 32 passengers was going from Delhi to Haridwar.

Pvt company employee accused of customer data theft

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

An employee of a private company dealing in household electrical items has been accused of stealing customer data, marking what is likely the first reported case of data theft in the city. The accused, Lavkush Chaturvedi, is currently absconding. The company has filed a complaint with the Vibhuti Khand police.

The data theft was discovered during routine updates of customer information when discrepancies were noted. The situation escalated after reviewing closed-circuit television (CCTV) footage, which revealed that Chaturvedi had been accessing and stealing customer data.

The incident initially came to light on Monday. According to the company's senior official, Chaturvedi absconded on July 20 at 6:12 pm after taking customer data and cheque payments. The company noticed the data was missing when it was required for updating records. Suspicion fell on Chaturvedi when he was found absent during the investigation of the missing data. CCTV footage later confirmed his involvement in the theft of both data and payment methods.

Attempts to contact Chaturvedi were unsuccessful. When approached, he provided misleading information and subsequently stopped answering calls. The company has since filed a formal complaint with the Vibhuti Khand police station. The official emphasised that tampering with customer data is a serious crime and that immediate legal action was taken. Chaturvedi had been employed by the company for the past two years. The reason behind his actions remains unclear.

DELAY IN COMPENSATION FOR LOSS OF LIVES, DAMAGED CROPS

CM Yogi seeks explanation from over six officials

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Continuing his action against negligent officers, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Tuesday sought answers from over half-a-dozen officials responsible for delay in compensation for loss of lives and damaged crops in various districts across the state.

Among those reprimanded included additional district magistrates (finance & revenue) from five districts. Additionally, explanations were sought from three sub-divisional magistrates (SDMs). In a notable action, Ashwini Kumar, a disaster expert from Kanpur Dehat, was also suspended for negligence in flood-related tasks.

The chief minister issued a stern directive to all these officers, asking them to submit

their clarifications to the government within two days. Failure to provide satisfactory answers may result in further stringent actions. This crackdown aligns with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's clear mandate that compensation for disaster-induced fatalities must be disbursed within 24 hours, underscoring his administration's zero-tolerance policy towards negligence in disaster management.

Relief Commissioner GS Naveen said that following CM Yogi's directives, compensation for disaster-related deaths was being provided within 24 hours across the state after completing the surveys. "Strict action is being taken against officials who are negligent in this process. As part of this, action has been taken

against officials for negligence in providing compensation for deaths and damaged crops during various disasters in the state," he said.

The ADMs who received adverse entries included Santosh Singh from Banda, Umesh Chandra Nigam from Siddharthnagar, S Sudhakaran from Sultanpur, and Gajendra Kumar from Muzaffarnagar. Additionally, explanations were demanded from SDMs, including Lalit Kumar Mishra from Sadar Tehsil in Siddharthnagar, Sanjay Kumar Singh from Shadabad Tehsil in Hathras, and Anil Kumar Katiyar from Atrauli Tehsil in Aligarh.

Furthermore, Ashwini Kumar, a disaster specialist from Kanpur Dehat, was placed under suspension for negligence in flood-related work.

Govt to invest ₹5 lakh crore in SCR over next two years

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh government plans to develop the recently constituted State Capital Region (SCR) along the lines of NOIDA (New Okhla Industrial Development Authority) in Gautam Buddha Nagar district. The state agencies—UP State Industrial Development Authority (UPSIDA) and UP Expressway Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA)—have been directed to commence the process of preparing detailed project reports.

The government has set a target of attracting Rs 5 lakh crore in investments in the region over the next two years. The SCR, in addition to Lucknow, includes five adjoining districts: Hardoi, Sitapur, Unnao, Rae Bareilly, and Barabanki, covering a total area of 27,826 square kilometers.

Awanish Awasthi, Advisor to the Chief Minister and former chairman of UPEIDA, stated that the focus would be on industrial development in SCR, with UPEIDA and UPSIDA playing lead roles in the region's development. These agencies will acquire land and develop industrial estates.

He noted that significant investments of over Rs 5 lakh crore have been made in NOIDA, and similar levels of investment are expected in the SCR over the next few years. Existing industrial estates and clusters in SCR include Sandila in Hardoi, Kursi Road in Barabanki, Amausi and Sarojini Nagar in Lucknow, and Unnao and Shuklaganj.

The UP-SCRDA, headquartered in Lucknow, will be led by the chief minister, with the chief secretary serving as vice-chairman. Other members of the develop-

ment authority include the additional chief secretary of Housing and Urban Planning, divisional commissioners of Lucknow and Ayodhya, district magistrates of all the districts concerned, and vice-chairmen of Lucknow, Unnao-Shukla Ganj, and Rae Bareilly development authorities, among others.

The team consists of more than three dozen members, including heads of departments from housing, revenue, urban development, finance, environment, rural development, irrigation, public works, transport, agriculture, tourism, and the chief town planner.

On Friday, UP Governor Anandiben Patel approved the establishment of the Uttar Pradesh State Capital Region Development Authority (UP-SCRDA), and the Housing and Urban Planning Department issued the notification.

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE
I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM MANJIT SINGH TO MANJEET SINGH. MANJEET SINGH S/O JASWANT SINGH R/O 120/830 RANJIT NAGAR, KANPUR

NOTICE
I HAVE CHANGED MY NAME FROM EBRAR AHMAD TO EBRAR AHMAD S/O SAMEEM KHAN R/O 183, PAIGAMPUR, BAKRI, POST-SUKETI, FATEHPUR.

NOTICE
MY DAUGHTER'S NAME IS MAVIYA IRFAN ACCORDING TO HER EDUCATIONAL RECORD WHENEVER HER CORRECT NAME IS MAVIYA FATIMA SO IN FUTURE SHE MUST BE KNOWN BY MAVIYA FATIMA FOR ALL FUTURE PURPOSE. IRFAN AHMAD S/O NAFIS AHMAD R/O 351/2 NEW LABOUR COLONY BABU PURWA KIDWAI NAGAR KANPUR-208011

NOTICE
It is informed that in my passport number - G7207585, my husband's name has been mentioned as Mohammad Zubair Siddiqui which is wrong whereas his correct name is Mohammad Zubair Manzoor. Both Mohammad Zubair Siddiqui and Mohammad Zubair Manzoor are the same person. In future he will be known as Mohammad Zubair Manzoor Sheeba Parveen wife Mohammad Zubair Manzoor R/o-488/59 Hasananj Kotwali Daliganj Lucknow

NOTICE
This is to inform that Original sale deed in the name of Sri Arvind Kumar Gupta S/O Late Sri Shiv Nath Gupta, which was duly registered in the office of Sub-Registrar Lucknow bearing document no. 281, dated 09/01/2008, regarding the property house no. 10A/84, Situated at Vrindavan Yojana no. 2, Sector-10, City & District Lucknow was lost with the ICICI Bank Limited between 26.08.2019 to 30.06.2024. If any person has found, claim or objection over it, kindly inform within 15 days from the date of publication of this notice and after the completion of above time period, no claim of any kind will be considered.
B. N. Tripathi Advocate, Res: C-15, Nehru Vihar, Kalyanpur, Lucknow, Mob: 9336127853

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE
I have changed my name from RAJESH KUMAR KAITHAL TO RAJESH S/O RAM SUMER PASI R/O KASARAH PURWA, SULEMABAD, FATEHPUR for future purpose

NOTICE
I would like to inform that two HDFC Bank FDR Nos. KP/2760298 and KP/2760281 belonging to Mrs. Uma Dwivedi have been lost. I, Vandana Dixit Kaushik, am the joint holder of both the FDRs. I request whoever will get it send in 14 days to the address- HDFC Bank Ltd., HDFC Bank House, Senapati Bapat Marg, Lower Parel (West), Mumbai-400013"

NOTICE
My date of birth erroneously been mentioned as 10-08-2009 in the High school marksheet where as the correct date of birth is 10-08-2006, which is mentioned in my birth certificate and Aadhar card. Sushant Agnihotri s/o Arun Kumar Agnihotri 34/38 Etawah bazar, Kanpur

NOTICE
I have changed my name from KM JYOTI to KUMARI JYOTI. In future I shall be known as KUMARI JYOTI. KUMARI JYOTI W/o Prakash Kumar Patayian Janghai, Handia, Prayagraj

Student beaten for not bringing pen

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In yet another case of misconduct by a teacher, a Class 7 student was severely beaten and expelled by the principal of a private school in Chaudharana Mohalla, Malihabad, for forgetting to bring a pen to school. The incident occurred on Saturday when the student arrived at school without a pen. The principal slapped him, pulled his hair, and made derogatory remarks about his inability to bring the required items. The student, in severe pain, pleaded with the principal to stop, but the principal reportedly responded that his role was to discipline such students harshly.

LDA vice-chairman stresses on need to modernise office operations

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Vice-Chairman of Lucknow Development Authority (LDA) Prathmesh Kumar on Tuesday emphasised the urgent need to modernise the office operations and instill a sense of discipline among the staff. During his inspection of various departments, Kumar stressed that discipline is crucial for enhancing individual efficiency and driving organisational progress. He warned that a lack of discipline could impede the growth of the institution. Kumar proposed the intro-

duction of digital storage rooms to manage property registry documents. Initially, these rooms will have the capacity to store 4,000 files, addressing past issues of file loss and inaccessibility. He assured that this system would be further expanded to accommodate all related documents. The development of the digital storage room is scheduled to begin in October and is expected to be completed within a month. In addition to digital storage, Kumar plans to preserve important old files that are deteriorating but are critical for historical records. He also

instructed that each staff member be assigned a dedicated 'almirah' with their names and mobile phone numbers clearly labelled. This measure aims to enhance transparency and organisation by ensuring that file subjects are clearly identified. Furthermore, Kumar directed officials and engineers involved in the rehabilitation of displaced persons from Akbar Nagar to relocate them to ground-floor accommodations based on genuine needs. This move is part of his broader effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of LDA operations.

Navigating gridlock: Challenges at IGP crossing

SHARMILA KRISHNA ■ LUCKNOW

The Indira Gandhi Pratishthan crossing near Shaheed Path has seen significant traffic growth over the years. By 11 am, the area becomes heavily congested, especially with frequent VIP movements and a high traffic volume from three sides. Roadways buses further exacerbate the situation, resulting in longer waiting times for commuters. The area boasts important government offices, corporate hubs, and a dense commercial zone, including major hotels and restaurants that attract large crowds. The proximity to the High Court and regular events at the Indira Gandhi Pratishthan contribute to the

brisk VIP movement. Additionally, the nearby Ram Manohar Lohia Institute of Medical Sciences ensures a steady flow of traffic, including ambulances. The crossing connects four major roads: Ayodhya Road, Hotel Hyatt, PIC UP, and Shaheed Path. Five traffic signals, regulated by the ITMS, manage the crossing. Notably, this area is free from tempos, autos, and e-rickshaws, reducing clutter. However, auto rickshaws often wait near Hotel Hyatt for passengers. Commuters often express frustration over the extended waiting times at the crossing. One commuter shared, "The waiting time here exceeds the average. It often takes two batches of vehicles to pass through the crossing during peak hours. If you have reservations at near-

by eateries, delays are almost inevitable." A traffic constable stationed at the crossing highlighted the challenges faced during office and school hours. "Five of us manage traffic here. The crossing is small, but the traffic flow from three sides is immense. While one side moves, the others wait, creating a perception of longer waiting times. The traffic signals are timed at 40 and 50 seconds, resulting in a two-minute wait," he explained. He also noted the increased number of commuters due to the High Court and various offices in the area. A senior traffic official clarified that the traffic signal timers are adjusted according to the load on each side. "The timer is longer on the three sides with heavier traffic compared to

the side coming from Hotel Hyatt. We regulate traffic based on these timers, which vary during peak and non-peak hours," he said. The official pointed out that roadways buses add to the traffic load. "These buses travel from Kaiserbagh to Kamta bus stand, passing through several crossings, including IGP and Chinhat. We have written to the UPSRTC about this issue, but there is no alternative route due to restrictions at the polytechnic crossing. An alternative route from Utretia to Shaheed Path could be viable, as Shaheed Path descends at Kamta crossing, which also has the Awadh Bus Stand," he suggested. Manpower is essential at the crossing to prevent signal jamming.

UP ATS busts SIM box racket

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The sleuths of the Anti-Terrorists Squad (ATS) of Uttar Pradesh claimed to have arrested an accused involved in converting international calls into local calls by passing the international gateway. The arrest was made on Monday morning and the ATS team recovered an illegal SIM box and its accompanying equipment. The arrested accused was operating an illegal telephone exchange in his own house in the Dullipur village of Baksha police station area of Jaunpur. During the initial interrogation, the accused revealed that he used to sell clothes in Mumbai from 1997 to 2012, where he met Jahangir, a resident of Bhiwandi, Mumbai, who gave him information about Mohammed Ali from Saudi Arabia, and he started the conversation. Ali told the accused about the profit in the business of SIM box and said that if he was ready, he could make money sitting at home. He was told that he would have to arrange for the Internet, a laptop and a room. The accused was provided the equipment related to the SIM box by Ali through courier and it was configured through AnyDesk software. The arrested accused further disclosed that Ali had sent the profit earned in the business to his bank account. Sometimes money was also sent in cash through a local

person. In this way, a profit of about Rs 1 lakh was made in a month. Ashraf Ali used to land international calls through the Internet on the SIM box by bypassing the international gateway, due to which VoIP (internet) calls got converted into normal voice calls and instead of the caller's number, the caller's number displayed to the receiver was of the SIM installed in the SIM box. Due to this, the identity of the original caller could not be established. In connection with the above action, FIR No. 231/2024 under sections 219 (2)/318(4)/319(2)/61(2) BNS, 4/20/21/25 Indian Telegraph Act 1885 and 3/6 Indian Wireless Act has been registered at the Baksha police station in Jaunpur. Retailers providing pre-activated SIMs in large numbers and other members of this gang are also on the ATS radar.

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PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
HARBOUR WORKS DIVISION NO.1
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE
e-TCN No. CE/RWD/AGCTS-15/23/231, dttd. 17.07.2024.
Name of the Work: Supply & installation of Ladders & Bollards along with installation of Cell & Super-M Fenders in various Berths of Paradip Port for two years*. Put to tender value: Rs.1,16,88,795.32 plus GST as applicable. Last date & time of submission of tender through online bidding is 08.07.2024 up to 17:15 Hrs. For details, please log on to the Website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
Sd/- Executive Engineer,
Harbour Works Division No.-1
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/24/2024-25 dttd. 22.07.2024

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF CONSTRUCTION ENGINEER
RURAL WORKS CIRCLE, BALASORE
"e" Procurement Notice for Road Work
O-136
Identification No. - Online Tender- Road N.C.B. No. 05 for 2024-25
Date: 22.07.2024

Letter No. 2647 W/E, Date: 22.07.2024

- Name of the work :- Road under MMSY-TRIP
- Total No. of work :- 1 Nos. of Roads.
- Estimated Cost :- Rs. 696.28 lakhs (Approximately)
- Eligible Class of Contractor :- As per Annexure
- Period of Completion :- As per Annexure.
- Other details :-

Procurement Officer	Bid Identification No.	Availability of tender On-line for bidding		Last Date & Time of sealing Tender	Date & Time of Opening of Tender in O/S E.R.W. Circle, Balasore	Technical Bid		Financial Bid
		From	To			6	7	
Chief Engineer, Rural Works Circle, Balasore	NCB No.-05 of 2024-25	29.07.2024 at 11:00 A.M	13.08.2024 Up to 5.00 P.M.	12.08.2024 Up to 5.00 P.M.	14.08.2024 at 11.00 P.M.			Will be intimated later

Further details can be seen from the website: www.tendersodisha.gov.in

OIPR-25105/11/0007/2425

Sd/- N.V. Hantharao
Chief Engineer,
R.W. Circle, Balasore.

Yogi: Budget inclusive development-oriented

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath hailed the Union Budget for the current fiscal (2024-25), tabled by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lok Sabha on Tuesday. He said the budget would prove to be all-encompassing, inclusive, and development-oriented, meeting the hopes, aspirations, and resolutions of 'Amritkal' for 140 crore Indians. "The General Budget 2024-25 provides the economic blueprint for fostering an 'aatmanirbhar' (self-reliant) and 'Viksit Bharat'. It embodies the sacred spirit of 'Antyodaya' and seeks to tap the country's infinite development potential with a fresh vision of innovation. The budget's provisions for every section of society are poised to realise the concept of Ramrajya," he said. Yogi expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra



Modi for the budget and congratulated Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and her team. He highlighted that the budget includes a provision of Rs 1.52 lakh crore for the prosperity of farmers and the agriculture sector, and over Rs 3 lakh crore for women's empowerment. "The greatest beneficiaries will be the people of Uttar Pradesh, the country's largest state. This is significant as Uttar Pradesh has been actively implementing the 'Mission

Shakti' programme since 2020. With the highest number of farmers residing in Uttar Pradesh, this budget will play a crucial role in their prosperity," he remarked. He noted that the budget would act as an economic blueprint to position India as the world's growth engine and to achieve the vision of a developed India, with the goal of transforming the nation into a five trillion-dollar economy. "The middle class has received the biggest tax exemption today, addressing a long-standing demand. There will be no tax on an income of up to Rs 3 lakh, and other tax slabs also offer substantial relief. The provisions for various sectors — rural poor, farmers, youth, industry, and the MSME sector — will generate numerous jobs. The provisions made in the budget for every section of society will help realise the concept of Ramrajya," he remarked.

Welcome budget for farmers, says RLD

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

National spokesman of Rashtriya Lok Dal Anil Dubey welcomed the Union Budget-2024-25, pointing out that the government allocated a fund of ₹152 lakh crore for farmers, giving them a message that they are on their priority list. "The budget is good for all — farmers, youths, women, and labourers. The government announced internships for one crore youths, while credit cards for farmers in five states and several other schemes were also announced," he noted. Meanwhile, RLD national secretary Anupam Mishra said the budget would prove to be an economic document for the creation of a 'developed and self-reliant India'. "The budget carries the spirit of Antyodaya and infinite possibilities of development. This budget reflects the resolve for holistic development of all sections of the society, including villages, poor, farmers, women, middle class and youth. I thank the respected prime minister and the Union finance minister for this public welfare budget," he said. Meanwhile, Health Minister and Deputy CM Brijesh Pathak expressed gratitude to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. "The budget presented by the Central government will help in the development of a modern India. The budget fulfils the vision of 'Viksit Bharat' of 2047, as envisioned by PM Modi. The budget shows concerns for the student community, the farmers and has provisions for the uplift of the middle class. By giving relief in the income tax, the Central government has given a big gift to the government employees," he added.



People watch live telecast of the Union Budget presentation by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Lucknow on Tuesday

PTI

Nothing for weaker sections: Maya

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Termining the Union Budget-2024-25 anti-poor, Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) president Mayawati on Tuesday claimed that it had nothing for the weaker section. "The budget is based on an old pattern made for just a handful of rich people," she remarked. The former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh posted on social media platform X: "The Union Budget presented in Parliament today, on its old pattern, except for a handful of rich and wealthy people, has no hope of 'good days' for the poor, unemployed, farmers, women, hardworking, deprived and neglected Bahujans of the country to get rid of their troubled lives." She added: "This new government also lacks the expected reformist policy and intention towards the tremendous poverty, unemployment, inflation, backwardness prevailing in the

country and the uplift of more than 125 crore people belonging to the weaker sections and the basic facilities required for them. Will the provisions in the budget make people happy and prosperous?" "The development of the country and the uplift of people should not be a maze of figures, but provide basic things like employment opportunities, money in pocket for spending to help them get rid of the troubled life. Everyone should feel the progress together. Development of railways is also very important. The government should give work to every hand like the BSP government did in the past," the BSP chief said. Meanwhile, the CPI (ML) criticised the budget, describing it as offering only a 'junjhuna' (rattle) to the unemployed while failing to address the needs of farmers. "No measures have been taken to reduce the rising food inflation," the party

stated. State secretary of CPI (ML) Sudhakar Yadav criticised the lack of concrete measures to tackle the severe unemployment that has persisted over the past decade. "Instead of a scheme like Agniveer, there should have been provisions for permanent employment. The demand for a legally guaranteed Minimum Support Price (MSP) for farmers has once again been ignored. The promise to double farmers' income remains unfulfilled," Yadav said. He also pointed out that the budget neglects the working class, with scheme workers such as ASHA, Anganwadi, and cooks being overlooked. The struggles of farm labourers, the rural poor, and programmes like MNREGA have not been addressed, nor has there been any provision for job guarantees for the urban poor, he said. "Care has clearly been taken to please corporate allies," he added.

Several significant provisions provided for MSME sector

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Union Budget-2024-25 includes several significant provisions for the MSME (Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises) sector. A new credit guarantee scheme has been announced, offering collateral-free loans to MSME units. To support this, a self-financed guarantee fund will be established, providing guarantee coverage of up to ₹100 crore for each borrower. This initiative will also benefit small units in the state that struggle to repay loans on time due to unavoidable reasons, preventing their accounts from becoming NPAs. The Yogi government has been consistently encouraging

MSME units in the state, and the new budget provisions will invigorate the MSME sector. UP's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises, Khadi and Village Industries, Silk Industry, Handloom and Textiles Minister Rakesh Sachan described it as an all-inclusive and development-oriented budget. He noted that MSME units currently face significant challenges in obtaining loans from various banks, which impacts their economic stability. "To address this issue, a new credit assessment model will be introduced in the budget, which will simplify the process of approval of loans based on digital footprints. This will make it easier for MSME units to secure loans. Unlike the

traditional system that relies on assets and turnover, this new system will streamline access to bank loans," he added. He also mentioned that the budget includes an increase in the loan limit under the Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, raising it from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh. This facility will be available to units that have repaid their previous loans within the stipulated time frame. In the next three years, 24 new SIDBI branches will be established in MSME clusters to assist MSME units in obtaining loans. Additionally, the registration limit on the TReDS (Trade Receivables Discounting System) platform has been reduced from ₹500 crore to ₹250 crore, enabling

more MSME units to register and access credit easily. e-commerce export hubs under the PPE model will support MSMEs and traditional artisans by facilitating the sale of their products in both national and international markets. Additionally, 100 NAB-accredited food testing labs will offer high-quality testing services to food processing units. Over the next five years, training will be provided to 1 crore youth at 500 large companies across the country, equipping them to start their own enterprises. These measures will significantly contribute to empowering the MSME sector and driving economic growth. Have to wait for electricity at affordable rates.

