



OPINION 6 PUSHPA KAMAL DAHAL FALLS FROM GRACE

WORLD 9 BIDEN SAYS HE QUIT RE-ELECTION BID TO SAVE US DEMOCRACY

MONEY 10 MARKETS EXTEND LOSSES FOR 5TH SESSION

LUCKNOW, FRIDAY JULY 26, 2024; PAGES 12 & 3

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ANKITA BEST-PLACED INDIAN AT 11TH IN INDIVIDUAL 11 SPORTS



J&K on high alert ahead of PM visit

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU/NEW DELHI

The security forces have been kept in a state of high alert ahead of the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to attend the 25th Kargil Vijay Diwas on Friday in Drass. This will be the PM's first visit to the region after recent spate of terror attacks and also a few high-level review meetings in this regard held in the national Capital with two of them chaired by Modi himself.



Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi during his visit at the forward locations of Chinara Corps. Dwivedi also reviewed the security situation along the Line of Control during his visit

The Army Chief later flew to Kargil to supervise the arrangements. Vital security installations were also kept on high-alert along the Jammu-Pathankot National Highway following the sighting of seven suspected terrorists in a village of the Pathankot district of the neighbouring State, Punjab.

(Jammu) and Pathankot to track down the suspects. During his brief stay, the Prime Minister will also carry out the first blast of the Shinkun La Tunnel Project, virtually.

Continued on Page 8

Modi meets Maha NDA partners to smoothen ties

RAJESH KUMAR ■ MUMBAI/NEW DELHI

With a lot of complications due to the breakaway factions of two important constituents — NCP and Shiv Sena — in Maharashtra, the Central leadership of BJP, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has personally started taking stock of the situation. The State is to go to Assembly elections soon.

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Rain-ravaged Maharashtra seeks Army, Navy help

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

At least three people were electrocuted in Pune and three others feared trapped under the debris of three collapsed villas in a hill slide at Lavasa, even as the heavy rains wreaked havoc in Pune, Mumbai and various parts of Maharashtra, prompting the Maharashtra Government to seek the assistance of the Army and Navy to deal with the monsoon-related incidents.



A commuter makes his way through a waterlogged road after rain, in Mumbai, on Thursday

Many parts of Pune lay thick sheets of water as the heavy rains ravaged the city since Wednesday night, while intense rains battered Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and other surrounding areas resulting in heavy flooding in low-lying areas and disruption in train and flight operations.

situation arising out of heavy rains in Pune, Mumbai Raigad, Thane and other parts of the State, Maharashtra chief Minister Eknath Shinde said, "The units of NDRF, SDRF, Army, Navy, Police, Fire Brigade, Health System have been directed to coordinate with each other and lend help."

"There is also heavy rain in Mumbai city and suburbs. The administration is fully alert to deal with any calamity in Mumbai and I am in touch with Pune, Raigad, Mumbai Collectors and Municipal Commissioners," Shinde said.

SC ruling a shot in arm for States rich in minerals

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The legislative power to tax mineral rights vests with the States and the royalty paid on minerals is not a tax, the Supreme Court ruled on Thursday in a landmark judgement which will give a huge revenue boost to mineral-rich States.



Parliament can still legislate to impose "any limitations" on States' power to levy tax on mineral rights. It referred to the term "any limitations" under Entry 50 of List II and said its scope is wide enough to include imposition of "restrictions, conditions, principles, as well as a prohibition".

BJP slams Opp for abusing Modi in Parliament debate



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre on Thursday hit out at Opposition leaders, contending that they had resorted to abusing Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the debate on the Union Budget in Parliament instead of speaking on the finer aspects of the document.

Modi for the third consecutive term. If anybody tries to insult the verdict of the people, they will be punished in the elections," Rishi said at a Press conference. His remarks came a day after the Opposition claimed the Union Budget was "discriminatory" against non-NDA-ruled States and accused the Prime Minister of running a "shaky and vulnerable" coalition Government.

Continued on Page 8

UPSC to curb cheating with tech

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

With a series of controversies related to the UPSC and the exams conducted by it including the topmost Civil Services Examinations, the commission is now preparing to enhance its examination security measures by incorporating advanced technological solutions such as Aadhaar-based fingerprint authentication, facial recognition systems, and AI-driven closed-circuit television (CCTV) surveillance, several media outlets reported.



the Application Database. If the QR code cannot be scanned, the candidate's roll number must be entered manually from the Admit Card. The UPSC also plans to implement CCTV/video surveillance with recording and live broadcast capabilities to monitor the activities of candidates and exam personnel across various centres and venues nationwide.

and post-examination materials are handled. Additionally, the service provider must arrange for remote live viewing of the CCTV footage at the UPSC's control room, ensuring real-time monitoring and enhancing overall security during the examinations.