Cong flays 'anti-people' budget

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Congress president Ajay Rai on Tuesday criticised the Union Budget-2024-25, calling it anti-people and claiming it is full of empty promises. "There is no solution to any major problem of the country, whether it is employment for youth, support for farmers, or inflation. There is no clear roadmap. Instead of discussing the promises made and schemes announced in the last budget, new promises and announcements are being made," Rai said while reacting to the budget. Rai said that if people carefully watch the budget speeches of 2023 and 2024, many discrepancies become apparent. For instance, the last budget promised that one crore farmers would be brought under the ambit of natural farming within three years, he noted. "This promise has been repeated in this year's budget, suggesting no progress was made in the past year. Similarly, the promise to open 10,000 bio input resource centres has been reiterated, indicating none have

been opened," he said. He criticised the Modi government's much-touted Smart City project, noting that it has not been effectively implemented in the past 10 years. Instead of discussing smart cities in the current budget, there is a need to develop cities as development centres, Rai argued. He also accused the government of partially adopting promises from the Congress party's manifesto, which was formulated with public input. "For example, the budget promises apprenticeships to one crore youth over the next five years with a stipend of Rs 66,000 per year," he pointed out. However, Rai added that the Congress manifesto proposed apprenticeships for all degree/diploma holders with an annual stipend of Rs 1 lakh. Rai criticised the budget's lack of clear plans for MSMEs, which he described as the backbone of the Indian economy. Instead of merely offering loans, MSMEs, already burdened with debt, need substantial support. He warned that increasing both short-term and long-term capital gains taxes

would hurt the economy, investors, and the middle class's savings. He noted the budget's omission of MNREGA, a UPA project crucial for addressing rural unemployment. Rai also highlighted the government's indifference towards the health sector, pointing out the need for advanced health infrastructure post-COVID-19. "The poor condition of government hospitals forces the common man to rely on private hospitals, plunging many into debt for medical treatment," he said. Rai expressed disappointment over the lack of encouraging plans for education in the budget. He pointed out that the budget for the University Grants Commission, the premier institute for higher education, had been cut by 60% compared to the previous year. Rai stated that the Modi government lacks a clear vision for the country's development and is indifferent to pressing issues like youth unemployment, inflation, fair prices for farmers, and the rights of tribals. "Like every time, this budget is disappointing," he said.

AIPEF: Extremely disappointing

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Power sector flayed the Union Budget 2024-25, tabled in Lok Sabha on Tuesday, saying it has nothing for the expansion of the power industry, generation, transmission and power distribution. The All-India Power Engineers Federation (AIPEF) said the budget was extremely disappointing and there was nothing in it for the energy sector, especially the transmission sector and power distribution companies of the states. AIPEF chairman Shailendra Dube said that the employees were hopeful that there would be talks of restoration of old pension, 8th Pay Commission, dearness allowance of 18 months confiscated during the Covid period, filling of lakhs of vacant posts in the Central government, and regularisation of outsourced employees in power sector, but the lack of it disappointed them. The UP Power Consumer Forum also criticised the budget, saying it had disappointed the power consumers.

Industry lauds focus on skill dev

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chairman of CII, Northern Region, Madhav Singhania praised the Union Budget-2024-25 for its focus on skill development through a new centrally-sponsored scheme and the upgradation of Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs). He welcomed these measures as steps toward leveraging the potential of the country's youth. Singhania stated, "The Union Budget 2024-25 is a significant move toward building a robust and inclusive India. We commend the government's focus on capital expenditure, which will create jobs and boost economic growth. The emphasis on the care economy, including working women's hostels and crèches, aligns with CII's vision of an inclusive society. Additionally, the focus on digital public infrastructure, especially in agriculture, will revolutionise the sector and benefit millions of farmers. The introduction of a credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs, enhancement of Mudra loans, and the creation of e-commerce hubs under the PPP model are expected to

boost revenue, fuel employment, and offer higher wage opportunities. The new scheme for skill development and ITI upgrades will also harness the potential of our youth." Sunjay Kapur, deputy chairman of CII, Northern Region, added, "The budget's emphasis on ease of doing business through measures like rationalising stamp duty and incentivising states for business reforms is a positive step. The abolition of angel tax is a major boost for the startup ecosystem. We are encouraged by the focus on energy transition and the development of a roadmap for HTA industries, which will help accelerate India's progress toward a low-carbon future. The increased allocation for skill development and e-commerce export hubs will create new opportunities for MSMEs and youth. Enhanced healthcare funding will strengthen medical infrastructure, and investment in agritech will support farmers with innovative solutions." Smita Agarwal, chairperson of CII Uttar Pradesh, described the Union Budget 2024-25 as reflecting a balanced and forward-thinking approach. "The

emphasis on women-linked schemes is a commendable step toward gender equality and empowerment. The budget's new priorities, ranging from enhancing agricultural productivity to fostering innovation and implementing next-generation reforms, provide a clear roadmap for sustainable development. The Rs 100-crore guarantee fund for MSMEs and improved credit access will support their growth and stability," she said. IIA senior vice-president Dinesh Goyal welcomed the budget's provision for credit support to MSMEs during stress periods, a long-standing demand of the IIA. "This support will help many MSMEs avoid sickness and closures, ultimately boosting the economy. The focus on ease of doing business is also a welcome step. However, effective monitoring of government efforts and close interaction with stakeholders will be required to achieve the desired results," he said. Alok Agarwal, general secretary of IIA, noted that the Rs 2.66 lakh crore allocated for rural development and infrastructure, along with Rs 11.11

lakh crore for overall infrastructure, will indirectly benefit MSMEs and create employment opportunities for youth. However, he expressed concern that despite several announcements, the budget allocation for the MSME sector is not high-lighted. "Historically, the MSME sector receives a negligible share of the total budget. We hope for adequate provisions this time," Agarwal said. Awadhesh Agarwal, national treasurer of IIA, expressed hope that the review of the Income Tax Act 1961 would simplify processes for taxpayers. "Simplifying tax systems generally increases government revenues. Announcements regarding easing litigation and appeal systems are a welcome step," he said. Shashank Shekhar, chairman of the GST Committee of IIA, welcomed the budget's announcements for MSMEs, including term loans without guarantees, enhanced Mudra loan limits, expanded mandatory onboarding in TReDS, MSME units for food irradiation, quality and safety testing, and reductions or exemptions of customs duties for domestic industries.

Economic experts all praise for budget

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Economic experts in the city hailed the Union budget 2024-25. Madhurima Lal, a professor in economics, Lucknow University, said it is a well-conceived budget. "Placing priorities on agriculture, employment, inclusive development, manufacturing and services, urban development, energy, infra, innovation, R&D, and nexgen reforms is a gradual step-wise healthier promotion of financial support to inclusive growth," she said. Reacting to the government's push for concerns of employment and education in the budget, she said: "I feel the PM's comprehensive package of five schemes aimed to skill and employ 4.1 crore youth over five years have strongly infused a life force into the job market fostering a skilled workforce. Also, by offering financial support of up to ₹10 lakh for higher education loans, the government directly aids one lakh students annually. This will help in reducing financial burdens and enhancing



Members of Adarsh Vyapar Mandal watching live broadcast of budget at a hotel in Lucknow on Tuesday

domestic institution admissions and inputs. This step ensures not only better accessibility but also promotes quality education and to remain within reach," she said. She said that her second concern regarding the manufacturing sector through smaller sections has also been well addressed. "Marketing has always been a concern and the budget sees that to enable MSMEs and traditional artisans to sell their products in international markets, E-Commerce Export Hubs will be set up in public-private-partnership (PPP) mode. These hubs, under a seamless regula-

tory and logistic framework, will facilitate trade and export related services under one roof as per the announcements of Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her Union Budget 2024 speech. This will facilitate our industrial sector to the extent that no one could foresee just now but if implemented in the right direction could be the base to turn our trillion economy with controlled inflation rate into a reality," she added. Prof Mahendra Kumar, an economic expert from BBAU, said that the significant focus of the budget centres around job cre-

ation, upgradation of social and economic standard of living and creation of avenues for employment generation for the unemployed youth. The finance minister has earmarked some of the developmental areas on priority that include enhancement of agricultural productivity, opportune avenues for employment generation and skilling, boosting up of manufacturing and service sector and rural and urban housing development with energy security. Meanwhile, a budget discussion was organised in a private hotel on Tuesday under the joint aegis of Uttar Pradesh Adarsh Vyapar Mandal and FICCI. Traders, industrialists, chartered accountants and women traders sat together and watched the live telecast of the budget and reviewed the budget presented by the Union finance minister. State president of Uttar Pradesh Adarsh Vyapar Mandal Sanjay Gupta expressed his views on the budget and said that it is going to encourage both the traders and people of the country. "Uttar Pradesh Adarsh Vyapar Mandal had been

demanding changes in the income tax slabs for the last several years. The finance minister has presented the right path by increasing the income tax slabs. This will also increase the number of income tax payers which, in turn, will increase the income of every income taxpayer of the country and the purchasing power of the people will increase, which will benefit both industry and businesses," he said. Trader Sanjay Gupta also welcomed the decision to increase the Mudra loan from ₹10 lakh to ₹20 lakh and removal of customs duty on gold and silver. He said it would bring working capital to the traders and the removal of customs duty on gold would increase the purchasing power of gold. Business leader Sanjay Gupta also welcomed the plan to provide collateral free loan of up to ₹100 crore to the MSME sector. He said that abolishing angel tax from startups would also benefit the youth starting startups and investment opportunities in startups will increase and more unicorns will be created.

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Notice under Section 13 (2) of the Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002

The following borrowers and co-borrowers availed the below mentioned secured loans from IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). The loans of the below-mentioned borrowers and co-borrowers have been secured by the mortgage of their respective properties. As they have failed to adhere to the terms and conditions of the respective loan agreements and had become irregular, their loan were classified as NPA as per the RBI guidelines. Amounts due by them to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) are mentioned as per respective notices issued more particularly described in the following table and further interest on the said amounts shall also be applicable and the same will be charged as per contractual rate with effect from their respective dates.

Sr No.	Loan Account No.	Type of Loan	Name of borrowers and co-borrowers	Section 13 (2) Notice Date	Outstanding amount as per Section 13 (2) Notice	Property Address
1	20889119 & 32538961	LOAN AGAINST PROPERTY	1. SHREE LAXMI TRADING CO 2. AKASH SHUKLA 3. AMAR SHUKLA 4. ISHA SHUKLA 5. LAXMI CHANDRA SHUKLA 6. NEETU SHUKLA	20.01.2024	80,80,538,98/-	ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PLOT NO. 3, ADMEASURING 1935 SQ. FT. I.E. 179.832, PART OF KHASRA NO. 10855A, SITUATED AT AURANGABAD JAGIR (HIMALAYAN CITY), WARD RAJA BIJLI PASI, LUCKNOW, UTTAR PRADESH-226002, AND BOUNDED AS:- EAST: 12 MTRS. WIDE ROAD, WEST: PLOT NO. 6, NORTH: PLOT NO. 4 & 5, SOUTH: PLOT NO. 2

You are hereby called upon to pay the amounts to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited) as per the details shown in the above table with contracted rate of interest thereupon from their respective dates and other costs, charges etc. within 60 days from the date of this publication, failing which the undersigned shall be constrained to initiate proceedings, under Section 13 (4) and section 14 of the SARFAESI Act, against the mortgaged properties mentioned hereinabove to realize the amount due to IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited). Further you are prohibited under Section 13 (13) of the said Act from transferring the said secured assets either by way of sale/lease or otherwise.

Sd/-
Authorized Officer

Date : 24.07.2024
 Place : LUCKNOW

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited, amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited and presently known as IDFC FIRST Bank Limited)

Provide better facilities to devotees: CM



Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath reviewing progress of development work in Varanasi on Monday evening.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath instructed the officials to provide better facilities to the devotees visiting Kashi during the month of Shravan and emphasised that devotees should not face any difficulty. "Ensure stringent cleanliness across the entire city, including major shivalayas, and provide adequate lighting and medical facilities in shivalayas and crowded areas. Additionally, fool-proof traffic and security arrangements must be made," he instructed, while holding a review meeting with officials and public representatives at Circuit House here on Monday evening to assess the arrangements for Shravan and the progress of development projects. The CM directed officials to promptly address public issues, emphasising the need for transparency, quality and timeliness. He stressed the importance of ensuring that all eligible individuals benefit from the government's welfare schemes, stating that no eligible beneficiary should be left out. He also instructed officials from the implementing agencies to complete ongoing projects with high standards of quality, urging them to run a campaign on a war footing for this. While reviewing the construc-

tion projects in Varanasi, Yogi expressed dissatisfaction with the progress in the construction of the 200-bed barracks in Ramnagar PAC and ordered that accountability be fixed for those responsible and the work be expedited. He instructed officials to commence the construction of the district's medical college as soon as possible. He also emphasised the need to complete the pending works of the rural drinking water scheme swiftly, noting complaints about roads not being repaired after laying of pipes. The CM instructed that responsibility be assigned to the contractors concerned and that 100 per cent repair of affected roads be ensured. Additionally, he directed officials to ensure time-bound progress in the construction of the International Cricket Stadium in Ganjari. He also directed that the issue of disrupted drinking water supply in Baraogaon market, caused by a pump breakdown for the last two months, be resolved immediately and added that accountability be fixed for those responsible. The CM issued strict instructions to prevent sewer overflows anywhere in the city, emphasising that any complaints regarding this should be addressed promptly. Officers were advised to handle these issues with full sensitivity.

Addressing complaints regarding Electricity department employees not answering phone calls, he instructed that such JEs, AEs, and SDOs be identified and strict action be taken against them accordingly. Additionally, he directed the nomination of a nodal officer to oversee project monitoring. Yogi noted that Varanasi, being the parliamentary constituency of the prime minister, has seen development works worth approximately Rs 40,000 crore completed under his guidance. Besides, development projects worth about Rs 12,000 crore are currently underway. He emphasised that while preparing the Detailed Project Reports (DPRs) for these projects, the suggestions of local public representatives must be considered. He also directed that a nodal officer be appointed to monitor each project. The CM emphasised the need for timely resolution of pending revenue cases, including those related to inheritance and measurements ensuring quality disposal of complaints. He also directed that security systems be strengthened for the safety of women, traffic management and tourism. Special attention was given to enhancing the image of the Varanasi Development Authority (VDA) and Municipal Corporation by

improving their operational processes. For the Sawan Mela, he instructed the deployment of sufficient police force to ensure the safety of Kanwariyas and other devotees. During the meeting, he reviewed the progress of Ring Road Phase 2, the widening and beautification of major roads, under-construction railway overbridges, buildings, and other projects, and ordered that these tasks be expedited. During the review, the Divisional Commissioner (DC) Kausal Raj Sharma reported that this year, four new routes have been added, along with a total of six gates, to facilitate easier darshan for devotees. He also mentioned that arrangements have been made for zig-zag barricading as well as managing cleanliness, security, CCTV, fire fighting, drinking water and toilets to control the crowd. District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam informed the CM that the Public Works Department (PWD) has repaired the pits near the Markandeya Mahadev temple complex and that parking arrangements have been made. The CM instructed the Municipal Commissioner Akshat Verma that a special cleanliness campaign for the ghats and temples should be launched and ensure that Kashi becomes completely free from single-use plastic. He instructed Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary to ensure adequate Health department arrangements for the Kanwariyas and other devotees visiting the temple premises. In the meeting, Police Commissioner Mohit Agarwal briefed the CM on various arrangements, including the deployment of police force for security, traffic management and parking arrangements. The meeting was also

Yogi flags off Anna Seva van

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath flagged off the Shri Kashi Vishwanath Dham Anna Seva van from the temple premises on Monday evening. The five vans will deliver food

after the Lok Sabha elections. During the 'darshan puja', state government ministers Dayashankar Singh, Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu', Ravindra Jaiswal, Legislative Council member Hansraj Vishwakarma etc. were present. On reaching the KVT the



CM Yogi Adityanath flagging off Anna Seva van from KVT in Varanasi on Monday

prepared in the temple's canteen to hospitals and Sanskrit schools. Later, on the first Monday of Shravan, Yogi offered prayers at sanctum sanctorum of Kashi Vishwanath Temple, performing the Shodashopachara puja. He prayed for the welfare of the people. Prior to this, the chief minister worshipped Baba Kalbhairav, the 'Kotwal of Kashi', seeking his blessings. It was the CM's first visit to Kashi for 'darshan' and 'puja'

CM greeted the devotees who had come for 'jalabhishek' and they chanted 'Har Har Mahadev'. During his one-day tour of Varanasi on Monday, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath instructed the temple administration, district officials and police to ensure that devotees do not face any inconvenience during the month of Shravan. He emphasised that all necessary facilities should be provided to the devotees.

attended by UP's Labour and Employment Minister Anil Rajbhar, Minister of State for Stamp and Court Registration Fee (Independent Charge) Ravindra Jaiswal, Minister of State for AYUSH and Food Security (Independent Charge) Dr Dayashankar Mishra 'Dayalu', Mayor Ashok Tiwari,

MLCs Hansraj Vishwakarma and Dharmendra Rai, MLAs Dr Neelkanth Tiwari, Saurabh Srivastava, Dr Awadhesh Singh, Sunil Patel and T Ram, MD of Purvanchal Vidut Vitran Nigam Ltd Shambhu Kumar, V-C of VDA Pulkit Garg and various other departmental officers.

Minister: Budget will strengthen economy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal described the Union Budget as multidimensional which will strengthen the country's economy. Commenting on the Budget presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, he said it has been prepared keeping in mind the youth, poor, women and food providers. "Certainly this budget will provide great relief to the farmers and youth of the country", said Jaiswal.

He further said that with this Budget, the income of the farmers will double and the youth will have skills in their hands. "Middle class families and elderly people above 60 years of age will get great relief", he said, adding that in the new tax regime for salaried employees, income up to ₹3.75 lakh is tax free which means it will give benefit of ₹17,500 and tax exemption on family pension has also increased from ₹15,000 to ₹25,000. The minister said the employees have also been given relief in income tax slab.

According to him, in the Union Budget, ₹2 lakh crore have been allocated for five schemes related to employment and skill training for the youth. "Those who are not getting any benefit under government schemes will get education loan of more than ₹10 lakh", he said, adding that the government will give up to three per cent of the loan money.

Along with this, the government will start a scheme to provide internship opportunities to one crore youth in 500 top companies. In this scheme,

honorarium of ₹5,000 per month and one-time assistance of ₹6,000 will be given, he said while praising the Budget. "Not only this, for the youth joining the first job, if the salary is less than ₹1 lakh, help of ₹15,000 will be given in three installments in EPFO", he said.

Meanwhile, Regional Vice President of Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of UP Anil K Jajodia said on first look of the General Budget, it seems to be a good one in the direction of progress and development in which an attempt has been made to take care of the views and needs of every section of the society.

"Although no special package has been given separately for the development of Purvanchal (eastern Uttar Pradesh) in this Budget, but the kind of opportunities shown in it the entrepreneurs and businessmen of Purvanchal by preparing themselves can take great advantage of it", he said, adding that the way investment has been made in development in Varanasi and this region in the last 10 years and the government has set a target of a massive investment of ₹11 lakh crore on infrastructure, the people of this region should prepare themselves to take up infrastructure projects so that the local companies and the people here can get maximum benefit from the large development fund. Along with this, Jajodia said, by making more organised and collective efforts in the tourism, health, education, export and food processing sector, new momentum and direction can be given to the economic prosperity of Varanasi and Purvanchal.

3 more Arogya Mandirs get NQAS certificates

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Medical and health facilities are being continuously expanded and strengthened at the community level in Varanasi, the parliamentary constituency of the prime minister. Keeping in mind 'Arogyam Param Dhanam', the reach of better health services is increasing in the community through Ayushman Arogya Mandirs being operated near home. Recently, the Government of India certified three more Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of the district as National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS), which includes Thathara and Amini of Adarsh block Sewapuri and Korauta Ayushman Arogya Mandir of Kashi Vidyapeeth block. Giving this information, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary expressed happiness and said that Thathara of Adarsh block Sewapuri has scored 90 per cent and Amini has scored 91.4 per cent in the final assessment of NQAS and Korauta of Kashi Vidyapeeth block has scored 84.86 per cent marks. The CMO congratulated the community health officers, ANMs, ASHA Sanginis, all ASHA workers



and gram pradhan of Thathara, Amini and Korauta. Deputy CMO and Nodal Officer Dr HC Maurya, District Programme Manager (DPM) Santosh Kumar Singh, MOIC (Sewapuri) Dr Manoj Kumar Verma, MOIC (Misirpur, Kashi Vidyapeeth) Dr Rambali Singh, Divisional Advisor of Quality Assurance Dr Tanveer Siddiqui, Block Programme Manager Anup Kumar Mishra, District Maternity Health Consultant Poonam Gupta and other related staff contributed significantly in all the assessment work of NQAS. Apart from this, Aparajita Singh of Nutrition International (NI) organisation also played an important role. According to the CMO, earlier Khargrampur and Kardhana Pratham Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of Adarsh block Sewapuri have been NQAS certified. Presently, all the

Ayushman Arogya Mandirs of rural areas have enrolled for NQAS. Along with this, the evaluation process is being done for the rejuvenation and NQAS of all the community and primary health centres of urban and rural areas. Gradually, all Ayushman Arogya Mandirs, CHCs and PHCs in Varanasi will get the status of NQAS certified and rejuvenated so that the community can also get quality medical and health facilities. CHO Priya Singh, ANM Dharma Devi, Sangini Gunjan Devi and gram pradhan Sunil Kumar Bind of Thathara Ayushman Arogya Kendra played an important role. CHO Rupam Bharti, ANMs Mamta and Meera, Sangini Phool Kumari and gram pradhan Anil Kumar of Amini and CHO Priya Mall, ANMs Rajat Kumari and gram pradhan Dinesh Kumar Patel of Korauta played an important role.

Special discount to students taking digital study material in UPRTOU

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A special discount has been arranged for students taking digital study material in the session 2024-25 in Uttar Pradesh Rajarshi Tandon Open University (UPRTOU). These students will be given a one-time discount of 15 per cent in the admission fees. This has been announced by its Vice-Chancellor Prof Satyakam. He said the university has started admission from Samarth Portal for the first time and this time we have set a target of admission of one lakh in the first year. For which workshops were organised in various districts of Purvanchal to increase enrollment. Prof Satyakam said that the aim of the university is to increase the quality of education. He said self-study material is the best study material in distance education system which cannot be matched by textbooks. He said the university does not want to make any kind of compromise with the quality of education, that is why strict instructions have been given to the teachers to complete the work of creation of self-study material soon. The V-C is in favour of making women of backward areas aware of education. For this, he called upon the coordinators to run a campaign and motivate

especially minority women for education. The university will help them in every possible way. Priority will be given to providing self-study material in Urdu as per the requirement of such areas. SUGGESTION: The All India Akhara Parishad has suggested the UP government to issue identity cards to all the saints and kalpvasis coming to the Maha Kumbh. Mahant Hari Giri, General Secretary of the Akhara Parishad and patron of Panchdashnam Juna Akhara, said that the Yogi Adityanath government should make it mandatory for all the people coming to the Maha Kumbh starting from January 13, 2025 to bring identity cards so that the entry of anti-religious elements under the guise of babas and kalpvasis can be stopped. Talking to journalists, Mahant Hari Giri said many times people also get fake identity cards made. Therefore, it should be made mandatory to get a copy of Aadhar card, voter ID card or other identity card certified by a gazetted officer, corporator, village head, panchayat secretary or any competent officer. Mahant Hari Giri has urged the Yogi government and the Mahakumbh administration to make arrangements for online registration for the devotees coming to the Mahakumbh.

Balanced Budget: Bhatia

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

CA Jasbir Singh Bhatia on Tuesday reacting to the Union Budget 2024-25 said riding on high economic growth and robust revenues, Union Finance and Corporate Affairs Minister Nirmala Sitharaman focused on youth and middle-class, job generation and a push for MSMEs and manufacturing in the country. While catering to the salaried class, youth and farmers, Sitharaman disappointed the futures and options (F&O) segment in the capital market by hiking Securities Transaction Tax on F&O trades. As expected the capital gains taxation regime was also rationalised both on rates and the holding period for financial assets. He said the credit guarantee schemes for MSMEs in manufacturing revision announced in the Budget 2024 indicates continued support to MSMEs as they play significant role in the manufacturing value chain of critical industry segments. With focus on plan and machinery, the scheme will help MSMEs to expand capacities, scale up production and improve the size that will make them competitive and enhance market reach. This support is critical in the development of manufacturing ecosystem in India for emerging sectors such as electronics

and semiconductors. The scheme is completely aligned to the government focus on 'Make in India'. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an investment of ₹10 lakh crore for the construction of on crore houses in cities under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana-Urban 2.0, of which Rs 2.2 lakh crore will be under Central assistance over five years. As PMAY-U is set to end on December 31 this year, the Cabinet had approved one crore new houses in the first meeting of the third term. The finance minister also announced the allocation for interest subvention for affordable houses, something which was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his Independence Day speech in 2023. In a bid to provide surplus at the hands of the middle class, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced an increase in the standard deduction to ₹75,000 from ₹50,000, and also tweaked the tax slabs under the simplified New Tax Regime (NTR) marginally. These decisions will provide a tax benefit of up to ₹17,500 per year to individual taxpayers under the NTR. The Old Tax Regime was left untouched in the Budget, and the additional savings offered under the NTR may be seen as further sweetening of the new regime in a bid to attract more salaried taxpayers to it. Over the past

few years, the government has been trying to make the simple and exemption-free NTR the preferred tax regime for salaried taxpayers. Tax payers falling in the highest tax bracket—those with a taxable income of ₹15 lakh or more—will save ₹7,500 on account of enhancement in the standard deduction limit under the NTR. In addition to this benefit, the rate rationalisation will lead to savings of ₹10,000 for this segment of taxpayers, taking their total savings to ₹17,500. On economy, the Budget has stayed the course of the fiscal glide path of reducing deficits to the target of 4.5 per cent by 2025-26. An increase in capital gains tax and securities transaction tax on F&O transactions are clearly aimed at pricking a possible bubble in the market. The economic survey hinted at this by noting that if equity market claims on the real economy are excessively high. Angel Tax abolished: This is one of the boldest moves made by the Finance Minister. It will be a big boost to the startup world and a game changer. In addition, the space economy will get a boost with a VC fund of ₹1,000 crore. Overall, it is a balanced budget with a covering thrust on employment, skilling, infrastructure. It will greatly boost economic activity and will aid in job creation, he added.

Newborn's body found

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Tension prevailed after the body of a newborn was found in Meja on Tuesday morning. After the people of the colony informed the corporator Sachin Kesari about it he immediately reported the matter to police. On getting police reached the spot and sent the mutilated body of the newborn for the post-mortem examination. The people spotted that the body cut into two parts lying on the side of the road in Sonkar colony in Dudiyala locality of Koraon Bazar around 11 am on Tuesday. On seeing it, the people informed the corporator. On getting information the police reached the spot and took the body of the newborn into possession and sent it for post-mortem. Koraon police station incharge Rakesh Kumar Bharti said the body has been taken into possession and sent for post-mortem. SUSPENDED: While working in the agricultural farm of Central Jail Naini, an undertrial prisoner escaped by dodging

the police late on Saturday. On returning from work on Saturday night, while counting the prisoners the jail officials came to know about his disappearance. After that the jail officials informed the police of Naini and Mahoba district. After which four warders were suspended for negligence in duty with immediate effect. Kalicharan (28) of Paswara area of Mahoba Nagar Kotwali was given 20 years sentence in gang rape case. He was sent to Naini Central Jail on March 9. On Saturday Kalicharan was taken by jail constables (warders) Balveer Yadav, Abhishek Singh, Ashutosh Chaturvedi, Brijesh Yadav to the farm for agricultural work. Kalicharan escaped by crossing the boundary built towards Leprosy Road with the help of a tree. Till Tuesday evening the jail and police team raided many places in search of Kalicharan but he could be not be found. Meanwhile the Dhoomanganj police claimed to have nabbed a teacher for allegedly outrag-

ing the modesty of a minor girl and sent him to jail. When the matter reached the police, the teacher absconded. The police registered a case. The Dhoomanganj police arrested the teacher on Monday night. A person working in a bank lives with family in Dhoomanganj area. His daughter is studying in an inter college in Jhalwa. A few days ago, a teacher there told her family that she needed tuition. The family also hired that teacher for tuition. The teacher took the girl somewhere after a few days and allegedly raped her. After this, the student was threatened that if she told anything to anyone, her life would be ruined. Also, she would be killed. The student remained silent for a few days, then she told her family members. After this, the police recorded the statement and started action. Dhoomanganj SHO Vaibhav Singh said the teacher has been arrested. He was nabbed near Nate Crossing. The accused is a resident of Lalauli area in Fatepur and was living here in Dhoomanganj area.

GHS-IMR hosts farewell party

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Dr Gaur Hari Singhania Institute of Management and Research (GHS-IMR) hosted the Rock and Roll Farewell Party 2024 for the Batch of 2022-24 on Monday. As the PGDM Batch of 2023-25 prepares to say goodbye to their seniors, they are experiencing a whirlwind of emotions. Excitement abounds as they look forward to the new opportunities that lie ahead in their personal and professional journeys. However, this enthusiasm is tinged with sadness as they prepare to leave behind the friends, faculty and staff who have become such a significant part of their lives over the past two years. The ceremony commenced with an inaugural address and welcome speech by Prof Rahul Goyal, Director of GHS-IMR. He inspired the students by reflecting on their remarkable journey. He highlighted the transformation from their anxious first days of orientation to becoming confident and capable graduates. After the farewell introduction, Garima Singh and Shashank Singh took the stage to perform. Junior students put on a series of impressive musical acts, including singing, dancing, and other performances to honour their seniors. Senior students also showcased their talent with beautiful performances. The event included a talent round, games and various competitions to select Mr Farewell, Ms



Farewell, Mr Prince, and Ms Princess 2024. Judging the winners was particularly challenging due to the exceptional performances by the students. The most eagerly awaited titles were announced at the end of the event with Mr Farewell and Ms Farewell being awarded to Manas Shukla and Aashna Mittal and Mr Prince and Ms Princess going to Vaibhav Maheshwari and Roli Tripathi. Prof Goyal along with other faculty members, awarded prizes to the winners. KANPUR METRO: Kanpur Metro is set to enhance its rainwater conservation capacity to approximately 24 lakh litres, encompassing a 32.4 km viaduct spanning both corridors, all 29 stations and two Metro depots. Comprehensive measures are being implemented to effectively conserve rainwater across the Metro infrastructure. Specifically, at every second span of the viaduct, water will be directed to designated pits situated in the median.

DM distributes land records to farmers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

Kannauj District Magistrate Shubrant Kumar Shukla, while distributing the land records to farmers at a function organised at the Primary School Bhojpur, Usmanpur, on Monday said residents of Usmanpur can also get the benefits of government's welfare schemes. It may be recalled that due to burning of land records of as many as 35 villages in a major fire in the Phoos Bungalow, Farrukhabad in 1990, farmers were deprived of getting the benefits of government's welfare schemes for the past several years. He said land records of Nandlalpur and Karnauli villages had already been handed over to farmers while the farmers of remaining villages will also get their land records in due course, he added. Chakbandi Officer Dharmendra Singh said due to efforts of the district magistrate, the work for prepa-



Kannauj District Magistrate Shubrant Kumar Shukla distributing land records to farmers in Usmanpur.

ration of land records had started by a team set up on January 9, 2023. Thereafter, the district magistrate planted a mango sapling in the name of his mother in the school campus. Tehsiladar Abhinav Verma, Chakbandi Officer Anis Siddiqui, ACO Dinesh Kumar Sharma, gram pradhan Jyoti, former gram pradhan Suresh Chandra along with other officers and villagers were present. The villagers are upbeat after getting the land records of their property and praised the all-out efforts of Kannauj DM.



Home Ministry gets ₹2.19 lakh cr

Major chunk for central police forces like CRPF, BSF, CISF

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has allocated Rs 2,19,643.31 crore for 2024-25 to the Ministry of Home Affairs with the majority of it — Rs 1,43,275.90 crore — being given to central police forces like the CRPF, BSF, and CISF which are responsible for internal security, border guarding, and security of vital installations. The interim budget 2024-25 had allocated Rs 2,02,868.70 crore to the home ministry, helmed by Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Finance Minister Sitharaman has allocated Rs 42,277.74 crore to Jammu and Kashmir which is currently under the direct control of the central government after the abrogation of Article 370. In the budget, Rs 5,985.82 crore

has been given to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, Rs 5,862.62 crore to Chandigarh, Rs 5,958 crore to Ladakh, Rs 2,648.97 crore to Dadra and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu and Rs 1,490.10 crore to Lakshadweep. The budget also allocated Rs 1,309.46 crore (Rs 578.29 crore in 2023-24) towards work related to census and Rs 1,606.95 crore to the National Disaster Response Force (Rs 1,666.38 crore in 2023-24). Among the paramilitary forces, the CRPF got Rs 31,543.20 crore, up from a revised estimate of Rs 31,389.04 in 2023-24, the BSF got Rs 25,472.44 crore (Rs 25,038.68 crore in 2023-24), the CISF was allotted Rs 14,331.89 crore (Rs 12,929.85 crore in 2023-24), the ITBP got Rs 8,634.21 crore (Rs 8,203.68 crore in 2023-24), the SSB was given Rs 8,881.81 crore (Rs 8,435.68 crore in 2023-24) and the Assam



Rifles was allotted Rs 7,428.33 crore (Rs 7,276.29 crore in 2023-24). The Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) is mostly deployed for internal security duties, operations against terrorists in Jammu and Kashmir, Naxals in central and eastern

India and the insurgents in the Northeast. The Border Security Force (BSF) guards India's borders with Pakistan and Bangladesh and it is also deployed for internal security duties. The Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) guards vital installations like nuclear plants, airports, and metro networks. The Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) guards the Sino-Indian border, the Shashastra Seema Bal (SSB) guards the India-Nepal and India-Bhutan borders, while the Assam Rifles protects India's border with Myanmar. The Intelligence Bureau (IB) has been allocated Rs 3,823.83 crore (Rs 3,268.94 crore in 2023-24), the Delhi Police got Rs 11,180.33 crore (Rs 11,940.33 crore in 2023-24), the Special Protection Group got Rs 506.32 crore (Rs 446.82 crore in 2023-24). The IB is India's internal intelligence agency, the Delhi Police guards the national capital and the SPG provides security to the prime minister. Meanwhile, Rs 3,756.51 crore has been allocated to the Border Infrastructure and Management, Rs 3,152.36 crore has been given for developing police infrastructure, Rs 1,105 crore for schemes related to women's safety, Rs 9,305.43 crore for various central sector projects and schemes sponsored by the home ministry, Rs 3,199.62 crore for security-related expenditure and Rs 1,050 crore for Vibrant Villages Programme. The budget allotted Rs 1,248.91 crore to the Cabinet under which the expenditure on the council of ministers, cabinet secretariat, Prime Minister's Office, hospitality and entertainment of the government comes while Rs 6,458 crore has been given for disaster management, relief and rehabilitation and grants-in-aid to state governments among others. The Safe City Project has been allotted Rs 214.44 crore, the National Forensic Science University got Rs 80 crore and the Rashtriya Raksha University has been given Rs 90 crore.

Attempt to enhance woman participation in work force

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

For promoting women-led development, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the budget carries an allocation of more than Rs 3 lakh crore for schemes benefitting women and girls. Presenting the Union Budget for 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha, Sitharaman said this signals the government's commitment in enhancing women's role in economic development. "For promoting women-led development, the budget carries an allocation of more than Rs 3 lakh crore for schemes benefitting women and girls," she said. Sitharaman said the government will set up working women hostels to promote their participation in the workforce. "We will facilitate higher participation of women in the workforce by setting up of working women hostels in collaboration with industries and establishment of creches in addition to the partnership will seek to organise women specific skilling programmes and promotion of market access for women SHG enterprises," she said. These initiatives are aimed at enhancing work-home balance for women, thus encouraging their greater participation in the workforce. As mentioned in the interim budget, there is a need to focus on the poor, women, youth and farmers, she said. Additionally, the budget outlines the launch of women-specific skilling programmes designed to boost female workforce participation, which has



increased to 24 per cent in Q2FY24. The budget showed that the recent payroll data shows a notable rise in female workforce participation. However, the Ministry of Women and Child Development has seen a marginal increase of 2.5 per cent in its Budget allocation for the fiscal year 2024-2025. The total budget for the ministry stands at Rs 26,092 crore, up from the previous year's revised allocation of Rs 25,448 crore. The SAMARTHAYA sub-scheme, supporting projects such as Women Hostels, Swadhar Greh and Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana, has been allocated Rs 2,516 crore, a slight increase from the previous Revised Budget when Rs 2,325 crore was allocated. A significant portion of this budget of the WCD ministry is directed towards the centrally sponsored schemes, which received Rs 25,848 crore. The flagship schemes under the ministry, such as Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0, Mission VATSALYA, and Mission Shakti, have been given substantial funds to continue their efforts in improving nutrition, child protection, and women's empowerment. Specifically, Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0 have been allocated Rs 21,200 crore, aiming to combat malnutrition and support early childhood care. Other key allocations include Rs 5.60 crore as India's contribution to UNICEF and continued funding of Rs 500 crore for the Nirbhaya Fund, which supports initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security of women.

Defence outlay hiked 4.79%

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With the objective of sustaining the ongoing modernisation and ensure operational readiness, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has allocated Rs 6,21,940 crore to the defence sector for 2024-25. The grant for 2023-24 was Rs 5,94 lakh crore and the hike is 4.79 per cent. In an effort to keep up the momentum of acquisition of modern weapon systems for the armed forces, the capital outlay is pegged at Rs 1,72,000 crore. The total allocation to the defence sector is 12.9 per cent of the total budget of the government of India for the financial year 2024-25. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the allocation of Rs 1,05,518 crore for domestic capital procurement will provide further impetus to atmanirbharta (self-reliance) in the defence sector. "As far as the allocation to the Ministry of Defence is concerned, I thank Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for giving the highest allocation to the tune of Rs 6,21,940.85 crore, which is 12.9 per cent of the total budget of the govern-



ment for 2024-25," he said in a social media post. "The capital outlay of Rs 1,72,000 crore will further strengthen the capabilities of Armed Forces. Earmarking of Rs 1,05,518.43 crore for domestic capital procurement will provide further impetus to Atmanirbharta," he said. "I am pleased that Border Roads have been given 30 per cent increase in allocation over the last budget under the capital head. This allocation of Rs 6,500 crore to BRO will further accelerate our border infrastructure," he said. To boost the startup ecosystem in defence industries, Rs 518

crore has been allocated to the iDEX scheme to fund technological solutions given by startups, MSMEs and innovators, Rajnath said. In the interim budget presented on February 1, the defence allocation was Rs 6.21 lakh crore. While maintaining the allocation made to defence ministry during interim budget, the government has made an additional allocation to the tune of Rs 400 crore on innovation in defence through the Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI) scheme. Through this scheme, MoD is engaging with startups/MSMEs and innovators to develop Def-Tech solutions and supply the Indian military with innovative and indigenous technological solutions. A grant of up to 50% of Product Development Budget with enhanced limit (Max) of Rs 25 crore per applicant will be awarded as per extant iDEX guidelines. The allocation for 2024-25 is higher by approximately Rs one lakh crore (18.43%) over the allocation for FY 2022-23 and 4.79% more than allocation of FY 2023-24.

Allocation for civil aviation reduced, local air connectivity to get a hit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The budgetary allocation for the civil aviation ministry has been reduced to Rs 2,357.14 crore for the current fiscal ending next March, with regional air connectivity scheme set to get Rs 502 crore during the same period. In the revised budgetary allocation for 2023-24, the amount for the ministry was at Rs 2,922.12 crore. As per documents of the Union Budget 2024-25 the ministry will get an allocation of Rs 2,357.14 crore. The money set aside for the regional air connectivity scheme has been cut to Rs 502 crore from Rs 850 crore in the revised budgetary allocation for 2023-24. The amount is for revival of 22 airports as well as commencement of 124 RCS routes and Viability Gap Funding for North East Connectivity. To improve connectivity in the northeast region, a new scheme has also been formulated for providing air connectivity and aviation infrastructure, as per a document. However, the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for drone and drone component will receive a higher allocation of Rs 57 crore this fiscal compared to Rs 33 crore in the 2023-24 revised estimates. For 2024-25, the allocations for the Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) have been cut to Rs 302.64 crore and Rs 89 crore, respectively.



In the Budget, an amount of Rs 57.14 crore has been allocated for the Hotel Corporation of India Ltd, which will be utilised to meet its statutory and other obligations under the ministry. According to the documents, an amount of Rs 85 crore has been allocated this fiscal for providing medical benefits to retired employees of Air India, which was sold by the government to Tata Group in 2022.

Govt allocates ₹4,000 cr for Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The government on Tuesday brought back interest subsidy under the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (Urban) 2.0 and set aside Rs 4,000 crore for Credit Linked Subsidy Scheme (CLSS). In the 2024-25 Union Budget, PMAY-U has been allocated Rs 30,170 crore, an increase of 20.19 per cent from the 2023-2024 budgetary allocation. According to the Union Housing and Urban Affairs Ministry, the interest subsidy scheme can soon be availed by the economically weaker section (EWS), lower income group (LIG) and middle income group. Nearly two years ago, the government did not extend the time period of CLSS under PMAY, which provided subsidised home loans based on income. At present, the scheme is being implemented through three verticals -- Beneficiary Led Construction/Enhancement, Affordable Housing in Partnership and In-situ Slum Redevelopment.

Presenting the Budget 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said that three crore additional houses under the PM Awas Yojana in rural and urban areas will be constructed, for which the necessary allocations are being made. According to budgetary document, Rs 3,000 crore has been allocated for EWS and LIG groups to construct houses under CLSS in urban areas while the middle income group will be provided Rs 1,000 crore. Sitharaman announced central assistance of Rs 2.2 lakh crore over the next five years to meet housing requirement of one crore urban poor and middle class families under the PMAY-U and proposed interest subsidy to provide loans at affordable rates. She said, "Under the PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0, housing needs of one crore urban poor and middle-class families will be addressed with an investment of Rs 10 lakh crore." "This will include the central assistance of Rs 2.2 lakh crore in the next five years," she added.

Cancer drugs exempted from customs duty

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Exemption of customs duties on three additional cancer medications essential for treating prevalent types like lung, liver, and endometrial cancers and Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on X-ray tubes and flat panel detectors used in medical X-ray machines under the Phased Manufacturing Programme to "bolster domestic production capacity" were the key highlights of the Budget 2024 announced by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman for the Health sector. Overall, the Union health ministry has been allocated Rs 90,958.63 crore in the 2024-

2025 budget, an increase of 12.96 per cent over the Rs 80,517.62 crore 2023-24 revised estimates. Addressing the Budget speech here, Sitharaman said, "To provide relief to cancer patients, I propose to fully exempt three more medicines from customs duties. I also propose changes in the BCD on x-ray tubes & flat panel detectors for use in medical x-ray machines..." Given the high expense of cancer treatment, which often makes them inaccessible to many, this exemption of custom duty on the additional cancer drugs is a crucial step. The three cancer drugs exempted from customs duty are Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab.