Continued on Page 8

Dhaka takes umbrage at Didi remark, complains to India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) on Thursday confirmed receiving a note from Dhaka that conveyed its objection to West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's remarks offering shelter to people affected by violent-clashes in that country.



Protesters in Bangladesh File PTI photo

New Delhi through diplomatic channels its displeasure over the West Bengal Chief Minister's comments. "I can confirm that we have received such a communication from the Bangladesh side. It is essentially on the lines described in the reports," Jaiswal said during his weekly media briefing while replying to a question.

Continued on Page 8

State govt cracks the whip on Ballia cops

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh police nabbed 18 people, including two policemen, late on Wednesday night for their alleged involvement in facilitating smuggling of liquor and other items into the state through the Bihar border.

ferred SP Ballia and ASP Ballia and kept them on waiting list and suspended the CO. Open vigilance inquiry has been ordered by the UP government on the assets of CO, SHO and police outpost in charge. Besides, nine policemen, including Narhi police station in-charge Pannelal, have been suspended following the raid while all policemen of the checkpoint, including in-charge of Korantadih outpost, have been suspended and a case has been registered against them.

and instructed ADG Varanasi Piyush Moradia to take strict action against all the accused policemen and others involved in the crime. Sources said that a report had been sought to forward it to the authorities concerned so that all the men in uniform, found to be involved in extortion, could be removed from the police force.

Continued on Page 8

Rashtrapati Bhawan sheds trace of colonial past

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A year after renaming the famous Mughal Gardens to "Amrit Udyan" on the premises of Rashtrapati Bhawan, efforts continue to align the iconic building with India's status as a Republic and underscore democratic principles deeply ingrained in Indian society since ancient times.



In these combo of pictures Rashtrapati Bhawan's iconic 'Durbar Hall' (left) and 'Ashok Hall' (right) have been renamed as 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap' respectively, in New Delhi

has been a consistent endeavour to make the ambience of the Rashtrapati Bhawan reflective of the Indian cultural values and ethos," a statement issued by the President's Secretariat said.

Bhavan — 'Durbar Hall' and 'Ashok Hall' — as 'Ganatantra Mandap' and 'Ashok Mandap', respectively, it said on a day Murmu completed two years of her presidency.

the word 'Ashok,' it added. 'Durbar Hall', located under the central dome of Rashtrapati Bhawan, is the venue of important ceremonies and celebrations such as the presentation of national awards. The term 'Durbar' refers to courts and assemblies of Indian rulers and the British.

Continued on Page 8

Police bust gang duping people through ATM card swap fraud

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

With the arrest of two accused on Thursday, the Madiaon police claimed to have busted a gang involved in duping people through ATM card swap fraud. Those arrested were identified as Ashish Kumar Singh alias Manoj Kumar (28) from Rajapur Musafirkhana in Amethi, and Adarsh Pandey (29) from Munshiganj, also in Amethi. The police team recovered over 80 ATM cards, a car, and a laptop from the accused. An employee of a well-known service provider website was reportedly leading the gang. Authorities are also investigating the gang's involvement in similar cases reported in localities beyond Madiaon. DCP (North) Abhijeet R Shankar stated that the police received a tip-off about some suspects sitting inside a car in the area. "Around 12:40 am on Thursday, the police received a tip-off from an informer that two suspicious persons, whose images were captured during previous such incidents, were sitting in a car. The police team quickly mobilised and arrested both suspects after surrounding the vehicle," the DCP said. He explained that the accused were being sought due to a surge in ATM card-swapping incidents in the area. "The images of the suspects were obtained through CCTV footage, and their activities are under police surveillance," he added. During interrogation,