Welcoming the move, DS Negi, CEO, Rajiv Gandhi Cancer Institute and Research Centre called it a significant step towards making essential cancer treatments more accessible and affordable for patients

Similarly, Dr Shyam Aggarwal, Chairman, Medical Oncology at Sir Ganga Ram Hospital, was of the view that slashing the custom duty on medical devices in the cancer sector will lead to "spurring of indigenous manufacturing of digital X-ray machines in India." "The reduction in GST and Import Duty on APIs will help in stabilising the Pharma prices in the country, boost the domestic manufacturing and make the medicines available for the common people at lower prices. This is in alignment with the Government's mandate of providing accessible health for all," said Dr Pradeep Multani, Former President, PHDCCI and Chairman, Multani

Pharmaceuticals Ltd. According to the budget details, out of the Rs 90,958.63 crore, Rs 87,656.90 crore has been allocated to the Department of Health and Family Welfare and Rs 3,301.73 crore to the Department of Health Research. Among the centrally sponsored schemes, the budget allocation for the National Health Mission has been increased from Rs 31,550.87 crore in 2023-24 to Rs 36,000 crore in 2024-25 and for the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) from Rs 6,800 crore to Rs 7,300 crore. For the National Tele Mental Health Programme, the budget allocation has been increased from Rs 65 crore to Rs 90 crore.

Development push to key heritage sites in Bihar, Odisha

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In her address unveiling the Union Budget 2024-25, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman placed a spotlight on Bihar and Odisha's rich cultural heritage, announcing ambitious plans for the development of key spiritual and historical sites. Among these, the Vishnupad Temple corridor at Gaya and the Mahabodhi Temple at Bodhi Gaya are slated for comprehensive transformation, modeled after the successful Kashi Vishwanath Temple Corridor. Sitharaman emphasised that these initiatives aim to elevate these revered sites into world-class pilgrim and tourist destinations, as a part of broader



efforts to position India as a global tourist hub, creating jobs and stimulating investments across various sectors. Sitharaman also outlined plans for Rajgir and Nalanda in Bihar. Rajgir, known for its religious significance among Hindus, Buddhists, and Jains, will undergo comprehensive development, highlighting its cultural heritage and natural attractions like the Saptarishi hot springs. Nalanda, home to the ancient Nalanda University, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, will be revitalised as a tourist center, with efforts to restore the university to its former glory, she said. "Rajgir holds immense religious significance for Hindus, Buddhists and Jains. The 20th

Tirthankara Munisuvrat temple in the Jain temple complex is ancient. The Saptarishi or the seven hot springs form a warm water Brahm Kund that is sacred. A comprehensive development initiative for Rajgir will be undertaken. Furthermore, Sitharaman emphasised the rich cultural traditions and natural endowments of the eastern states such as Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh. The government plans to launch 'Purvodaya,' a development initiative encompassing human resource development, infrastructure enhancement, and economic opportunities to foster growth in the region. However, stakeholders in the tourism sector have expressed

disappointment. Rajiv Mehra of Indian Association of Tour Operators (IATO) criticised the budget for not adequately addressing inbound tourism and employment generation opportunities. Aashish Gupta from FAITH, an apex body of the tourism and hospitality industry in the private sector echoed these sentiments, suggesting that while the budget acknowledges India's potential as a global tourism hub, more concrete measures such as increased marketing budgets, infrastructure support, and tax reforms could have been included to fully leverage this potential. Others rued that the main issues concerning the sector such as issues with GST levy and TCS on outbound travel were also ignored.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Optimistic outlook

The Economic Survey for 2023-24 emphasises the urgency of addressing inequality and unemployment

The Economic Survey for 2023-24 released on the eve of the Union Budget is optimistic about the Indian story of growth and development; however, it also indicates the areas of concern on which it suggests the Central Government to act on priority. It is customary to have the Economic Survey just before the budget as it sets the tone of the budget and puts things in perspective. This year round it is buoyant on growth and pegs India's GDP growth at 6.5-7.0% in this fiscal year. The Economic Survey, a comprehensive report that reviews the developments in the Indian economy over the past year, forecasts robust growth in various sectors. This optimism is grounded in several factors, including strong domestic consumption, increased investments, and favourable government policies. Interestingly this is despite the fact that most economies around the world are struggling to attain much lower levels of GDP. The survey underscores the Government's focus on infrastructure as a critical driver of growth. Ongoing projects in road, rail, and port development are expected to boost connectivity and efficiency, facilitating smoother trade and commerce. Besides, the rapid expansion of the digital economy is another significant area of growth. Though open to criticism, the Survey maintains that the 'Make in India' initiative continues to show promising results.



The survey notes that boosting exports, particularly in high-growth industries such as pharmaceutical, electronics, and textiles, could significantly enhance India's global economic standing. The Survey also talks about the problem area of the Indian economy. Agriculture, the backbone of the Indian economy, remains a priority. The survey recommends further reforms to increase productivity and ensure sustainable growth in this sector. Innovations in technology and better access to markets are crucial to achieving these goals. The Economic Survey rightly numerates various factors which could pull down the economy and be an impediment in the national growth. The biggest stumbling block is of course inflation. The survey suggests a balanced approach to monetary policy to manage inflation without stifling growth. Unemployment yet another constraint needs to be addressed on priority. The survey calls for policies that support skill development and entrepreneurship to harness the potential of the burgeoning young population. PM Modi reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to growth. Indeed, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget for 2024-25 incorporates several suggestions made by the Economic Survey. Setting a roadmap for the third term of Modi Government, Union Finance Minister has defined nine priorities. These are agriculture, employment, human development, energy security, manufacturing, innovation, infrastructure and next generation reforms. These would indeed go a long way in reducing unemployment, curbing inflation and giving economy a push that would be inclusive and sustainable.

The survey recommends further reforms to increase productivity and ensure sustainable growth in this sector. Innovations in technology and better access to markets are crucial to achieving these goals. The Economic Survey rightly numerates various factors which could pull down the economy and be an impediment in the national growth. The biggest stumbling block is of course inflation. The survey suggests a balanced approach to monetary policy to manage inflation without stifling growth. Unemployment yet another constraint needs to be addressed on priority. The survey calls for policies that support skill development and entrepreneurship to harness the potential of the burgeoning young population. PM Modi reaffirmed the government's commitment to fostering an environment conducive to growth. Indeed, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman's Budget for 2024-25 incorporates several suggestions made by the Economic Survey. Setting a roadmap for the third term of Modi Government, Union Finance Minister has defined nine priorities. These are agriculture, employment, human development, energy security, manufacturing, innovation, infrastructure and next generation reforms. These would indeed go a long way in reducing unemployment, curbing inflation and giving economy a push that would be inclusive and sustainable.

PICTALK



Hindu devotees offer prayers during the holy month of Shrawan at the Pashupatinath Temple in Kathmandu PTI

India backs Philippines in South China Sea standoff



ASHOK K MEHTA

As China continues its aggressive tactics, the Philippines, bolstered by international alliances, stands resilient against Beijing's coercion

My enemy's enemy is my friend is a fitting adage for India's support to the Philippines which is fighting a battle royale in the South China Sea with China. Chinese Coast Guards have been regularly intruding into the Philippines Exclusive Economic Zone (PEEZ) which they regard as part of the South China Sea under its default claim of 10 dash line that was rejected by an arbitration court at Hague under UNCLOS in 2016. Bash on regardless is PLA's dictum in coercing the Filipinos as they to us along LAC. Foreign Minister S Jaishankar visited Manila in May and expressed full support for the Philippines in its claims in PEEZ.

Foreign Ministry spokesperson after the 17 June clash said "We oppose destabilizing unilateral action to change status quo by force or coercion". Earlier in 2022 India made its first international sale of the Brahmos anti-ship missile system to the Philippines. I was in Manila last month, days after the 17 June incident comparable to our own Galwan clash on 15 June 2020. It was evident that the Chinese were bullying Filipinos in their waters. The 17 June incident has been flogged with Chinese but mainly Filipino accounts. In brief, Chinese Coast Guards are trying to force out Filipino Coast Guards from their outpost on Thomas Shoal 2 which they preemptively occupied in 1999 denying a free run to China in seizing unoccupied islands in PEEZ.

Like pirates, the Chinese Coast Guard are even poaching in EEZ of Asian countries. Chinese have unilaterally promulgated law in the South China Sea laws that allow them to seize for 60 days without trial, foreign vessels and even fire at them -which they have not done - if necessary.

Chinese Coast Guard is employing lethal weapons short of firearms like picks, axes, spears and rods to inflict casualties with medieval warfare equipment that the PLA used to surprise Indian troops in Galwan. Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and Indonesia have quietly accepted Chinese bullying while the Philippines



backed by the US is pushing back. All these countries are hugely reliant on China for trade and BRI benefits. The Philippines like Taiwan is resisting Chinese coercion while balancing its economic relations with Beijing. Between 2000 and 2020 China committed a total of USD9.1 bn in financial support to the Philippines.

In Manila, after the violent incident near Thomas Shoal Chinese Coast Guard intercepted the Philippines Coast Guard that was trying to resupply its small island garrison. Seven Filipino sailors were wounded in the clash and one lost a thumb. Seven rifles were also impounded and have not been returned. President Bong Bong Ferdinand Marcos Jr who had recently warned China at Shangri-la Dialogue of 'consequences' and vowed not to yield 'even an inch or a millimeter' has been blowing hot and cold as have his ministers also.

The Philippines has a Mutual Defence Treaty of 1951 with the US whose conditions are more specific and binding than the US-Taiwan Act. Still, no one wants to invoke the Treaty over the 'territorial integrity' of a Shoal. American Ambassador to the Philippines Mary Carlsson said in Manila on 24 June that China should settle disputes by international law and "not bully our partners in their backyard". The US is wary of opening another



IN MANILA, AFTER THE VIOLENT INCIDENT NEAR THOMAS SHOAL CHINESE COAST GUARD INTERCEPTED THE PHILIPPINES COAST GUARD THAT WAS TRYING TO RESUPPLY ITS SMALL ISLAND GARRISON

front after Ukraine, Gaza and the Red Sea, even as the risk of accidental escalation or misunderstanding is high in the Taiwan Straits. The US plans to revive and modernize Subic Bay and adjoining Clarks Airbase and is deploying the deadly Typhon missile system at some of their ten bases in the Philippines.

The Indian Brahmos missiles are located in Luzon facing the South China Sea and can reach out to Chinese-occupied Mischief Reef, Thomas Shoal 2 and Scarborough Shoal. It is believed that some 3 to 400,000 Americans reside in the Philippines and US-Philippines relations under Marcos Jr are back to its heyday. The Philippines is actively collaborating with QUAD-US, India and Australia. Japan and the Philippines signed a defence agreement this month that will allow the deployment of troops on each other's territory with Tokyo pledging to provide additional defence aid. Similarly, Manila and Seoul are coordinating maritime coordination and joint exercises.

South Korean shipyards are likely to receive orders to build Coast Guard vessels for the Philippines. Canada and even the European Union are coordinating maritime activities in PEEZ. None of the Philippines' brave calls for standing its ground in the South China Sea and pledges of support from its friends and allies has deterred China in its show of force.

It fielded its aircraft carrier Shandong and the world's largest Coast Guard vessel 5901 in PEEZ while at the same time, it held talks with Filipino officials on de-escalation measures this month. The code of conduct in the South China Sea under preparation for over two decades is expected to be finalized in 2026.

However, the most recent agreement is about establishing hotlines at various levels for stopping maritime incidents. From the US and Indian perspective, the Chinese claimed preeminence in the South China Sea has to be contested by QUAD, AUKUS, the new trilateral between Japan, the Philippines and South Korea. Further resistance to the reunification of Taiwan must continue and Taiwan Straits remain free for navigation and overflights.

As China's economy declines, and Asian economies grow through new supply chains and the realization of India's East Asia policy, Western collective deterrence will dampen Chinese bravado in the South China Sea. The Philippines will be the immediate natural southern pillar of the Indo-Pacific strategy. (The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. Views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THAT GOOD MORNING THUD

Madam — Day after day, month after month and year after year, I have waited, and have been rewarded with, the familiar thud of a bundle of newspapers at my doorstep. Two newspapers rolled into a cylindrical bundle, a Hindi one for my significant other, and an English one for myself, have made their presence felt at a fixed time, and at a designated landing spot — a coir doormat placed just outside of our front door. Kudos to our "paperwallah bhaiya" whose throw never misses the mat. And what's more, the bundle always aligns itself in the North-South direction, even after a seemingly careless throw. The soft thud is much like the firing of a starter pistol before a sprint, albeit much less noisy. The familiar thud signals that yet another day has begun, and we have no time to fritter away. What remains now is to pour the hot coffee into our waiting tumblers, put on our specs and try to take the world on our stride.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

MAMATA'S GOODWILL GESTURE

Madam — This is in response to the news report titled "Opposition curses NDA Sarkar" (July 22). A state government might not have any locus standi to offer shelter to foreign citizens within its border, but West Bengal Chief minister Mamata Banerjee must be appreciated for displaying such warmth for the innocent Bangladeshis running away from internal unrest. After all humanity must reign supreme over petty artificial international borders. So instead of maligning Banerjee with all sorts of ridiculous accusations possible, BJP leaders must ask it's own government in New Delhi to act as gallant-hearted as Indira Gandhi (during the 1971 turmoil prior to formation of Bangladesh) and allow refuge to the escaping Bangladeshis in the neighboring Indian states including West Bengal.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

Joe Bide backs Kamala Harris



US President Joe Biden has endorsed Vice-President Kamala Harris as the Democratic Party's presidential nominee, marking the end of his re-election bid. Kamala Harris pledged to do everything in her power to unite the nation. If nominated, Kamala Harris would be the second woman, following Hillary Clinton, to run for the U.S. presidency. If successful, she would make history as the first female president of the United States. Despite being the world's oldest modern

democracy, America has not yet elected a woman as president in its 236 years of electoral history. In contrast, India, a much younger democracy, elected Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister in 1966. Women face numerous hurdles in politics, including time poverty, lack of campaign funding, and fewer opportunities for political training and mentorship. Social media also facilitates personal attacks that disproportionately target women, potentially driving them out of politics, according to Silveria E. Jacobs, former Prime Minister of Sint Maarten.

If Kamala Harris breaks the American glass ceiling, it could inspire women worldwide to pursue politics and promote female leadership. Her achievement would symbolize progress and motivate more women to seek political office, enhancing gender diversity and representation in global political leadership.

Srinivas Madhav | Hyderabad

BANGLADESH BLUES

Madam — Apropos, "Trouble in Bangladesh," Jul 22. The tragic death of about 100 people in violence triggered by the students' protest demanding a roll-back of 30 percent job reservation for relatives of veterans who fought in the 1971 war in Bangladesh, has shown the Sheikh Hasina government in poor light. The quota provision has been under fire as it apparently benefits the supporters of PM Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement.

She had defended it on the grounds that veterans deserved the highest respect for their contribution to the liberation, regardless of their political affiliation. However, the PM cannot afford to ignore the present realities. A merit-based system for jobs will help Bangladesh sustain its impressive economic march. Hopefully, the government will implement the apex court's order in letter and spirit. And there is also a lesson here for India, where unemployment is a major issue and sev-

eral states have witnessed an uproar over quotas. Prioritising political considerations over ensuring a level playing field for recruitments is fraught with grave consequences.

The tragic deaths resulting from the students' protest against job reservations have cast a shadow over the Sheikh Hasina government. While the PM defends the quota for veterans, a merit-based system is essential for Bangladesh's economic progress.

The government must heed the apex court's order to ensure fairness. This situation also serves as a cautionary tale for India, where prioritising political considerations in job quotas could have serious repercussions. Now the apex court of Bangladesh has toned down the quotas it is likely that Bangladesh will once again have peace and chart on its path to progress. It will also be good for India-Bangladesh relations.

N Sathasiva Reddy | Bengaluru

To mitigate heatwave effects we must prioritise innovations in RE



RATUL PURI

This climatic extremity underscores the urgent need for innovative solutions in the renewable energy sector

India is no stranger to scorching summers. Recently, the country has endured its longest and most intense heatwave in recorded history, with temperatures in some areas soaring to a blistering 50 degrees Celsius. Heatwaves in India typically occur between March and June, with May being the peak month. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) defines a heatwave as a period where temperatures exceed 40°C in plains, 37°C in coastal areas, and 30°C in hills, with significant deviations from average temperatures. When this deviation reaches 6.5°C or more, it is classified as a "severe heatwave." The public health implications of such extreme temperatures are severe. Heatstroke, dehydration, and heat exhaustion become common, exacerbating pre-existing conditions like heart disease and respiratory issues. Vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, and outdoor workers, are particularly at risk. The heatwaves also impact wildlife, causing water scarcity, disrupted food chains, and habitat loss. Livestock suffers from



heat stress, affecting milk production and overall health. Global warming has raised average temperatures, creating conditions ripe for extreme weather events. Heatwaves, in turn, drive up electricity demand, straining power grids to their limits. A 2022 report from the World Meteorological Organization underscored the vicious cycle: greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel-based electricity production contribute to heatwaves, which increase power demand, further straining fossil fuel resources and exacerbating the climate crisis. This highlights the urgent need for large-scale renewable energy adoption. India has ambitious renewable energy goals, aiming for 500 GW of capacity by 2030. However, the very heatwaves that renewable energy seeks

to combat pose challenges, particularly for the solar energy sector. Solar panels, primarily using photovoltaic technology, are designed for optimal efficiency between 15 and 35 degrees Celsius. As temperatures rise, their efficiency drops, with prolonged exposure to high temperatures potentially reducing efficiency by 10-25%. This is because increased thermal agitation disrupts electron flow within the circuits, decreasing voltage output. To address this challenge, several solutions are being explored. Monocrystalline panels, known for their superior performance under stress, could be a viable alternative for heatwave-prone areas, despite their higher cost. Advances in technology like TOPCon (Tunnel Oxide Passivated Contact) are also promising, enhancing the efficiency and performance of solar components in harsh environments. Additionally, incorporating advanced cooling systems, such as ventilation within panels, can manage excess heat. Using heat-resistant materials in solar panel construction could also help

withstand high temperatures with minimal efficiency loss. The intense heatwaves in India underscore the urgency of climate action. The renewable energy sector must innovate continuously to develop efficient and affordable solar panels capable of withstanding India's diverse weather patterns, from extreme heatwaves to heavy monsoons. Local geographical factors must be considered in design and deployment strategies. The country's renewable energy sector must rise to the challenge by fostering resilient technologies that can withstand extreme weather events like heatwaves. This journey demands a multi-pronged approach to accelerate the development of heat-resistant solar technologies. Promoting public-private partnerships can facilitate the large-scale deployment of these advancements, making them more accessible and affordable. Only then can India ensure a cleaner, greener legacy for future generations. (The writer is the Chairman of Hindustan Power Group; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

HARNESSING THE POWER OF OPTIMISM

In the high-pressure maze of the corporate world, optimism emerges as a powerful antidote to stress



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

The corporate world is a maze of challenges, deadlines, and pressures that often leave an employee drained and disheartened. However, amidst this complex and mostly daunting environment, there lies a strong antidote: optimism. That very saying, "The whole world runs on hope," has within itself a very deep message that can turn around professional life and make it work wonders. Optimism, not pessimism, is not some feel-good philosophy but a very practical way to build resilience, increase productivity, and foster a more positive workplace culture. Long-term optimism is the positivity of thinking towards the occurrence of good things and ultimately positive results from our efforts. This mindset should be at the core of every working principle in a corporate setting. Projects may fail, market conditions may go for a toss, or other obstacles might impede; it is then that the optimist who views these obstacles not as insurmountable barriers but as opportunities for growth and learning.

Consider its effect on workplace morale. The optimistic frame of mind can make a lot of difference in the general feel of an office. If leaders or team members have bright, twinkling eyes and a positive outlook, this no doubt will breed others to emulate and follow in their footsteps, creating an upward spiral of sentiments. This sort of collective optimism yields openness to collaboration, increasing innovation, and a willingness to take calculated risks. A team that believes in the possibility of success is going to realize it far more than one that is bogged down in doubt and negativity. Optimism allows for an increase in resiliency. When faced with setbacks, an optimistic person is more likely to try again and views these failures as being transitory, or conquerable.

This elasticity can prove particularly useful in business circles where preservations are often what distinguish between giving up and breaking through to success. In its instance, the optimistic approach will make individuals keep themselves motivated and move consistently toward their goals, even when the odds are not favourable. Even so, optimism needs to strike a correct and delicate balance with realism. Blind optimism that is not based on the real situation brings over-optimistic expect-



tations with a sense of subsequent disappointment. The key here is to adopt realistic optimism: know the challenges, and uncertainties, but emphasise solving the problems and cultivating the outcomes. This balanced approach will keep one hopeful without losing sight of practical considerations.

One of the ignored facts about optimism is its relationship with the capability of stress management. The corporate world itself is a very stressful environment with great stakes and constant demands. Optimism hence acts as a defence mechanism against this stress and thus helps them cope better under pressure. Optimistic employees must, therefore, be more likely to resort to proactive coping strategies like problem-solving and seeking support than become prey to anxiety and despair. This kind of camaraderie enhances job satisfaction, reducing turnover rates and generally creating a stable and harmonious work environment. Inculcating optimism in professional life does not mean one gets oblivious to challenges and uncertainties in a business environment. Instead, it is a manner of relating to them with hope and activity. Without attachment to the outcomes, giving it our best creates the opportunity for a whole lot of possibilities to start unwrapping. Life itself, much like work, is unpredictable. Embracing that uncertainty optimistically makes us able to move through the corporate landscape resiliently, creatively, and in high spirits. Optimists by choice can build a workplace that is productive, enriching, and supportive. This means that optimism is not merely a personal virtue; rather, it is a business asset with its key to professional success and better careers.

(The writer is a motivator; views are personal)

Income tax amendment promises relief for MSMEs



UTTAM GUPTA

The biggest problem faced by small enterprises is delayed payment of their dues by large enterprises as it results in a shortage of working capital severely impacting their production



An amendment to the Income Tax Act, introduced through Finance Act 2023, and effective from April 1, 2024 stops businesses from claiming tax deductions for payments beyond 45 days to the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) for supply of goods and services has caused much consternation. The MSMEs are ancillary units engaged in the production, manufacturing and processing of goods and commodities (mostly intermediate goods) which are supplied to large enterprises or master units. These units operate on a small scale and are further categorized into micro, small and medium enterprises depending on the 'investment' and 'turnover' threshold as defined under the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises Development Act, 2006.

A micro-enterprise is one where investment in the plant and machinery or equipment doesn't exceed Rs 10 million and turnover doesn't exceed Rs 50 million. A small enterprise is an entity where investment in the plant and machinery is less than 100 million and turnover doesn't exceed Rs 500 million. For a medium enterprise, the thresholds are set at Rs 200 million for investment in the plant and machinery or equipment and Rs 1000 million for turnover. According to the Ministry of Statistics & Programme Implementation, the share of MSME Gross Value Added (GVA) in India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is around 30 per cent. The share of MSME manufacturing output in all India Manufacturing output is even higher at around 36 per cent.

The share of export of MSME-specified products in all India exports has oscillated between 44 - 50 per cent during the last couple of years, according to the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics (DGCIIS). As for employment, according to a report released by the McKinsey Global Institute (MGI), MSMEs in India contribute 62 per cent to the total. Looking at the omnibus 'informal' sector - apart from MSMEs, it also includes proprietary household and partnership establishments - its contribution to employment is even higher at more than 75 per cent whereas in GDP its share is almost 50 per cent. The MSMEs thus play a predominant-

ing role in shaping the prospects of the economy more so in promoting 'inclusive' development with particular emphasis on increasing employment and income and reducing income inequalities.

Yet, they have borne the brunt of far-reaching economic decisions implemented by the Modi - Government during its first two terms such as demonetization (2016) and introduction of the Goods and Services Tax (GST), 2017 also the devastating impact of the Corona - pandemic (2020). The government has taken several mitigation steps including a Rs 500,000 crore Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme (ECLGS) for businesses/MSMEs; equity infusion of Rs 50,000 crore through MSME Self-Reliant India Fund; no global tenders for procurement up to Rs. 200 crores (it bolsters their chances of securing government contract); relaxing threshold for classification of MSMEs; extension of non-tax benefits for 3 years in case of an upward change in status of MSMEs; inclusion of retail and wholesale trades as MSMEs; launch of Udyam Assist Platform (UAP) to bring the Informal Micro Enterprises (IMEs) under the formal ambit for availing the benefit under Priority Sector Lending (PSL); launch of an online Portal "Champions" to cover various aspects of e-governance including grievance redress and handholding of MSMEs and so on.

Even as all these initiatives seek to address issues of credit availability, technology infusion, market support etc, a problem haunting small enterprises has to do with delayed payment of their dues by large enterprises. When they don't receive payment for the goods supplied by them, it results in a shortage of working capital severely impacting their ability to continue with production. To address this problem, Section 15 of the MSMEs Development Act 2006, had mandated payments to micro

and small enterprises within 45 days in case of written agreement (in case, there was no written agreement, the time limit was set at 15 days). In 2019, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs came up with the Specified Companies (Furnishing of information about payment to micro and small enterprise suppliers) Order that required large firms to file returns every six months even if there is no outstanding to MSME beyond 45 days.

Yet, the problem persisted forcing numerous firms to down shutters. This prompted the Union Government to look for a solution under the IT Act (1961). The Finance Act 2023, inserted Section 43B(h) in the IT Act (1961), which prescribes that if a larger company doesn't make payments to micro and small enterprises within 45 days in case of written agreement, it cannot deduct that expense while calculating the taxable income of the relevant financial year. How does it impact the large enterprises? To arrive at the profits during a financial year (FY) and hence the income on which tax is levied (known in IT parlance as 'taxable income'), a company deducts all expenses incurred on running the business from the total revenue it earns. The payments made by it for the purchase of goods from the MSMEs are an important item of expense; therefore it is deductible from the revenue.

If, it doesn't pay the small firm say Rs 5 lakh within the prescribed 45 days, Section 43B(h) will kick in and the large firm won't be allowed to deduct this amount in that FY thereby increasing its taxable income to that extent. So, it will end up paying more tax during that FY. Taking an effective corporate tax of 34.9 per cent (basic corporate tax of 30 per cent plus 12 per cent surcharge plus 4 per cent Health & Education Cess), the extra tax works out to Rs 174,500/-. This will

be a deterrent strong enough to dissuade large enterprises from holding back payments to MSMEs. It is not as if this extra tax ends up impacting the company's balance sheet forever. This additional tax paid (albeit due to delays in making payments to MSMEs) can be adjusted the following year when the company pays the supplier. The Section thus strikes a good balance between the interests of all stakeholders. Even while creating a strong incentive for large enterprises to prioritize payments to the MSMEs thereby bolstering the latter's financial health and growth, it doesn't unduly penalize the former. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Corporate Affairs has also relaxed the reporting requirements under its 2019 Order. A notification issued on July 15, 2024, requires that "only those specified companies which are having payments pending to any micro or small enterprises for more than 45 days from the date of acceptance or the date of deemed acceptance of the goods or services under section 9 of the MSMEs Development Act, 2006 shall furnish the information". Earlier, they were required to furnish even if there was no outstanding to MSME beyond 45 days.

Yet, industries and businesses have asked Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to defer the implementation of the clause in the IT Act by a year to April 2025. At the same time, we see reports of large enterprises arm-twisting small firms by deciding not to buy from MSMEs; instead deal with those MSMEs that are not registered with the Udyam portal (It's an online system for registering MSMEs, launched by the Union MSME ministry) or from non-MSMEs. This must be avoided. Section 43B(h) of the IT Act should be given a fair chance to succeed.

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



A MICRO-ENTERPRISE IS ONE WHERE INVESTMENT IN THE PLANT AND MACHINERY OR EQUIPMENT DOESN'T EXCEED RS 10 MILLION AND TURNOVER DOESN'T EXCEED RS 50 MILLION

India introduces three new criminal laws: A shift from colonial past

While some legal bodies have criticised the new laws, other see these laws as a transformative step towards a modern justice system

At the onset, with the introduction of three new criminal laws, launched on July 1st, some of the legal bodies and other civil organisations opposed the move stating it to have been introduced without 'much discussion' in the Parliament. Whereas, some of legal experts consider it to be a 'New Avatar' that will enable the country to have a paradigm shift from favoured colonial laws to a contemporary India. The laws; of Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) have replaced the almost 150 years ago laws of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and the Indian



MANOJ VARGHESE

Evidence Act (IEA), formulated during the British regime. The new laws will bring in a modern justice system, incorporating provisions such as Zero FIR, online registration of police complaints, summonses through electronic modes such as SMS and mandatory videography of crime scenes for all heinous crimes. With around 20 new offences added, 40 offences amended, 83 new fines imposed and six community services introduced, the

new laws are all set to deliver speedy justice in the public interest.

The new laws are framed on the lines of 'citizen first, honour first and justice first'. The general impression is that the police will now need to work with 'data' instead of 'danda' (baton). Universally, introducing and executing a change in any system is a challenging task. Above all, a change in the legal system is a complex mechanism for adaptation. "Change is inevitable, and progressive laws are good for any nation", says Prof Mahesh Verma, Vice Chancellor, of Indraprastha University. The police need to understand that they cannot refuse to register an FIR based on lack of jurisdiction or disputed

jurisdiction. It is tough for them to bring it into practice as the number of cases filed in their jurisdiction will bring in a bad repute for their respective Police station.

They are now legally bound to register (Zero FIR) and transfer such a case to the respective police station. Section 37 of the BNSS requires a police officer in every police station, not below the rank of Assistant Sub-inspector, to be responsible for maintaining and prominently displaying information about the arrested persons. Justice M L Mehta, Former Judge of Delhi High Court says, "Law is a set of norms emulated by state for the welfare of the people. Law is the efficacious remedy for legal system. Delays are unavoidable mechanism in the legal system.



With only 20% cases reaching the court, over five crore cases are pending. It is a Herculean task and will take over 300 years to dispose of these pending cases."

As per the BNSS, the new laws prioritise the investigations of crimes against women and children, ensuring timely completion within two months of recording information

(Section 193). Summons can now be served electronically (Sections 64, 70, 71). Courts grant a maximum of two adjournments to avoid unnecessary delays in case hearings (Section 346).

The new laws mandate all state governments to implement the Witness Protection Scheme (Section 398). A new chapter has been added to the BNS specifically to address offences against women and children (Chapter V) and the introduction of community service for minor offences (Sections 4, 202, 209, 226, 303, 355, 356). For its effective implementation, and creating awareness among all stakeholders including police, prisons, prosecutors, judicial, forensic personnel as well as the general public, the

Government has organised several rounds of orientation and training programs. The awareness is happening at different levels to understand the legal system better concerning the newly introduced three criminal laws. National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has made 23 functional modifications to the existing CCTNS (Crime and Criminal Tracking Network and Systems) application to facilitate technology compatibility with new criminal laws, including the filing of an FIR. The Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed 13 training modules for capacity building of police, prisons, prosecutors, judicial officers, forensic experts and central police organisations.

The Bar Council of India has made it mandatory to include the three new criminal laws in the curriculum of universities and legal education centres from the academic year 2024-25. Justice Talwant Singh, Former Judge of Delhi High Court is all praise for the role of academicians in drafting the new laws. He suggests that in the days to come the country will require an ample number of forensic experts. In contrast, the more new laws are unfolded; the more is the possibility of its lacunae being exposed. Is growing incidents of crime good for police and lawyers, is a million-dollar question! (The writer is former editor with Free Press Journal and Media Advisor to Delhi Govt. Presently Media Advisor to GGSIPU; views are personal)



Budget allocation for Water Resources, Ganga Rejuvenation surges

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In the 2024-25 Union Budget, the Department of Water Resources, River Development, and Ganga Rejuvenation has received a substantial increase in allocation, reaching Rs 30,233.83 crore, a 55 per cent rise from the previous year. This surge primarily targets major irrigation projects and the Namami Gange Mission-II. Key highlights include a comprehensive Rs 11,500 crore plan for flood control and irrigation projects across states, including the Kosi-Mechi intra-state link and initiatives for river pollution abatement. Also, significant funds have been earmarked for projects like the Farakka Barrage and Dam Rehabilitation, alongside boosting efforts under the National Ganga Plan and water resource management schemes such as the Atal Bhujal Yojana and National Hydrology Project. However, the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation has received a dismal



budgetary allocation of Rs 77,390.68 crores for the fiscal year 2024-2025, a mere 0.5 per cent rise from the revised estimate of Rs 77,032.65 crore announced in the budget 2023-2024. A substantial portion of this financial year's allotment for the Drinking Water and Sanitation department is directed towards the Jal Jeevan

Mission (JJM), which received Rs 69,926.65 crore, a marginal rise from the revised estimate of Rs 69,846.31 crore in 2023-2024. This flagship programme aims to provide functional household tap connections to every rural household by 2024, focusing on ensuring regular and adequate water supply.

Additionally, the Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee National Institute of Water and Sanitation (SPM-NIWAS) has been allocated Rs 95 crore, a huge rise from the Rs 3 crore it got in the last revised estimate. The Swachh Bharat Mission (Gramin), which focuses on maintaining Open Defecation Free (ODF) status and enhancing waste management in rural areas, has been allocated Rs 7,192 crore. This allocation remains consistent with the budget for the previous fiscal year and continues to support sanitation efforts nationwide. The budget also includes significant funding for water supply and sanitation at Rs 64,302.85 crore, an increase from the previous year's Rs 64,138.41 crore. Additional allocations include Rs 7,632.19 crore for Northeast India, aimed at improving water and sanitation facilities in these regions. Grants-in-aid to state governments have been set at Rs 5,169.86 crore, while grants to Union Territories are allocated at Rs 250 crore.

Maldives financial aid slashed, Bhutan to get most

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In line with India's 'neighbourhood first' policy, Bhutan was on Tuesday allocated the largest share of Rs 2,068 crore as development aid in the Union Budget for 2024-25 while the outlay for the Maldives saw a sharp decline to Rs 400 crore from last year's Rs 770 crore. The cut in allocation to the Maldives came amid strain in ties between the two countries since Mohamed Muizzu, known for his pro-China leanings, became president of the island nation in November last year. In the budget, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) was allocated a total of Rs 22,154 crore for the fiscal 2024-25 as against last year's revised outlay of 29,121

crore. The same allocation was made to the MEA in the interim budget that was presented to the Parliament in February. In the interim budget, the development assistance to the Maldives was pegged at Rs 600 crore. According to the budget papers, the allocation now stands at Rs 400 crore. The outlay for Bhutan has been pegged at Rs 2,068 crore for 2024-25 as against Rs 2,398 crore in the revised estimate of 2023-24. After Bhutan, Nepal was allocated the second largest outlay of Rs 700 crore. An amount of Rs 245 crore has been set aside for Sri Lanka in 2024-25 as against last year's Rs 60 crore. The allocation for Chabahar Port has also been maintained at Rs 100 crore, underlining India's focus on connectivity projects with Iran.

Infiltration bid foiled in J&K, jawan martyred



MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Alert troops of the Indian Army foiled a major infiltration bid while one soldier succumbed to his received during a heavy exchange of fire along the line of control in the Battal sector of Krishna Ghati in the frontier district of Poonch in the wee hours of Tuesday. Meanwhile, massive search and combing operations were going on at several locations in the neighboring district of Rajouri. The terrorists had targeted a house of the Shaurya Chakra awardee and a nearby army post in the Gunda village of Khawas tehsil in the wee hours of Monday. According to a spokesman of the Nagrota-based White Knight Corps, "Alert troops foiled an infiltration bid by effectively engaging infiltrating terrorists with effective fire in the Battal Sector at 3.00 a.m. During the exchange of heavy fire, one braveheart was injured. Later the injured jawan succumbed to his injuries. Operations are continuing". The martyred jawan has been identified as Lance Naik Subash Chander.

Modi terms Budget visionary

From Page 1

The employment-linked incentive scheme will create crores of jobs, he said, noting that the first salary of the first job of a youngster will now be borne by the government. He also mentioned provisions for higher education and the scheme for internships for 1 crore youths. "Working in top companies under the scheme, the young interns will find new avenues of possibilities," Modi said. The rise in the limit of collateral-free loans under the Mudra scheme from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 20 lakh will greatly benefit small businessmen, women, Dalits, backward and the deprived, he added. Modi said the development of the country's eastern region will get new momentum and energy through the budget's "Purvodaya" vision. New impetus will be given to the development of important infrastructure such as highways, water projects and power projects, he added. "A big focus of this budget is the nation's farmers," the prime minister said, noting that the government, after unveiling the world's biggest grain storage scheme, has now introduced "Vegetable Production Clusters" which will help both farmers and the middle class. "It is the need of the hour for India to become self-reliant in the agricultural sector. Therefore, measures have been announced to help farmers increase the production of pulses and oilseeds," he said. Modi said the budget was aimed at making the middle class stronger and would provide a new scale to education and skills development. "The budget has come up with strong plans to empower the

tribal society, Dalits and backward classes. This budget will help in ensuring the economic participation of women," the prime minister said. He said the budget will provide a new path of progress for small traders and MSMEs. "There is a lot of focus on manufacturing and infrastructure in the budget. This will give new impetus to economic development," Modi added. The prime minister said that over the last 10 years, around 25 crore people have come out of poverty. "Building on this momentum, this budget will further energise the aspirations of our neo-middle class. Unprecedented opportunities will be unleashed for our younger generation," he said. "Also, this budget will empower the middle class like never before," the prime minister said. Touching upon the schemes for poverty alleviation and empowerment of the poor, he highlighted the measures for three crore houses for the poor and the "Janjatiya Unnat Gram Abhiyan", which will link five crore tribal families to basic facilities with a saturation approach. The budget brings numerous opportunities for India's startups and innovation ecosystem, Modi said, referring to the Rs 1,000 crore corpus fund to vitalise the space economy and the decision to abolish the angel tax. "Record high capex will become a driving force of the economy," the prime minister said. He said the development plans of 12 new industrial nodes, new satellite towns and transit plans for 14 big cities would enable the development of new economic hubs in the country and create numerous jobs.

FM's silence over Kaveri dampens spirit of farmers

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Finance Minister's silence over the inter-linking of Kaveri, Krishna and Godavari rivers which would have addressed the scarcity of irrigation waters in Tamil Nadu's Kaveri Delta districts has dampened the spirit of the farmers in the region. This means that there is no end in site for the ongoing legal battle between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu over Kaveri River water. Both the States are getting ready to approach the Supreme Court against each other, Tamil Nadu demanding Karnataka to release Kaveri water while Karnataka expressing its helplessness in obeying the apex court order asking it to release 192 Thousand Million Cubic Feet (TMCFT) water during every water year (1 June to 31 May) to facilitate paddy cultivation in the districts of Thanjavur, Thiruvarur, Nagapattinam, Tiruchirappalli, Cuddalore and Pudukkottai. Every year see flood waters of Kaveri River getting discharged into the Arabian Sea. If the west flowing tributaries of Kaveri are directed to Tamil Nadu, the lower riparian State would not face any issues and the short term Kuruvai and long term Samba crops could be cultivated without any water scarcity, said Dr S Kalyanaraman, director, Sarawathi Research Foundation,



Chennai. "The fine option available for Tamil Nadu is the linking of Kaveri, Krishna and Godavari Rivers. This will help the farmers to make use of the flood waters of Godavari discharged into the Bay of Bengal for crop cultivation in the Delta districts of Tamil Nadu. NaMo Government which had promised water for everyone and control of floods and droughts by river inter linking should go on a mission mode for the execution of the project," Kalyanaraman, a former chief executive of Asian Development Bank told The Pioneer.

Thiruvarur based A Sathyanarayana, president, Consortium of Kaveri Delta Farmers, said though no formal announcement has been made in the budget speech, there is enough provision in the statutes to take up the interlinking of rivers project by separate notification. "We are hoping against hope that the Centre would do something to help Tamil Nadu come out of this perpetual drought situation. K S Radhakrishnan, former DMK leader who took up the inter linking case to the apex court and got a favorable verdict said he was disappointed that the project remains on drawing board. "The detailed project report is ready and all that the government has to do is to launch the work. Nitin Gadkari, who was the minister in charge of water resources had assured the Tamil Nadu farmers that he would initiate measures to inter link Kaaveri, Krishna and Godavari. But he has been shunted out of the ministry and we don't know what the present minister is up to," said Radhakrishnan. He said that the ruling DMK's priority was on elevating Udhayanidhi Stalin as deputy chief minister.

Bihar, Andhra get special package

From Page 1

She added that the government is committed to financing and completing the Pollavaram irrigation project, which is considered the lifeline for Andhra Pradesh and its farmers. Additional allocations will be provided this year to support capital investment for economic growth. The Union Budget unveiled big-ticket measures for Bihar, proposing a total outlay of over Rs 60,000 crore for various projects, including funding for three expressways, a power plant, heritage corridors and new airports and sports infrastructure. Sitharaman announced the Centre's support for development of three road connectivity projects -- Patna-Purnea Expressway, Buxar-Bhagalpur Expressway, and Bodhgaya, Rajgir, Vaishali and Darbhanga spurs, and an additional two-lane bridge over river Ganga at Buxar. Reacting to the budgetary announcements, Andhra

Pradesh TDP supremo and CM N Chandrababu Naidu thanked PM Modi and Sitharaman, for recognising the needs of State and focusing on a Capital, Polavaram, industrial nodes and development of backward areas in AP in the union budget. In his reaction, Union minister and JD(U) leader Lalan Singh slammed the opposition's claim that the budget's measures for Bihar and Andhra Pradesh are aimed at saving the government due to its dependence on regional parties from the states for survival. Singh noted that his party has sought either the status or special financial package. Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav linked Sitharaman's announcements of several development measures for Bihar and Andhra Pradesh to the BJP's political compulsion to "save" its government and asked if there was anything for Uttar Pradesh, India's most populous state.

LESS TAX, MORE JOBS

From Page 1

"For the salaried employees who have opted for the new tax regime, the standard deduction is being increased from Rs 50,000 to Rs75,000," she said. The 2024-25 Budget has revised the tax slabs for those who have opted for the new regime. "Under the new tax regime, tax rate structure to be revised is as follows: Rs 0- Rs 3 lakh -Nil; Rs 3-7 lakh -5 per cent; Rs 7-10 lakh -10 per cent; Rs10-12 lakh -15 per cent; Rs12-15 lakh -20 per cent and above Rs 15 lakh-30 per cent," she announced. Sitharaman said salaried

employees under the new tax regime will save up to Rs17,500 annually in taxes due to changes proposed in the Budget. She said the deduction on family pension for pensioners will be enhanced from Rs15,000 to Rs 25,000. In total, 4 crore salaried individuals and pensioners stand to benefit from the changes. She said the government has raised the deduction limit for the employer's contribution to NPS from 10 per cent to 14 per cent. It has also withdrawn the equalisation levy of 2 per cent. Sitharaman said the monetary limit for filing tax

appeals will be increased to Rs 60 lakhs for ITAT, Rs 2 crore for high courts and Rs 5 crore for the Supreme Court. She also announced the Government's decision to abolish the Angel tax. "Corporate tax rate to be reduced on foreign companies from 40 to 35 per cent," Sitharaman added. To spur employment generation, the Budget provides for incentives for companies, including paying one-month salary for first-time employees, incentive at specified sale to both employees and empowers with respect to their retirement fund contribution in the first four years of

employment and reimbursing employers up to Rs 3,000 per month for two years towards EPFO contribution of each additional employee. Also, a programme to improve skills as well as internship for students and subsidised loans for higher education are proposed in the Budget. Encouraged by robust tax collections and a higher-than-expected dividend receipt from the Reserve Bank, Sitharaman said the Government's fiscal deficit — the difference between the total revenue earned and total expenditure — will be trimmed to 4.9 per cent of the GDP in 2024-25, below the

5.1 per cent figure estimated in the interim budget she had presented in February this year. She reduced gross market borrowing marginally to Rs 14.01 lakh crore. The Budget for 2024-25 fiscal (April 2024 to March 2025) has allocated Rs 1.52 lakh crore for agriculture and allied sectors, proposes aid for building 3 crore affordable housing units in urban and rural areas, credit support to small and medium businesses, raising of loan for small business to Rs 20 lakh, setting up 12 industrial parks, and includes proposal for setting up a Rs 1,000-crore venture capital fund for space sector.