CISF officer's daughter loses ₹1 lakh in online deceit

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The daughter of a CISF officer was duped of Rs 1 lakh in an online fraud from her bank account at a branch in Sarojininagar. Her father lodged a complaint, which was forwarded to the Sarojininagar police station. In his complaint, CISF officer Rajesh Kumar Mishra, who is posted in Delhi, stated that his daughter is pursuing MBA from IIM-Jammu. "My daughter Bhagyalakshmi is a second-year MBA student at the Indian Institute of Management, Jammu. On January 3, 2024, Bhagyalakshmi received a phone call from a mobile number. The caller introduced himself as an employ-

ee of FedEx courier company and informed Bhagyalakshmi that her courier had arrived and a payment was required to release it," the complaint read. Rajesh explained that during this time, a sum of Rs 99,810 was withdrawn from his daughter's Canara Bank account in Sarojininagar through a UPI transaction. "Upon discovering the fraud, Bhagyalakshmi filed a written complaint at the Nagrota police station in Jammu, the Cyber Crime police station in Gandhi Nagar, and the Sarojininagar branch of Canara Bank. However, she was advised to lodge the complaint at the cyber police station. She then filed a complaint at the cyber police sta-

tion, where she was informed that action would be taken by the National Cyber Crime Portal," Rajesh said. The CISF officer added that the complaint was subsequently forwarded to the Sarojininagar police station for resolution. "The fraudster has an account at the Punjab National Bank's Sabit Ganj branch in Etawah district and he has cheated many others in a similar manner. As a result, there is a freeze on withdrawing money from his account. Upon inquiry, it was found that a sum of Rs 4 lakh is deposited in his account," he said, sharing details of the investigation provided by the police. The case is currently under investigation.

Janeshwar Mishra Park to have a greener look

Lucknow (PNS): The Janeshwar Mishra Park in Gomti Nagar is set to have a greener appearance in the coming days following the planting of 500 saplings on Thursday. This initiative was led by Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Prathmesh Kumar. Initially, Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob was scheduled to be the chief guest but she withdrew due to other official commitments. Addressing the officials, staff, and the public who participated in the event, Kumar highlighted the major challenge of water scarcity, exacerbated by insufficient rainfall this monsoon season. He assured that arrangements for watering the saplings have been made, with over eight tankers designated for the task. If additional tankers are needed, the development authority will hire them from private agencies. The saplings were planted along the walking and cycling tracks and around the artificial lake. The initiative aims to provide shade for walkers and cyclists in the future. The general public actively participated in the plantation drive, as there were no restrictions on outsiders. Walkers also joined in planting the saplings. The LDA vice-chairman said that the plantation drive is part of a national programme aimed at restoring greenery, which has significantly diminished globally. He emphasised that positive results can only be achieved with public cooperation. Additionally, free saplings were distributed to locals with the promise of proper care for their growth.



Bulldozers in action on Thursday to demolish the 'phool mandi' which had come up unauthorisedly on Hussainabad Trust land in Kanchan market area of Chowk

Candle march taken out to protest murder of property dealer

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Leaders from various Brahmin organisations gathered for a candle march on Thursday evening to protest the death of property dealer Hrithik Pandey. The march, which began around 7:30 pm, saw hundreds of participants converge on Banthra police station. The protesters chanted slogans demanding death penalty for the accused and later proceeded to Pandey's residence to meet his family. During the demonstration, the group voiced strong criticisms against both the police and the local administration. The protesters accused the authorities of neglecting public grievances and failing to address their complaints effectively. They also

raised slogans targeting the local MLA, expressing frustration over the lack of action taken regarding the murder. The protesters questioned why the accused had not yet been arrested, despite the time elapsed since the incident. The leaders of the Brahmin organisations assured Pandey's family of their commitment to seeking justice. Hrithik Pandey was fatally assaulted by a group of men over a dispute related to the supply of electricity in their locality. A case has been registered against five named suspects—Pratyush, Avnish, Shani Singh, Rishi Singh—and ten unidentified accused. The charges include entering Pandey's home armed and assaulting family members, including women. In response to the rising ten-

sions, the police have deployed a PAC contingent in the village to prevent further clashes. The atmosphere remains charged as supporters of the victim demand stringent action against the perpetrators. In a related development, the SHO of Banthra, two sub-inspectors, and a constable have been suspended for dereliction of duty in connection with the case. Additionally, Pradeep Singh, one of the accused, was apprehended near the Sai river bridge. The protest highlighted ongoing concerns about police response and administrative accountability in handling such cases. The community's call for justice reflects broader issues of public trust in law enforcement and the need for effective legal remedies.