Big push to job creation

From Page 1

There is also a sense of urgency since the BJP is gearing up to face elections in key states such as Maharashtra, Haryana, and Jharkhand where the party had suffered setbacks in the Lok Sabha elections. The Modi 3.0 budget is also an indication that the government will look at job creation more intensely, a politically significant cue since unemployment and jobless growth had been the key themes of the Opposition narrative in the run-up to and during the campaign which they believe struck a chord. Sitharaman introduced three schemes for employment-linked incentives, targeting the recognition of first-time employees and providing support to employers by internship opportunities in 500 top companies to one crore youth in five years, there is a clear stress on job creation. The finance minister said the Centre would allocate Rs 2 trillion to create jobs over the next five years. To spur employment, it will roll out incentives for companies, including those in manufacturing, along with programmes to improve skills

and provide subsidised loans for higher education, Sitharaman added. India's official unemployment rate in urban areas is 6.7 per cent, but the private agency, the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy, pegs it higher at 8.4 per cent. The First Timers scheme will provide one-month wage to all persons newly entering the workforce in all formal sectors. "The direct benefit transfer of one-month salary in three instalments to first-time employees, as registered in the EPFO, will be up to Rs 15,000. The eligibility limit will be a salary of Rs 1 lakh per month. An incentive will be provided at specified scale directly both to the employee and the employer with respect to their EPFO contribution in the first four years of employment. The scheme is expected to benefit 30 lakh youth entering employment, and their employers. The third scheme will be employers focused that cover additional employment in all sectors. "All additional employment within a salary of Rs one lakh per month will be counted. The government will reimburse to employers up to Rs 3,000 per month for 2 years towards their EPFO contribution for each additional employee. The scheme is expected to incentivize additional employment of 50 lakh persons," she said. As the BJP was facing farmers' backlash over the MSP issue over the past few years and

seeing its Lok Sabha tally dip in a state such as Haryana and Maharashtra, the finance minister said Rs1.52 lakh crore will be allotted for agriculture sector. Moreover, the minister added that the government will release new 109 high yielding, climate resilient seeds for 32 field and horticulture crops. The finance minister said in the next two years, one crore farmers across the country will be initiated into natural farming supported by certification and branding. "Implementation will be through scientific institutions and willing gram panchayats. 10,000 need-based bio-input resource centres will be established. For achieving self-sufficiency in pulses and oilseeds, we will strengthen their production, storage and marketing. As announced in the interim budget, a strategy is being put in place to achieve 'atmanirbharta' for oil seeds such as mustard, groundnut, sesame, soybean, and sunflower. "Large scale clusters for vegetable production will be developed closer to major consumption centres. We will promote Farmer-Producer Organizations, cooperatives and start-ups for vegetable supply chains including for collection, storage, and marketing. The details of 6 crore farmers and their lands will be brought into the farmer and land registries. Further, the issuance of Jan Samarth based Kisan Credit Cards will be enabled in 5 states," the finance minister said.

Palestinian factions unite after China-brokered talks

PTI ■ BEIJING

In a rare show of solidarity amidst the war in Gaza, 14 Palestinian factions, including Fatah and Hamas, have jointly pledged to end their deep divisions and strengthen Palestinian unity by signing a declaration on Tuesday at a meeting brokered by China.

China's Foreign Ministry, which coordinated the dialogue among the rival factions for the past three days, said on Tuesday that the declaration was a first step to promote a "comprehensive, durable and sustainable ceasefire" in the Gaza Strip battered by Israeli attacks.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi who met the leaders' factions said the signing of the agreement was "an important, historic moment in the Palestinian cause". He said that under the deal the rival groups had agreed to set up an "interim national reconciliation government" to govern post-war Gaza.

The pact aims to unite Palestinians in their conflict with Israel which launched the war against Hamas in Gaza in October last year following the abduction of over 200 Israeli hostages.

Signatories included senior Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk and Fatah envoy Mahmoud al-Aloul along with emissaries from 12 other Palestinian groups.

The Chinese foreign ministry said it was the first time the 14 rival groups had gathered together in Beijing for reconciliation talks.

"Reconciliation is an internal matter for the Palestinian factions, but at the same time it cannot be achieved without the support of the international community," Wang said.

"The core outcome is that the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) is the sole legitimate representative of all Palestinian people," Wang said, adding that "an agreement has been reached on post-Gaza war governance and the establishment of a provisional national reconciliation government." It was unclear from Wang's comments what role Hamas, which is not part of the PLO, would play in such an arrangement, or what the immediate impact of any deal would be.

Israeli govt quietly funds West Bank settler outposts

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli government has budgeted millions of dollars to protect small, unauthorized Jewish farms in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, underwriting tiny outposts meant to grow into full-fledged settlements, according to an anti-settlement monitoring group.

Documents uncovered by Peace Now illustrate how Israel's pro-settler government has quietly poured money into the unauthorized outposts, which are separate from its more than 100 officially recognized settlements. Some of those outposts have been linked to settler violence against Palestinians and are sanctioned by the U.S. Palestinians and the international community say all settlements are illegal or illegitimate and undermine hopes for a two-state solution.

The Ministry of Settlements and National Mission, which is headed by a far-right settler leader, confirmed it budgeted 75 million shekels (USD 20.5 million) last year for security equipment for "young settlements" — the term it uses for unauthorized Jewish farms and outposts in the West Bank. The money was quietly authorized in December while the country's attention was focused on the war against Hamas in Gaza.

Peace Now said the funds have been used for vehicles, drones, cameras, generators, electric gates, fences and new roads that reach some of the more remote farms. The group estimates approximately 500 people live on the small, unauthorized farms and 25,000 more live in larger outposts. Those outposts, while not officially authorized by the government, often receive tacit support before they are retroactively legalized.

Hagit Ofran, director of Peace Now's "settlement watch" program, said the funding was the first time the Israeli government has channeled money to the outposts so openly.

Rights groups say the expanding network of remote farms atop



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi, center, hosts an event for Mahmoud al-Aloul, left, vice chairman of Fatah, and Mussa Abu Marzuk, a senior member of Hamas, to meet at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing, Tuesday. AP/PTI

West Bank hilltops are the primary drivers of violence and displacement of Palestinians.

In the last month alone, Israel's government has legalized five formerly unauthorized settlements and made the largest land grab in the West Bank in three decades, declaring a wide swath of the territory state land in preparation for new construction.

Palestinians say violence by people associated with these farms has soared since Hamas' October 7 attack, which sparked Israel's war against the militant group in the Gaza Strip. On Friday, the top United Nations court said Israel's presence in the Palestinian territories is unlawful and called for an immediate halt to settlement construction.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quickly denounced the nonbinding opinion, saying the territories are part of the Jewish people's historic homeland.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas claimed by the Palestinians for a future state — in the 1967 Mideast war. It has settled over 5,000,000 Jews in the West Bank, most of whom live on authorized settlements, in addition to over 2,000,000 others in contested east Jerusalem, which it claims as part of its capital. Netanyahu's far-right government is dominated by West Bank settlers and pro-settler politicians. Netanyahu has placed his finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, in a new position inside the Defense Ministry overseeing settlement construction and development.

United States, Britain, and the European Union have imposed international sanctions on 13 hard-line Israeli settlers, some of whom are associated with the outpost farms — as well as two affiliated outposts and four groups — over accusations of attacks and harassment against Palestinians. The measures are meant as a deterrent, and they expose people to asset freezes and travel and visa bans, though the freezes have been less effective.

The office of Orit Strock, the Minister of Settlements and National Mission, said the funds were coordinated with the Defense Ministry and "carried out in accordance with all laws." It added that Strock, herself a longtime settler leader, "sees great importance in strengthening settlements" despite international condemnation. The budget was approved in December and predates the sanctions.

Rishi Sunak to remain interim UK Opposition leader until Nov 2

PTI ■ LONDON

Rishi Sunak will remain in place as the UK's interim Opposition Leader for over three months after the Conservative Party set out the timetable to elect his successor by November, with nominations opening on Wednesday. The 1922 Committee of backbench members of Parliament responsible for the Tory leadership race on Monday evening unveiled a two-phase election process that will see the new leader being installed on November 2. The 44-year-old British Indian leader, who had announced his resignation on July 5 after the party's worst general election defeat, had said he would remain in place as interim Tory leader until his successor has been elected.

"I will stay in post until November 2 and the result of our leadership election," said Sunak.



"This will allow our party to fulfil its role as the official opposition professionally and effectively. I believe this is what is best for the Conservative Party and, most importantly, our country," he said.

"It would be inappropriate for me to make any comment about the leadership campaign or candidates. I am confident that this timetable decided by the party board and the 1922 Committee will allow for a thoughtful, professional and respectful contest," he added.

Among the leading Tories expected to contest to become the Opposition Leader include former Indian-origin home secretary Priti Patel and Suella Braverman, shadow ministers James Cleverly, Kemi Badenoch, Tom Tugendhat and Mel Stride, and former minister Robert Jenrick.

To be nominated, each candidate will require a proposer, seconder, and eight further nominations which would mean a maximum of 11 possible Tory MPs could be on the ballot paper by the time nominations close on July 29. This will be followed by a first round of campaigning in August after which the Conservative Parliamentary Party will whittle down the candidates to four MPs, with votes scheduled between September 4 and 11.

The Tory party conference between September 29 and October 2 will be seen as a so-

called "beauty contest" when the four finalists will be given key speaking slots to address the wider Conservative membership and make their pitch. The parliamentary party will get a second-round vote to further whittle down candidates to the final two by October 10, who will go ahead for a head-to-head clash in an online ballot by the entire Tory membership.

After voting closes on October 31, the winner will be declared on November 2. Bob Blackman, the newly elected Chair of the 1922 committee, said he believed this timetable would allow for "a respectful and thorough leadership debate."

"While there are significant debates to be had about our party's future, we must remember that the country — and our members — want to see us engaged in proper debate not personal attacks," he said.

Taiwan cancels air force drills due to approaching typhoon

AP ■ TAIPEI

An approaching typhoon prompted the cancellation of air force drills off Taiwan's east coast on Tuesday, although naval and land exercises were set to continue in other parts of the self-governing island democracy, which China threatens to invade. The Air Force 5th Tactical Mixed Wing announced the cancellation, citing adverse weather conditions. According to the Central Weather Bureau, Typhoon Gaemi was heading westward toward the island with sustained winds of 144 km (about 90 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 180 kph (110 mph). Ferries and some domestic flights were cancelled Tuesday, Taiwan's Central News Agency said. Military spokesperson Sun Li-fang said the annual Han Kuang military exercises are on track to continue with adjustments to ensure the safety of personnel and equipment, although some sea and air exercises would be altered due to the weather.

This year's drills follow the election of Lai Cheng-te as presi-



dent, who continues the Democratic Progressive Party's near-decade in power. The party rejects Beijing's demands it recognise Taiwan as a Chinese territory.

Taiwan's military has long relied on support from the United States, but has in recent years reinvigorated its domestic arms industry, producing submarines and training aircraft that complement upgraded weapon systems purchased from abroad.

Taipei and the surrounding regions also held a regularly scheduled air raid drill Tuesday

afternoon, with sirens sounding, vehicles parking and pedestrians clearing the streets to enter buildings and metro stations as they would in the event of an air attack from China or a natural disaster. Troops were also deployed to the port of Tamsui, a key entryway to Taipei's river system which a motor boat from China entered last month. The boat apparently went undetected by radar and other security systems in what was seen as a test of Taiwan's capacity to respond to covert missions by the Chinese military.

UK police warn: Violence against women at 'epidemic' levels

London (AP): Violence against women and girls has reached "epidemic levels" and police are treating it as a threat on the same scale as terrorism, Britain's police chiefs said Tuesday.

More than 1 million violent crimes against women and girls were recorded by UK police in 2022 to 2023 — accounting for one-fifth of all recorded crime, a new report commissioned by the National Police Chiefs' Council and the College of Policing said.

One in every six murders was related to domestic abuse in the same period. At least one in every 12 women each year will be a victim of crimes including sexual offenses, rape, stalking, harassment or online sexual abuse, the report estimated, with the exact number thought to be much higher because of crimes that go unreported.

"Violence against women and girls is a national emergency," Deputy Chief Constable Maggie Blyth said in a statement.

British Pakistani radical preacher faces life term

London (PTI): Anjem Choudary, a radical Islamist preacher with dual British and Pakistani nationality, was on Tuesday found guilty of directing a banned terrorist organisation and faces life imprisonment in the UK following a joint international investigation.

Choudary, 57, was found to have taken on a "caretaker role" in the Al-Muhajiroun (ALM) and a trial at Woolwich Crown Court in London heard that he directed the terror group for a significant period after 2014 and encouraged support for it by addressing online meetings.

He now faces a life imprisonment term when he is sentenced on July 30 following the conviction, which was the result of investigations by the Metropolitan Police, the New York Police Department, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

"ALM's tentacles have spread across the world and have had a massive impact on public safety and security," said Commander Dominic Murphy, head of the Metropolitan Police's Counter-Terrorism Command. ALM was first proscribed, or banned, by the UK in 2006 under the name Al Ghurabaa. In 2010, ALM was included in the ban as an alternate name. Choudary was one of the original three members of ALM, which was founded in 1996.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said he was still acting as its leader as late as July 2023, making online speeches to a US-based offshoot called Islamic Thinkers Society (ITS). That group was infiltrated by undercover law enforcement officers in the US, who were present at online lectures in 2022 and 2023. The court heard that Choudary said he viewed being called an extremist as a "medal" during lectures. Choudary was released early from a five-year sentence for inviting support for the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group in October 2018 but his licence conditions prevented him from using the internet until July 2021.

Trump's lawyers urge NY appeals court to overturn 'egregious' civil fraud verdict

AP ■ NEW YORK

Fresh off victories in other legal cases, Donald Trump on Monday pressed a New York appeals court to overturn the nearly USD 500 million New York civil fraud judgment that threatens to drain his personal cash reserves as he campaigns to retake the White House. In paperwork filed with the state's mid-level appeals court, the former president's lawyers said Manhattan Judge Arthur Engoron's Feb. 16 finding that Trump lied to banks, insurers and others about his wealth was "erroneous" and "egregious."

Trump's appeal arguments echoed many of the gripes he delivered during his trial to TV cameras outside the courtroom. His lawyers argued that New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit should have been promptly dismissed, the statute of limitations barred some allegations, that no one was harmed by Trump's alleged

fraud and that James' involvement in private business transactions threatens to drive business out of the state.

Trump's lawyers contend that Engoron's decision, if upheld, would bestow James, a Democrat, with "limitless power to target anyone she desires, including her self-described political opponents," Trump's lawyers wrote in a 116-page filing with the Appellate Division of the state's trial court. Engoron rejected many of the same objections as the case proceeded to trial last year, at one point equating them to the plot of the film "Groundhog Day" and fining some of Trump's lawyers USD 7,500 each for "repetitive, frivolous" argument.

Trump posted a USD 175 million bond in April to halt collection of the judgment and prevent James' office from seizing his assets while he appeals. If he wins, he won't have to pay the state anything and will get back the money he has put up now.

"Such an outrageous miscarriage of justice is profoundly un-American, and a complete reversal is the only means available to restore public confidence in the integrity of the New York judicial system," Trump lawyer Christopher Kise said in a statement. He called Engoron's decisions "legally bereft" and "untethered to the law or to commercial reality," and described the staggering judgment as "draconian, unlawful, and unconstitutional."

The Appellate Division has said it will hear oral arguments in late September. Trump's lawyers initiated the appeal days after Engoron's ruling and had until Monday to file written arguments.

James' office said Trump and his lawyers are raising unfounded arguments. "We won this case based on the facts and the law, and we are confident we will prevail on appeal," James' office said in a statement. Monday's appeal filing is the lat-

est development in a momentous legal and political stretch for Trump, who last week accepted the Republican party's presidential nomination just days after he was hurt in a shooting at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. An attendee was killed and two others were hurt.

On July 1, the Supreme Court sided with Trump in ruling that ex-presidents have immunity from criminal prosecution for official acts performed while in office, further delaying his Washington, DC, election interference case and causing his sentencing in his New York hush money criminal case to be delayed until Sept. 18 while his lawyers fight to have that conviction thrown out.

On July 15, a federal judge in Florida dismissed Trump's classified documents case, ruling that Special Counsel Jack Smith, who filed the charges, was illegally appointed by the Justice Department. Smith is appealing.

Harris visits battleground Wisconsin in first rally

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Vice President Kamala Harris is making her first visit to a battleground state Tuesday after locking up enough support from Democratic delegates to win her party's nomination to challenge Republican former President Donald Trump, two days after President Joe Biden dropped his reelection bid. As the Democratic Party continues to coalesce around her, Harris is travelling to Milwaukee, where she will hold her first campaign rally since she launched her campaign on Sunday with Biden's endorsement. Harris has raised more than USD 100 million since Sunday afternoon and has scored the backing of Democratic officials and political groups.

Tuesday's visit was scheduled before Biden ended his campaign, but it took on new resonance as Harris prepared to take the mantle of her party

against Trump and looks to project calm and confidence after weeks of Democratic Party confusion over Biden's political future. The visit comes a week after the Republican National Convention wrapped up in the city and as Harris works to sharpen her message against the GOP nominee with just over 100 days until Election Day.

Wisconsin is part of the Democrats' "blue wall" of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania that is critical to their 2024 plans.

The vice president previewed the themes that will be prominent in her campaign against Trump on Monday during a stop at her campaign headquarters in Wilmington, Delaware, contrasting her time as a prosecutor with Trump's felony convictions — "I know Donald Trump's type," she said — and casting herself as a defender of economic opportunity and abortion access.

"This election will present a clear choice between two different visions. Donald Trump wants to take our country back to a time before many of us had full freedoms and equal rights," she said in a statement responding to the AP delegate tally. "I believe in a future that strengthens our democracy, protects reproductive freedom and ensures every person has the opportunity to not just get by, but to get ahead."

"I am grateful to President Biden and everyone in the Democratic Party who has already put their faith in me, and I look forward to taking our case directly to the American people," she added.

By Monday night, Harris, who also ran for president in 2020, had the support of well more than the 1,976 delegates she'll need to win on a first ballot, according to the AP tally of delegates. No other candidate was named by a delegate contacted by the AP.

Nearly 40 mn had HIV in 2023: UN

United Nations (AP): Nearly 40 million people were living with the HIV virus that causes AIDS last year, over 9 million weren't getting any treatment, and the result was that every minute someone died of AIDS-related causes, the UN said in a new report launched Monday.

While advances are being made to end the global AIDS pandemic, the report said progress has slowed, funding is shrinking, and new infections are rising in three regions: the Middle East and North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, and Latin America.

In 2023, around 630,000 people died from AIDS-related illnesses, a significant decline from the 2.1 million deaths in 2004. But the latest figure is more than double the target for 2025 of fewer than 250,000 deaths, according to the report

by UNAIDS, the UN agency leading the global effort to end the pandemic.

Gender inequality is exacerbating the risks for girls and women, the report said, citing the extraordinarily high incidence of HIV among adolescents and young women in parts of Africa.

The proportion of new infections globally among marginalised communities that face stigma and discrimination — sex workers, men who have sex with men, and people who inject drugs also increased to 55 per cent in 2023 from 45 per cent in 2010, it said.

UNAIDS Executive Director Winnie Byanyima said: "World leaders pledged to end the AIDS pandemic as a public health threat by 2030, and they can uphold their promise, but only if they ensure that the HIV response has the resources it

BAPS Hindu temple vandalised in Canada

PTI ■ OTTAWA

A BAPS Swaminarayan Mandir in the Canadian city of Edmonton has been vandalised with alleged hateful and anti-India graffiti, amidst rising Hinduphobia in the country. The Consul General of India in Vancouver said in a post on X: "We condemn the defacing of BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir in #Edmonton with anti-India graffiti. We have requested the Canadian authorities to investigate the incident and take prompt action against the perpetrators."

There has been no reaction as yet from the BAPS — the B o c h a s a n w a s i A k s h a r p u r u s h o t t a m Swaminarayan Sanstha, the organisation that runs the temple. Also, there are no reports yet of any official action against

the vandalism that took place on Monday morning. "Earlier today, the Edmonton BAPS Mandir was vandalised with paint, displaying hateful rhetoric on the walls of what should be a place of refuge. Hate has no part in Canada — much less in places of worship & prayer. This incident is wrong & goes against the values of our city," said Randy Boissonnault, Member of Parliament /Depute — Edmonton Centre.

A statement from the Canadian Hindu Chamber of Commerce (CHCC), dedicated to promoting the interests of the Hindu business community in Canada, said, "The act of vandalism is not only an attack on a physical structure but also an affront to the sentiments of the Hindu community and the principles of respect and tolerance that our society holds

dear." It condemned the "senseless act of hate" and the "rising tide of Hinduphobia" across Canada and said, "These incidents are deeply troubling and have no place in our multicultural and inclusive society."

The CHCC urged the Canadian government and local authorities to take immediate and effective measures to combat Hinduphobia and protect religious institutions and communities from such acts of violence and intolerance, the statement said and called for united efforts.

Last year, there were at least three incidents of attacks on Hindu temples, including at Mississauga, Brampton and Windsor, and some saw Khalistani referendum posters with veiled threats to Hindus.

The latest vandalism in Edmonton also invoked strong reactions from all quarters,

including from elected public representatives.

Chandra Arya, a member of Parliament from Nepean in the House of Commons said, "During the last few years, Hindu temples in the Greater Toronto Area, British Columbia and other places in Canada are being vandalised with hateful graffiti. Gurpatwant Singh Pannun of Sikhs for Justice last year publicly called for Hindus to go back to India."

"Khalistan supporters publicly celebrated in Brampton and Vancouver the assassination of Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and brandishing images of deadly weapons," he said in a post on X and added, "As I have always been saying, Khalistani extremists seem to get away with ease with their public rhetoric of hate and violence." "Again, let me put it



Sensex, Nifty tumble

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stock market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty tanked after Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced a hike in STT (Securities Transaction Tax) on F&O (Futures and Options) securities. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped as soon as Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman began presenting the Budget for 2024-25. But, within minutes it slipped in the red and later plummeted 1,266.17 points to 79,235.91 during the afternoon trade. The NSE Nifty also tumbled higher as the finance minister began the presentation of her 7th Union Budget in the Lok Sabha. However, volatile trends soon came in and the benchmark later tanked 435.05 points to 24,074.20. The BSE benchmark had climbed 264.33 points to 80,766.41 in early trade. The Nifty went up 73.3 points to



24,582.55. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday said the government plans to raise the capital gains exemption limit on certain financial assets to Rs 1.25 lakh per year for the middle and upper middle class. Presenting the Budget for 2024-25, she announced a hike in STT (Securities Transaction Tax) on F&O (futures and options) securities by 0.02 per cent and

0.1 per cent. This is the first Budget during Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led government's third term in office. India's economic growth continues to shine while the global economy is still in the grip of policy uncertainty, Sitharaman said. The country's inflation continues to be stable and is moving towards 4 per cent, and core inflation stands at 3.1 per cent.

Among the Sensex pack, Larsen & Toubro, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Reliance Industries, State Bank of India and Bajaj Finserv were the major laggards. Titan, ITC, Hindustan Unilever and Adani Ports were among the biggest gainers. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 3,444.06 crore on Monday, according to exchange data. In Asian markets, Seoul and Tokyo traded higher while Shanghai and Hong Kong quoted lower. The US markets ended in positive territory on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude dimmed 1.12 per cent to USD 82.40 a barrel. Falling for the second day in a row, the BSE benchmark fell 102.57 points or 0.13 per cent to settle at 80,502.08 on Monday. The NSE Nifty dipped 21.65 points or 0.09 per cent to 24,509.25.

₹1.28 lakh cr for telecom projects; BSNL gets lion's share of ₹82,916 cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government has proposed the allocation of Rs 1.28 lakh crore for telecom projects and public sector firms under the telecom ministry with a majority of funds earmarked for state-owned BSNL. Of the total proposed allocation, over Rs 1 lakh crore is meant for BSNL and MTNL-related expenses, including Rs 82,916 crore infusion in BSNL for technology upgradation and restructuring at BSNL. "The total net allocation for this demand in BE (Budget Estimate) 2024-25 is Rs 1,28,915.43 crore (Rs 1,11,915.43 crore plus Rs 17,000 crore). The additional provision of Rs 17,000 crore is met from the balances available under Universal Service Obligation Fund and will be utilised for schemes viz., Compensation to Telecom



Service Providers, Bharatnet and Research and Development," the budget document said. The budget has proposed to allocate Rs 17,510 crore for pensionary benefits of the employees of the Department of Telecommunications, including employees absorbed in Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd and employees of Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd with effect from April 1, 2014. The government has proposed to allocate Rs 3,668.97 crore for

payment of principal amount of MTNL bonds. The budget has made provision of Rs 34.46 crore for Technology Development and Investment Promotion, Rs 70 crore for Champion Service Sector Scheme and Rs 1,806.34 crore for Production Linked Incentive Scheme. Besides the allocation, the government has proposed to increase import duty on motherboards, technically called printed circuit boards, by 5 per cent in the Union

Budget 2024-25 to boost domestic telecom gear manufacturing. "To incentivise domestic manufacturing, I propose to increase the BCD (Basic Customs Duty) from 10 per cent to 15 per cent on PCBAs (printed circuit board assembly) of specified telecom equipment," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said. The increase in basic customs duty for telecom PCB assembly comes with the exemption of critical minerals that are used in the manufacturing of communication equipment. The finance minister proposed to fully exempt 25 minerals, such as lithium, copper, cobalt and rare earth elements, which are critical for sectors like nuclear energy, renewable energy, space, defence, telecommunications and high-tech electronics from customs duties and reduce basic customs duty on two of them.

Gold, silver, mobiles to become cheaper

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold, silver and other precious metals along with imported mobile phones, certain cancer drugs and medical devices are set to become cheaper with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announcing cuts in customs duty in the Union Budget 2024-25. However, certain items such as imported garden umbrellas and laboratory chemicals are set to become costlier due to an increase in basic customs duty. Sitharaman in her Budget speech on Tuesday proposed reducing "customs duties on gold and silver to 6 per cent and that on platinum to 6.4 per cent" to enhance domestic value addition for jewellery in the country. Moreover, to provide relief to cancer patients, the finance minister proposed to fully exempt three more medicines from customs duties -- Trastuzumab Deruxtecan, Osimertinib and Durvalumab. She also proposed "changes in the BCD (basic customs duty) on x-ray tubes & flat panel



detectors for use in medical x-ray machines under the Phased Manufacturing Programme, so as to synchronise them with domestic capacity addition." Earlier X-ray tubes used in manufacturing of X-ray machines for medical, surgical, dental or veterinary use attracted 15 per cent BCD, which has been proposed to reduce to 5 per cent. The government also proposed slashing import duty on mobile phones, chargers and some components that are used for manufacturing of handsets. Sitharaman said with a three-

fold increase in domestic production and almost 100-fold jump in exports of mobile phones over the last six years, the Indian mobile phone industry has matured. "In the interest of consumers, I now propose to reduce the BCD (basic customs duty) on mobile phone, mobile PCBA and mobile charger to 15 per cent," Sitharaman said. Earlier BCD on mobile phones, chargers and motherboard was 20 per cent. The government has proposed to exempt specified goods for use in manufacturing of connectors in mobile phones and oxygen-free copper for

use in manufacturing of resistors (an electronic component) from BCD levy. The BCD on specified goods for use in manufacturing of connectors was in the range of 5 to 7.5 per cent and oxygen-free copper for use in manufacturing of resistors attracted 5 per cent BCD. Similarly, customs duty on 25 critical minerals such as lithium, copper, cobalt and rare earth elements, which are critical for sectors like nuclear energy, renewable energy, space, defence, telecommunications, and high-tech electronics either got fully exemption or reduced. "This will provide a major fillip to the processing and refining of such minerals and help secure their availability for these strategic and important sectors," she said. The finance minister also proposed removing BCD on specified capital goods for use in manufacturing of solar cells or solar modules and said this will "support energy transition". However, she withdrew customs duty exemption on import of solar glass and

tinned copper interconnect "in view of sufficient domestic manufacturing capacity". Similarly, Sitharaman also proposed reducing BCD on certain broodstock, polychaete worms, shrimp and fish feed to 5 per cent to promote India's seafood exports, which has touched an all-time high of more than Rs 60,000 crore in the last financial year. For leather and textile sectors, she proposed to remove duty on import of wet white, crust and finished leather for manufacturing of textile or leather garments, footwear or other leather products for export. "...To enhance the competitiveness of exports, I propose to reduce BCD on real down filling material from duck or goose. I am also making additions to the list of exempted goods for manufacture of leather and textile garments, footwear and other leather articles for export," she added. Sitharaman proposed to increase BCD on garden umbrella from 20 per cent to 20 per cent or Rs 60 per piece, whichever is higher.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government has scrapped the Rs 30,000 crore equity infusion it had planned in state-owned fuel retailers after they made record profits in the fiscal year ended March 31, according to the Budget Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented on Tuesday. Sitharaman had on February 1 last year, while presenting the annual Budget for the 2023-24 fiscal (April 2023 to March 2024), announced an equity infusion of Rs 30,000 crore in Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) to support the three state-owned firm's energy transition plans. Alongside, she had also proposed Rs 5,000 crore for buying crude oil to fill strategic underground storages at Mangalore in Karnataka and Visakhapatnam in Andhra Pradesh that India has built to guard against any supply disruptions. In the interim budget, the



finance minister presented in February this year ahead of the general elections, the capital support to the three oil companies was halved to Rs 15,000 crore and the plan for filling strategic underground storage was deferred. In the full budget for 2024-25, both plans have been scrapped. The budget documents showed nil allocation for capital support to the three oil marketing companies (OMCs) in 2024-25 against Rs 30,000 crore that was provisioned in the 2023-24 budget. While the interim budget in February this year showed the amount against this entry at Rs 15,000 crore,

the revised allocation in the full budget presented today showed Rs 0.01 crore as the expenditure for 2023-24 and nil in the 2024-25 budget provision. While other state-owned oil companies like Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and GAIL (India) Ltd too have lined up billions of dollars of investment to achieve net-zero carbon emissions, the equity support was limited to the three fuel retailers, which had suffered huge losses in 2022 when they held retail petrol, diesel and cooking gas (LPG) prices despite a spike in raw material (crude oil) prices, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Mixed response from tea industry

PTI ■ KOLKATA
The budget for 2024-25 presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Parliament on Tuesday evoked mixed reactions from the tea industry. The Tea Association of India (TAI), a leading producer's body, said that the scheme 'Pradhan Mantri Shramik Pratishan Yojana (PMCSPY) devised for the welfare of tea workers, especially women and their children in Assam and West Bengal, is a welcome move. Secretary of the Association of Tea Auctioneers (ATA) Sujit Patra, however, said apparently there is nothing for the tea industry in the budget for 2024-25. The government has earmarked Rs 1000 crore for implementing the scheme,



which the tea industry will benefit immensely, the association said. Development of digital and banking infrastructure in the tea growing areas has been a consistent demand of the industry for several years. "Announcement of setting up bank branches in the northeastern region is a positive step towards that direction" TAI said. The continuation of PMAY (Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana) and PMGSY (Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana) will surely benefit the rural population including those residing within the tea gardens, the association said. ATA Secretary Sujit Patra, however, said that the industry expected some assistance in boosting exports by providing higher RoDTEP rates, which did not find a place in the budget.

Startup and venture funds Son Tuesday cheered the Budget decision on the abolition of angel tax for all investor classes, terming it a "game-changer" that would remove significant barriers in growth and foster a vibrant and dynamic ecosystem. Angel tax refers to the tax that the government imposes on funding raised by unlisted companies, or startups if their valuation exceeds the company's fair market value. "To bolster the Indian startup eco-system, boost the entrepreneurial spirit and support innovation, I propose to abolish the so-called angel tax for all classes of investors," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech. The angel tax issue has been a thorn on the side of startup founders and investors, and

Announcement on abolition of angel tax cheers startups, investors

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Startup and venture funds Son Tuesday cheered the Budget decision on the abolition of angel tax for all investor classes, terming it a "game-changer" that would remove significant barriers in growth and foster a vibrant and dynamic ecosystem. Angel tax refers to the tax that the government imposes on funding raised by unlisted companies, or startups if their valuation exceeds the company's fair market value. "To bolster the Indian startup eco-system, boost the entrepreneurial spirit and support innovation, I propose to abolish the so-called angel tax for all classes of investors," Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in her Budget speech. The angel tax issue has been a thorn on the side of startup founders and investors, and



ecosystem, encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship across the country," Prateek Jain, Associate Director-Startup and Alliances, Alliance of Digital India Foundation (ADIF) said. Shyam Menon, Co-Founder and Partner, Bharat Innovation Fund dubbed the move as "a significant and positive step" towards

alleviating a longstanding issue in startup investing. "For some time, angel tax has been a notable point of friction, creating challenges for investors and startups, alike. By eliminating this tax, the government is addressing a key barrier that has hindered investment in emerging businesses," Menon said. According to the industry, the decision would stimulate an increase in capital inflow, and foster more supportive environment for the formation and growth of startups within the country. It will lead to a cessation of fresh litigation, noted Brijesh Damodaran, Partner at Auxano Capital. "Furthermore, funds that would have been tied up in deposits for cases involving notice issuance cease. This redirection of cash flow will enable businesses to allocate

resources more effectively towards their core operations, thus enhancing their overall operational efficiency and growth prospects," Damodaran pointed out. Arjun Malhotra, General Partner of Good Capital described the development as a huge win for the Indian startup ecosystem. "It's heartening to see the government not only listening but taking decisive action to support innovation. As an investor, I've seen firsthand how this tax has been a thorn in the side of founders and investors alike, creating unnecessary friction in the funding process," Malhotra noted. Tech Entrepreneurs Association of Mumbai believes that startups will now be better positioned to scale operations, invest in technologies, and create high-quality jobs.

Customs duty exemption on lithium, cobalt to aid growth of EV sector: Auto Inc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The proposed exemption in customs duty on import of lithium, cobalt and other rare minerals in the Union Budget 2024-25 is likely to lower the battery production cost and help in making electric vehicles more affordable for the buyers, auto industry leaders said on Tuesday. Minister Nirmala Sitharaman while presenting the Union Budget for 2024-25 proposed to fully exempt customs duties on 25 critical minerals and reduce Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on two of them. "This will provide a major fillip to the processing and

refining of such minerals and help secure their availability for these strategic and important sectors," she noted. Minerals such as lithium, copper, cobalt and rare earth elements are critical for sectors like nuclear energy, renewable energy, space, defence, telecommunications, and high-tech electronics, Sitharaman stated. Auto industry body SIAM President Vinod Aggarwal said the exemption of customs duty on import of lithium, cobalt and other rare minerals and extension of concessional customs duty on Li-Ion cells till March 2026 and withdrawal of equalisation levy of 2 per cent

on e-transactions is expected to propel the growth of the Indian auto industry. "The Indian automobile industry welcomes the continued emphasis on economic growth with several announcements, especially the strong fiscal support for infrastructure in the next five years," Aggarwal stated. Liberal allocation for rural development and infrastructure of Rs 2.66 lakh crore is a welcome step that will boost the rural economy, he added. SIAM also welcomes several proposals in the Budget such as measures for skilling and upskilling and support to manufacturing and



employment generation and support to MSMEs, many of whom form the large supplier

base for the auto sector, Aggarwal said. Auto component body

ACMA President Shradha Suri Marwah stated that the reduction in customs duty on critical minerals will encourage cell manufacturing in the country and add to the evolving EV ecosystem in the country. Deloitte India Partner Rajat Mahajan said the move is likely to encourage few players to indigenise battery production in India. He, however, noted that the Budget has been silent on direct benefits to the automotive sector. "The industry was not expecting a lot but was definitely looking for some announcements with respect to FAME III subsidies, and

other direct benefits for EV/NEV (New Electric Vehicle). We may have to wait to see if there are any further relaxations in the future by the EM or by the GST Council," Mahajan said. BatX Energies Co-Founder & CEO Utkarsh Singh said the reduction of BCD and exemption of 25 essential minerals from custom charges is set to lower production costs for battery manufacturing and recycling, enhancing the affordability and accessibility of electric vehicles in India. The strategic move will significantly impact India's EV market by lowering production costs and

enhancing competitiveness, he added. Hero MotoCorp Executive Chairman Pawan Munjal said the Budget positions India as a technology-driven and knowledge-driven economy, reaffirming commitment to sustainable development. Ashok Leyland Executive Chairman Dheeraj Hinduja said reduction in duties on rare earth minerals will help in promoting sustainable mobility. Mercedes-Benz India MD & CEO Santosh Iyer said the Budget clearly underlines the government's priorities on creating a robust foundation for a developed Indian economy.

PERSONAL, NATIONAL COACHES PIVOTAL IN ATHLETE'S CAREER: VIJAY

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Olympic medallist shooter Vijay Kumar feels both the personal and national coaches play an equal role in the growth of an athlete as the debate over the role of the two continues to intensify with the Paris Games around the corner. Several Indian athletes have opted for personal coaches in Paris and Vijay feels there is nothing wrong with it and that due "weightage" should be given to them. India's medal hopeful in pistol shooting Manu Bhaker has opted for pistol legend Jaspal Rana as her coach in Paris, while rifle marksman Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar trains with former Olympian Joydeep Karmakar, though the veteran hasn't accompanied his ward to the Games. Athletes in several other disciplines are also taking help of personal coaches as they eye Olympic dream. Vijay, who was a surprise medal-winner in the 2012 London when he stepped out of the shadow of the likes of Abhinav Bindra and Gagan Narang to clinch silver in rapid-fire pistol, said personal coaches should get due "weightage" as they have played a pivotal role in

bringing up the athlete to this level. "Well, it's a complicated issue. Personal coaches should also get due weightage. Suppose I become a national coach some day, the shooter who comes to me, he would have been trained by someone to come up to that level by a personal coach," Vijay, an ex-serviceman now serving as DSP with Himachal Police, told PTI. "So, the contribution of both the coaches is equal. The national coaches give that extra push... That 1-2 point bump in scores, how to handle pressure in international competition," said Vijay, who got enrolled in the Army early and was able to harness his talent in shooting to bring several accolades for the country. The 38-year-old, however, feels that the shooting federation should appoint coaches with good credentials and those who have faced challenging situations in some of the toughest competitions in the world. "The federation should only appoint those coaches who have performed at the international level and won medals, so they can teach their wards how to handle those circumstances, what thoughts



to keep in mind while shooting or relaxing, the techniques to follow," added Vijay. He feels that the Indian shooting team's preparations have been far from ideal and that a clear roadmap should have been in place for Paris-bound shooters six months before the mega event.

"Observing from the outside, I feel it is the planning of players in the last six months where we are lacking. The federation, I feel, should have had a crystal clear roadmap on what all competitions the shooters should take part in and the kind of training they should get and under whom.

"So the focus should have been on that. The last six months the focus should be on how to make the players more focused, how much to train them, how much foreign exposure needs to be given, all that needs to be worked to the 'T,'" he added. "This year also, I've heard that

the team was announced three (two) months before the Olympics. The trials were very late and the team announcement too was late. This exercise should have been completed in January-February, to be very frank," he added. "The federations policy to have

Olympic Selection Trials was fair but the execution was a bit late. The process should have been completed 2-3 months before it actually happened. The last 5-6 months (before Olympics) are crucial. I must say, if the competition at the Olympics is in July-end, then January or maximum February the trials should have ended. Here trials were going on till April-end I suppose." Vijay felt that the team should have been given a month's rest before they embarked on rigorous specialised training. Unfortunately, due to the Olympic Selection Trials taking place late and the late announcement of the team, Indian shooters didn't have that luxury. "The (federation) should have been given proper rest to the shooter of about a month and then rigorous training should have started after that, plus foreign exposure, plus technical training. That would have been ideal as per my understanding," he added. With fitness and mental trainers now becoming an integral part of every athlete competing in major international competitions, Vijay feels he isn't fully convinced about their importance. "Even today, I am 50:50

convinced that there should be fitness trainer and mental trainer. No doubt these things help, but if your upbringing is in a particular environment, it gives you that competitive edge. That was given to me by the Army, my family upbringing. "You cannot say you can teach (mental training) to someone at 20 or 30 years of age, because the environment a kid grows up in has a profound effect on their mind. All these things weren't there when I was shooting... The Army army atmosphere was good and had I good players for company because of which I excelled. "We imbibed everything our coaches told us with a clear mind. We blindly followed them. For me it was Army coach Pavel Smirnov and other senior coaches. While coaches and all the trainers can lead one to a point, Vijay feels being in the company of some of the best shooters in his time at the Army Marksmanship Unit in Mhow helped him grow as a shooter. "Pemba Tamang, Jitu Rai... It gives you inspiration and also gives you a push that others are doing well, so you don't go into that relaxed zone. So, good players are a must for your growth."

Indian badminton at Paris Games: Role of supportive parents in making an Olympian

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Six summers ago, Clifford Crasto Slept his daughter Tanisha at the Pulella Gopichand Academy in Hyderabad on her 15th birthday, hoping it would give wings to her nascent badminton dreams even if it meant being far away from the comfort of her home in Dubai. It was a cultural change for Tanisha, who was born in Dubai. But she waddled through that and will now represent India at the Paris Olympics along with her senior women's doubles partner Ashwini Ponnappa. While there is no guidebook to raise an Olympian, for parents, it's a journey filled with sacrifices, and emotional upheaval. Yet firm decisions have to be taken to help their children grow in sports and life. "I took her to India on her birthday. It was a very brave decision, an emotional decision to leave her alone in a different country," the Goa-born Clifford, who shifted base to work in Dubai, told PTI over phone. "She was born and brought up in Dubai. So, it was hard for both of us. But we knew that she had taken the right path and we supported her. We are happy with that decision and happy with where she has reached now," he said. Tanisha showed early promise and emerged as a top player in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. She represented Bahrain and won the women's doubles title at the 2016 Bahrain International Challenge before becoming the youngest singles winner at the UAE Open at 14. Then Tanisha decided to compete in India, representing Goa from 2017, and won the junior and senior nationals multiple times. Clifford, who worked at Intel



distributors in Dubai for 18 years, had to leave his job to accompany Tanisha in tournaments. "It was quite tough for me. I had to travel with her for national, state and international tournaments. "I would not get so many leaves as she was playing around 25-30 tournaments in a year. So, I had to quit my job," said the Margao-born Clifford. Clifford and his family have already booked their Paris tickets and will be cheering Tanisha from the stands. While Tanisha will be plying her trade in women's doubles, Satwiksairaj Rankireddy and Chirag Shetty will be leading India's charge for gold in men's doubles. Kasi Vishwanatham, Satwik's father, found a way to make his son comfortable ahead of the big event -- recreate a home-like atmosphere at his Hyderabad training base before their Paris departure. "Before every big tournament like the Asian Games and world championships, we try to stay for a few days with him in Hyderabad. "His mother (teacher) took a break from work and was here (in

Hyderabad) for three weeks now," Vishwanatham, a retired physical education teacher, said. While Satwik's parents will not travel to Paris, his elder brother Ramcharan will be in the City of Lights. Chief national coach Pulella Gopichand noticed Satwik when he reached the U-15 men's doubles final of the Nani Prasad Memorial tournament in Hyderabad. "Gopichand told me that we need a men's doubles player for India's team championships," said Vishwanatham, a state level player and international umpire, who officiated during the 2009 World Championships at Hyderabad. "It was tough financially for the first few years but my friends and family supported me and once he did well at the 2018 Commonwealth Games, there was no looking back," he recalled. Satwik and Chirag won the men's doubles silver at the 2018 CWG. Satwik also played a pivotal role in India winning their maiden gold in the mixed team championships at Gold Coast. The duo bettered that doubles silver with a maiden gold at the 2022 CWG in Birmingham. Now,

they are hot favourites to win gold at the Paris Games. They had done well in their debut Olympics in Tokyo but failed to enter the knockout stage despite winning two of the three group matches. "He was quite sad after the Tokyo Games because they had done well and had beaten the gold medalist pair. But according to rules they couldn't make it (knockouts)," said Vishwanatham. "He is not someone who gets too low after a loss. He is pretty honest in his assessment about the reason behind the defeat. Whenever he calls me after a loss, he would point out how they lost, and where the opponents played better," he added. Here, DK Sen is a bit different. Unlike other parents, who generally support their children off the field, Sen has seen the progress of Lakshya from close quarters as his co-coach. In fact, both of Sen's sons - Lakshya and Chirag - are international players and they have learnt the ropes from him at the SAI Almora Centre before he joined the duo at the Prakash Padukone Badminton Academy in Bengaluru.