Struggling with proficiency in Hindi, girl from Darjeeling hangs self

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A 13-year-old student of Class VIII ended her life because she struggled with reading and writing in Hindi, which led to her classmates allegedly looking down upon her. According to reports, a neighbour saw the minor girl hanging with a dupatta tied around her neck and informed her mother. Her mother took her to Lok Bandhu Hospital, where doctors pronounced her dead. The police took the body into custody and sent it for autopsy. Pravendra Singh, incharge of the Quila outpost, said that the deceased, Diya, who hailed from Darjeeling, hanged herself and died as a result. He stated that the matter was under investigation. The police reported that Diya was depressed due to her diffi-

culty with reading and writing in Hindi. Her mother works in a security company, while her father remains in their native home in Darjeeling. Diya's mother Nimakit explained that she works in a private security company and that Diya had trouble understanding Hindi, which affected her concentration and caused her stress. She mentioned that they had moved to Lucknow only five months ago and were living in a rented house in Ruchi Khand, Ashiyana. Diya attended a private school but struggled to mingle with her classmates because of her limited proficiency in Hindi, which her peers spoke fluently. On Wednesday morning, Nimakit went to work, and in the afternoon, Diya hanged herself to death. Diya's father Nirmal and her elder sister live in

Darjeeling. A woman riding a scooter died in Sarojininagar on Wednesday afternoon after being struck by a tanker near Haj House. The woman, identified as Priya from Kanchanpuri Colony, was returning home with her 5-year-old daughter Nishtha from school. The two were riding a scooter when the incident occurred. Around 1 pm, near the Haj House on Kanpur Road, a high-speed, uncontrolled milk tanker struck Priya's scooter from behind. Priya died as a result of the collision, while Nishtha was thrown a considerable distance from the impact. The police reached the scene and transported the seriously injured Priya to Lok Bandhu Hospital, where she was pronounced dead. Priya had purchased the scooter only four days ago.

ILLEGAL WEAPON A video of an Class VIII student brandishing an illegal weapon went viral on social media. Police began questioning the student after being informed. The accused is reportedly the son of a village head. Some people filmed the minor, the son of a gram pradhan in a village in Mohanlalganj, and circulated the video on social media. In the video, the teenager is seen holding a weapon. Upon receiving information about the video through social media, the police immediately went to the village and began questioning the suspect. The police stated that they are investigating the authenticity of the viral video. If the video is confirmed to be genuine, appropriate action will be taken to determine who provided the weapon to the minor.

Kushinagar admin rescues 4 trapped in Badi Gandak river

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/KUSHINAGAR

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath consistently reassures residents that the state government stands firmly with them during times of crisis and that they need not worry. This commitment was exemplified by the Kushinagar district administration late Wednesday night. In a remarkable display of bravery, the Kushinagar district administration rescued four individuals who were trapped in the rapidly rising waters of the Badi Gandak river in Khadda tehsil. Despite the dark conditions and strong current, the team executed a swift and successful rescue operation, saving everyone. The villagers have praised the district administration for their swift and effective response. It is worth noting that in 2003, 16 people lost their lives at this very location due to similar strong currents. According to Relief Commissioner GS Naveen, at 8 pm on Wednesday, Kushinagar District Magistrate Umesh Mishra reported that Khadda tehsil SDM Rishabh Pundir and ADM (FR) Vaibhav Mishra had informed him of a boat capsizing due to sudden strong currents in the Badi Gandak river and four people were stranded in the strong currents near the Punihava bridge. He added that District Magistrate Umesh Mishra requested permission for a nighttime rescue operation. Permission was granted promptly, and the State Disaster Response Force commandant was instructed to

carry out the operation. ADM (FR) Vaibhav Mishra reported that upon receiving permission for the operation, the SDRF team arrived at the scene. However, due to intense darkness, the SDRF team initially indicated its inability to proceed with the rescue. Lighting was quickly arranged, allowing the rescue operation to begin. ADM (FR) Vaibhav Mishra, SDM Khadda Rishabh Pundir, and the SDRF team demonstrated exceptional bravery and after considerable effort, successfully rescued all four individuals trapped in the fast current of the water within 40 minutes. Following the rescue, the individuals underwent medical check-ups and after receiving clearance from doctors, were transported home by car. District Magistrate Umesh Mishra revealed that all four individuals trapped in the strong current of the Badi Gandak river were residents of Bihar. They had gone fishing in the river late at night when the flow suddenly increased and their boat capsized. They were stranded near the Punihava bridge due to the strong current. Upon receiving information from the villagers, SDM Khadda Rishabh Pundir informed ADM (FR) Vaibhav Mishra at 8 pm. The rescue operation commenced immediately, and all four were successfully rescued within 40 minutes. ADM (FR) Vaibhav Mishra identified the individuals as Rajkumar Sahani, Bhuwali Sahani, Subhash Sahani, and Shailesh Kumar, all from Bagah Narayanpur Ghat in Bihar.