Dupont's Olympic debut to boost France's rugby sevens chances

AP ■ PARIS

Antoine Dupont had one ambition when he switched his focus to what he described as the French Olympic project: a gold medal for the host nation. The world's premier rugby player will get France's Olympic medal campaign underway Wednesday, two days before the official opening ceremony of the Paris Games, when his team takes on the United States in the first Pool B game of the rugby sevens competition. Stade de France will be at capacity and most of the attention will be on Dupont when the French kick off in the third game of a three-day men's tournament. It'll be the same on Day 2 when the French meet two-time Olympic champion Fiji, the most formidable force in rugby's condensed sevens format. The U.S. men face France and Fiji on Wednesday, giving them a unique view of a pair of title favorites. "When we get in that environment, besides maybe 14 players, give or take 50 friends and family coming in supporting us, the staff and the people watching on TV - we know it's going to be us versus 69,000 people," U.S. Captain Kevon Williams said of facing the French. "We're OK with that, we've been preparing for that, we've honed in and said, it's just us." "All we'll see is the French jersey, so we'll be ready." France hosted the Rugby World Cup last year and the national team again failed to lift the title. It has been a finalist three times at the sport's biggest tournament. With undisputed star of the 15-a-side game joining its ranks, France has peaked in the rugby sevens format in 2024. Dupont helped the French win a spot on the world series for the first time in 19 years, and then capped it with a victory in the series finale in Madrid. The French evolution has coincided



with an unusually lean season for Fiji. Although Fiji head coach Osea Kolinisau is confident the team's bid for an Olympic three-peat will overshadow the inconsistent world series run by the time the men's sevens medals are awarded Saturday. "We plan to keep that legacy going," Kolinisau said. "We can claim it solely." Kolinisau led Fiji to its first ever Olympic gold medal as captain in 2016 at Rio de Janeiro, where rugby sevens was featured on the Olympic program for the first time. Kolinisau was rushed into the coaching role earlier this year to resurrect Fiji's men's program, and he reinstated what he calls the "Fijian way" - or instinct - for sevens rugby: "High tempo, high risk." In the series finale, the Fijians posted wins over Ireland, South Africa and New Zealand before losing to France in the semifinals. For Argentina, a grand final loss to France in Madrid was a setback after it topped the league stage of the world series, winning three of the seven stops. For the Olympic tournament, Argentina is grouped with Australia,

Samoa and Kenya in Pool B. No. 2-ranked Ireland, Tokyo silver medalist New Zealand, Rio bronze medalist South Africa and Japan are in a tough Pool A. Uruguay joins France, Fiji and the U.S. In Pool C. The top two teams in each group and the two best third-place teams advance to the quarterfinals, meaning two-thirds of the 12 starters are still in medal contention when the knockout phase starts. That's the stage where the Fijians have come into their own at the two previous Olympics. Jerry Tuwai has been integral in Fiji's first two Olympic runs and the 35-year-old playmaker was recalled by Kolinisau two months ago after almost a year out of the team. A two-time Olympic champion, Sevens World Cup winner and player of the decade, Tuwai has embraced Kolinisau's approach ahead of the Paris Games. "Our style of play has been opened up and our teamwork and communication. Our decision making - that's another thing that opened up, too," Tuwai said. "After two Olympic gold medals, these boys have shown they always show up in very big tournaments."

Tarzan at Olympics: Johnny won 3 gold medals at 1924 Paris Games

AP ■ PARIS

Before there was Michael Phelps or Mark Spitz winning Olympic gold medals for the United States - there was Tarzan. Yes Tarzan, the fictional literary and film character who was raised by apes in the African jungle. This of course was Johnny Weissmuller, who played Tarzan in the films but was also a swimming superstar 100 years ago. He won three gold medals at the 1924 Paris Olympics: the 100-meter freestyle, the 400 free, and the 4x200 relay. Weissmuller also won bronze in water polo in an Olympics that featured many stars including Paavo Nurmi. Weissmuller defeated Duke Kahanamoku in the 100 final after the famous Hawaiian - often called the "father of surfing" - had won gold in 1912 in Stockholm and in 1920 in Antwerp. The 1916 Olympics were set for Berlin but canceled because of World War I. Adolf Hitler and the Nazis hosted the 1936 Berlin Olympics, where the torch relay originated. Weissmuller's swimming brought fame, and his virile image got him cast in the "Tarzan the Ape Man" film in 1932 - the first of his 12 Tarzan films.

There was, of course, the signature Tarzan yell - akin to a yodel - and what the character's creator Edgar Rice Burroughs described as "the victory cry of the bull ape." Weissmuller won two more golds in the 1928 Amsterdam Olympics and could have won a third had he not been pulled from the 400 to play for the water polo team. He set a world record in the 100 of 57.4 seconds prior to the 1924 Olympics that stood for a decade. The world record now is 46.80. He was also the first to go under 5 minutes for 400 meters, setting a world record of 4:57.0 in 1923. He was a trailblazer, the first to swim 100 meters under 60 seconds. He is regarded as the first athlete to sign an endorsement deal with a sports-wear line. He was among the first members inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame. Weissmuller was selected in 1950 by The Associated Press as the "Greatest Swimmer of the Half Century" and made famous the American crawl stroke with his chest high out of the water. **TARZAN THE SEX SYMBOL:** Hollywood producer Bernard Hyman thought Weissmuller's name was too long, but was told he



was famous as an Olympian. The name shouldn't be changed, he was warned. "All right then," he said. "We'll just lengthen the marquee. And put lots of water in the film." The writer Cyril Hume, who worked on the Tarzan script, tells a widely published story about taking Weissmuller in front of Hyman and others for his "screen test." Weissmuller was told to take off his

clothes. "I didn't realize what was going on," Weissmuller was quoted as saying. "They asked me if I could climb trees and I said yes. And they asked me could I pick up a girl and walk away with her, and I said yes. And that's all there was to the test. I had the part." Tarzan's love interest was Jane Parker, played by Maureen O'Sullivan, an Ireland-born actress

who was Jane in the first six Tarzan films made by MGM. Her star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame faces Weissmuller's. Buster Crabbe, who won Olympic gold in swimming in 1932, played Tarzan in one film for Paramount - "Tarzan the Fearless" - as it unsuccessfully challenged MGM's series. A hero on the screen, Weissmuller was also a real-life hero. He and his

brother, Peter, are credited with saving the lives of 11 people in a boating accident on Lake Michigan in 1927. He was married five times and died in Acapulco, Mexico, in 1984 and is buried there. **WEISSMULLER'S ROOTS:** Weissmuller was born Janos (Johann) Peter Weissmuller on June 2, 1904, to German parents in Freidorf, which is now a district of the Romanian city of Timisoara. At the time it was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The family immigrated to the United States when he was an infant and eventually settled in Chicago in 1908. He contracted polio as a 9-year-old and took up swimming as a remedy. Some of his first swimming lessons were in Lake Michigan. He was discovered by famed coach Bill Bachrach and, in an official biography of Weissmuller, Bachrach recalled an early meeting. "He had the gawkiness of an adolescent puppy. Also the stroke he used was the oddest I ever saw," Bachrach said. "But the stopwatch told it all. Nearly record time." Weissmuller became a symbol of American culture in the early part of the 20th century, popularized

swimming and often bragged that he never lost a race. "That is not true, but it's close," said Olympic historian Dr. Bill Mallon. Mallon said Weissmuller was defeated in a backstroke race - not Weissmuller's primary stroke - by Ludy Langer. And likely in another race against Langer, also an Olympian. "He definitely stands out," Mallon added. "Don't know if he was overshadowed by (Paavo) Nurmi - at least not in the USA." **BETTER THAN SPITZ?:** In a 1972 interview with the New York Times, Weissmuller compared himself to Spitz, who won seven gold medals that year in the Munich Olympics. He won two more on relays in 1968 in Mexico City. "I was better than Mark Spitz is," Weissmuller said. And he explained why. "It's easier to go faster now," he said. "On a turn, they don't have to touch with their hand, they just flip and push off; that's a split second. The platform is higher and the pool is deeper so when you enter the water that's a couple strokes. And the water's smoother. We didn't have the lane ropes, we had to get up higher in the water to avoid the little waves."

ASALANKA TO LEAD SRI LANKA IN T20I SERIES AGAINST INDIA

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Charith Asalanka was on Tuesday named captain of the Sri Lankan T20 team for the three-match series against India, starting here on July 27, replacing spin all-rounder Wanindu Hasaranga, who stepped down after the team's early exit from last month's T20 World Cup. The 27-year-old comes with considerable captaincy experience. In the absence of Hasaranga, who was facing suspension due to ICC code of conduct violations, Asalanka had captained Sri Lanka in two T20Is on the tour of Bangladesh earlier this year. A former Sri Lankan U-19 captain, he also led Jaffna Kings to the Lanka Premier League title last week. Sri Lanka Cricket Selection Committee opted for several changes following the team's dismal show at the T20 World Cup, where the island nation managed to win only one game and made an early exit. Overall, the 16-member squad is a good mix of experience and youth.

The seasoned pair of all-rounders Angelo Mathews and Dhananjaya de Silva, wicketkeeper Sadeera Samarawickrama and left-arm pacer Dilshan Madushanka have been left out of the squad. Returning to the squad are 34-year-old Dinesh Chandimal, who last played a T20I in



February 2022, and Kusal Janith Perera. Uncapped all-rounder Chamindu Wickramasinghe has earned a maiden call up. Right-arm seamer, who had been training at the MRF Pace Academy in India, has been rewarded for his breakout IPL season.

Pacers Binura Fernando and Avishka Fernando also find themselves back in the national fold. Sri Lanka will play the first of the three T20Is on July 27 here, followed by games on July 28 and 30. The Indian team, which will be led by a new captain in

Suryakumar Yadav as well, landed here on Monday night for the series, which also features three ODIs scheduled next month.

SRI LANKA SQUAD:
Charith Asalanka (capt), Pathum Nissanka, Kusal Janith Perera (wk), Avishka

Fernando, Kusal Mendis (wk), Dinesh Chandimal, Kamindu Mendis, Dasun Shanaka, Wanindu Hasaranga, Dunith Wellalage, Maheesh Theekshana, Chamindu Wickramasinghe, Matheesha Pathirana, Nuwan Thushara, Dushmantha Chameera, Binura Fernando.



Rahul Dravid screamed and cried, recalls Ashwin on India's T20 World Cup celebrations

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Virat Kohli handing over the T20 World Cup trophy to former coach Rahul Dravid after India's title triumph in Barbados and the much revered coach 'screaming and crying' in joy is something that will remain etched in his memory, Ravichandran Ashwin has expressed. After India pipped South Africa in a tense final last month to win their second T20 World Cup, former coach Dravid was seen letting out his emotions in a rare show while holding the trophy aloft. Ashwin admitted it was indeed a special moment for the 51-year-old Dravid, who could not win an ICC title as a player but finally redeemed it as a coach.

"My moment was when Virat Kohli called Rahul Dravid and gave the cup... I saw him hug the cup and cry," he said in a video on his YouTube channel. "Rahul Dravid screamed and cried. I saw him enjoy it. I felt that a lot." Ashwin also reckoned that Dravid was scared being at the helm of another campaign in the Caribbean, for the team under his captaincy had made a group-stage exit in the 2007 ODI World Cup. "I want to talk about a sacred person. (In) 2007, (the) 50-over World Cup. India gets knocked out. Rahul Dravid (was) the captain then. He does not captain the one-day side after that," he said. "He has been with the Indian team. If something does not go well, if the Indian team goes out, or if they lose a match,

immediately they ask what Dravid is doing." Ashwin also acknowledged the hard work done by Dravid during his stint as India coach, saying he brought balance to the team and changed in approach. "I know what he has been doing with this team for the past two to three years. I know how balanced he has been. I know how hard he has worked to change this approach," Ashwin said. "I know what he has given each of his players. Even when he is just sitting at home, he has been planning how to do this and that," he added. Under Dravid, India reached the finals of the World Test Championship and the ODI World Cup but lost to Australia on both occasions.



Bernard dubbed Olympics' godfather; here's how he built LVMH's fortune

AP ■ PARIS

For decades, France's LVMH has been the face of luxury for the wealthy who tote Louis Vuitton bags, don Christian Dior clothing, spritz Bulgari perfume and sip Veuve Clicquot Champagne. This week, the world's dominant luxury group - home to 75 high-end brands across fashion, jewellery, watches and alcohol - will be the face of a global event for the masses: the Paris Olympics, with its billions of viewers around the planet. With a major sponsorship role aimed at burnishing the image of the Games and the French capital, it's a new chapter in LVMH's speciality of selling exclusivity at a grand scale under its chair and CEO, Bernard Arnault. Assembling and growing dozens of exclusive labels under one powerhouse roof has put Arnault, 75, at the very top of Forbes' list of the world's richest people. As recently as June 3, Forbes

estimated his wealth at USD 207 billion, narrowly ahead of Tesla's Elon Musk and Amazon founder Jeff Bezos. With ever-shifting stock-market prices, the three men often trade places (according to Forbes' real-time billionaires list on Tuesday, Arnault and his family are currently No. 3). LVMH's cosmetics brand Sephora sponsored the Olympic torch relay. Berluti designed France's opening ceremony uniforms. Jeweler Chaumet crafted the Olympic medals. Those who rest in cases designed by Louis Vuitton, whose headquarters at 2 Rue Pont Neuf will be hard to miss as the opening ceremony parade floats by on the Seine River. "We tried to find a way to do it, to do something else than just signing a check and getting billboards on the side of the streets," Antoine Arnault - LVMH's head of environment and image and Arnault's eldest son - told The Associated Press on Monday.

Purnima's sacrifices for elusive archery medal

PTI ■ PARIS

Purnima Mahato didn't even know when her son Siddharth and daughter Archisa turned 17 and 10 as she would often feel guilty of being a perennially absentee mother. But in her three-decade career as an archery coach, the myriad desire to see one of her wards stand on the Olympic podium allowed her to make sacrifices and also demand a bit of it from her children. "We have everything but an Olympic medal. Archery has become life for me. My children grew up on their own and I didn't even realise," the Dronacharya Awardee coach told PTI in an exclusive interaction. "I hardly got to spend any time back home all these years with my kids. I left my son (Siddharth) at home when he was not even a year old. He is now all grown up and 17 years old, preparing for his 12th standard board exams. My daughter (Archisa) is 10 years old. It seems they have sacrificed way more than me for this Olympic medal," she gets a touch emotional. She has not even stayed at home for a week in 2024. "I went home for four days this year busy with the trials and camp, this has been the story so far. We have got all the medals but the Olympic medal is still a work in progress," she rued. **BETTER EQUIPPED TO KEEP EMOTIONS UNDER**



CHECK: The heartbreak of missing the 'Inner 10' when it matters is way too familiar a feeling for Purnima, who is again in charge of the women's team at the Paris Games where she wants veteran Deepika Kumari and her compatriots to focus on process rather than thinking about the end result. "Medal layenge, medal layenge yeh baat tum dimaag se nikal do (a medal will never come if you chase after a medal, just focus on the processes)," she has told the trio of Deepika, Ankita Bhakat and Bhajan Kaur. "They are now better placed to control their emotions and overcome the nervousness in big matches. It's (an Olympic medal) just a matter of time now." A CWG medallist, Mahato took up coaching at Tata Academy after leaving the sport in late 90s. She first coached the national team in an Olympics during the Beijing

edition where Dola Banerjee and V Pranetha were part of the squad. It was a 10-team draw and India got a bye to quarters as they needed to win two matches for their maiden Olympic medal. They were pitted against China, where they lost by big five-point margin and their story of heartbreaks continued since then. Every time the Olympic approaches, the expectation reaches its peak for the archers. And this time, it is no different. The women's team, who finished the Olympic cycle as World No. 8, topped the rankings among the non-qualified nations to earn the team quota. The men also made it on rankings by finishing the Olympic cycle as world No. 2. Paris, as a venue, has also been lucky for the Indian team. The women's team had won a silver and bronze medal in the World Cup Stage 3 in 2022 and

2023 in Paris, while senior archer Deepika Kumari has an individual gold here from World Cup Stage 3 in 2021. "The Koreans and the Chinese also have hearts that beat faster but they know how to control it by being mentally strong," Mahato said. "It's about following the process, stay engaged and relaxed without looking at scoring a perfect 10." "I don't want them to focus on the opponent's team, it's about keeping the atmosphere relaxed, by humming a song or focusing on the breath when your turn comes," she said. **STRATEGY AND CODE WORDS:** In the team event, Ankita will shoot first followed by Bhajan while Deepika with all her experience has the responsibility to play the role of the finisher. "Whenever one archer goes to the shooting line, the other has the job to keep the mood light by using their respective code words," Mahato said. This time the women's coach has the added responsibility after being awarded the Padma Shri three months back. "It's not a burden but an added responsibility, whenever you get a recognition you have an extra responsibility. I've been coaching for the last 28 years now and our players also do well but never got a medal. "But everyone in this team comes into the Olympics after doing well in the World Cups held during the current Games cycle. We have medals across all categories," she signed off.



Vidhatri eyes back-to-back wins on Hero Women's Pro Tour

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Talented golfer Vidhatri Urs, who captured her first title as a professional on the Hero Women's Pro Golf Tour last week, will look to make it two in a row as she tees up at the 10th Leg of the tournament at the par-72 Prestige Golfshire here on Wednesday. The field is once again very strong in the presence of the current Hero OOM leader Hitaashee Bakshi and last year OOM winner Sneha Singh, who have won twice each this year. The field also has Anvitha Narendar, winner of the eighth leg, the experienced Amandeep Drall, winner of the fifth Leg, and Neha Tripathi. While Amandeep seeks greater consistency, Neha is trying to make a comeback from a back injury.

Vidhatri, who is related to one of India's top pros Pranavi Urs, has been in excellent form. She was third in her first two appearances and then grabbed a win last week. Some of the other young pros waiting to make a mark include Durga Nittr, Jasmine Shekar, Gourabi Bhowmick and Karishma Govind. The amateurs have also shown a lot of promise with the prominent ones being Saanvi Somu and Mannat Brar, who have also played for India in international teams chosen by the Indian Golf Union. Apart from the in-form Saanvi Somu and Mannat Brar, the other amateurs are Aaradhya Shetty, Anuradha Chaudhuri, Keerthana Rajeev and Kaya Daluwatte of Sri Lanka. The event carries a purse of Rs 13 lakhs and will have a total 38 players including six amateurs.

Woods watches 15-year-old son Charlie shoot a 12-over 82

AP ■ BLOOMFIELD TOWNSHIP (MICHIGAN)

Charlie Woods, the 15-year-old son of Tiger Woods, covered his face with his cap after shaking hands with his playing partners on the 18th green at the Oakland Hills North Course. Woods shot a 12-over 82 on Monday in the U.S. Junior Amateur, a tournament he played his way into. "He still qualified," Tiger Woods said to his son's caddie after the rough round. "That's what I keep telling him," caddie Luke Wise said. Woods earned a spot in the field of top juniors from around the world when he shot a 1-under 71 to win his qualifier last month in Coral Springs, Florida. He will have to have quite a

turnaround Tuesday on the Oakland Hills South Course, which Ben Hogan called "The Monster," to be among the low 64 scorers from a field of 264 players from 40 states and 35 countries. Charlie Woods is the only one in the world who knows what it's like to be the son of Tiger Woods, and now he's fully aware of what it's like to compete with all eyes on him. At an event that usually draws a few hundred people for the championship match, about 100 were waiting on the first tee to see Charlie play while his dad watched, and at least that many spectators followed them for hours. Oakland Hills had six members assigned to assist with crowd control. That wasn't enough, and 10 more men were dispatched to hold

ropes to give the players - and Tiger - some space. After Charlie hit his tee shot on the seventh hole and left behind his tee, adorned with a palm tree, a fan took it out of the ground to keep as a memento. "I feel like he's feeling pressure," said 35-year-old John Pinch of Warren, Michigan. "If his dad could talk to him, he would probably try to get him to settle down. "You can tell he's really down on himself." Charlie was frustrated and let it show, slamming and swinging clubs into the ground after errant shots and shaking his head from side to side. His father was relatively helpless because rules prevent parents from coaching their children during the

US JUNIOR AMATEUR AT OAKLAND HILLS



tournament. After a brief exchange prior to the round on the practice green, Tiger didn't say a word to his son and didn't appear to even make eye contact as he watched from afar while surrounded by police officers - at least one of whom snapped photos - and security personnel. Without a doubt, Tiger wished his son could hear him on the 181-yard, par-3 fourth. A rules official gave Charlie relief because his ball landed on a metal cap on the right side of the green. "He gets a club length," Tiger said, standing out of earshot of his son. Tiger wanted his son to place his ball to the left, but Charlie elected to take relief to the right. "No, no, no," Tiger muttered to

himself. "Go the other way." Charlie ended up with his first of five double bogeys at No. 4 to go with four bogeys and two birdies - on both of the par 5s. He was wild off the tee - often missing to the right - came up short on a series of flop shots out of thick rough and sailed some approaches over greens. Tiger was 14 when he qualified for his first U.S. Junior and reached the semifinals. He won his first U.S. Junior a year later and went on to become the only player to win the tournament three times in a row. Tiger traveled to suburban Detroit from Scotland after matching his highest 36-hole score as a professional at the British Open, missing the cut for the third straight time in a major.

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