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD.
(Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall Patiala-147001)
Corporate Identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033813
(Phone No. 01881-275289) E-mail: se-hq-ggsstp-ropar@pspcil.in

E-Tender (Short Term) Enq. No. 542/P-2/EMPW-12733 Dated 17.07.2024
Dy.Chief Engineer/ Headquarter (Purchase Cell-2) GGSSTP, Rupnagar invites E-Tender ID No. 2024_POWER_124109_1 for Annual Contract for Rewinding/ Re-caging/ Re-staggering and other repairs of HT Motors of GGSSTP, Rupnagar.
For detailed NIT & Tender Specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in from 18.07.2024 onwards.
Note:- Corrigendum & addendum, if any will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in **RTP-67/24**

76155/12/3172/2023/36027 Dated CHD :- 7/25/2024

GURU NANAK DEV UNIVERSITY, AMRITSAR

SHORT TERM E-TENDER NOTICE FOR SOPHISTICATED EQUIPMENTS

Short Term E-Tenders are invited for purchase Fluorescence Spectrophotometer, CAD software for Fabric Design, Garment Design Software, Socks Knitting Machine, Single Color Roto Flat Printing Machine, Universal Testing Machine (UTM), Narrow Fabric Weaving, Lab Coating Machine, Package Dyeing Machines, Printing Screen making and Exposure Unit, Pad Thermo Fixation Range, Calendering Machines, Digital Tear Tester, Air Permeability Tester, UV Penetration Tester, Automatic Hydrostatic Head Tester, Computer Color Matching System and Computer be submitted online latest by 9/08/2024 upto 4:00 p.m. Detailed information can be obtained from website www.eproc.punjab.gov.in Any corrigendum/Addendum related to these e-tender will be uploaded, if required, on Punjab Govt. website: eproc.punjab.gov.in

Director of Research
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar

NA/12/24361/2023/36011 Dated CHD :- 7/25/2024

पावरग्रिड POWERGRID

Notice

1. The Petitioner above-named has filed a petition before the Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, New Delhi for determination cum truing up of Transmission tariff for 2019-24 tariff block and determination of transmission tariff for 2024-29 tariff block for **Petition-1: Asset-1: OPGW Links-(220kV Pong-Jalandhar (BBMB) and 132kV Sewa II -Kathua)-149.956Km**, along with associated communication equipment and Asset-2: OPGW links of 638.544Km under 'Northern Region OPGW Strengthening Scheme' in 'Northern Region' and **Petition-2: Asset-1: Augmentation with 765/400kV, 1x1500MVA Transformer (3*) at Bikaner (PG) along with associated bays under 'Transmission system for evacuation of power from REZ in Rajasthan (20 GW) under Phase III - Part J'**

2. The beneficiaries of the Transmission system are: (a) Ajmer Vidut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (b) Jaipur Vidut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (c) Jodhpur Vidut Vitran Nigam Ltd. (d) Punjab State Electricity Corporation Limited (e) Haryana Power Purchase Centre (f) Jammu & Kashmir Power Corporation Ltd. (g) Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd. (h) BSES Yamuna Power Ltd. (i) BSES Rajdhani Power Ltd. (j) Tata Power Delhi Distribution Ltd. (k) Chandigarh Electricity Department (l) Uttaranchal Power Corporation Ltd. (m) North Central Railway (n) New Delhi Municipal Council. (o) Himachal Pradesh State Electricity Board. (p) Central Transmission Utility of India Ltd.

Particulars	Petition-1	Petition-2
Approved capital cost of the project (Rs. in lakh)	FR-4020 RCE: NA	FR: 33061 RCE: NA
Authority which has approved the Capital Cost	Chairman and Managing Director	Board of Directors
Scheduled date of commercial operation	05.12.2024	31.12.2023
Actual date of commercial operation	Asset-1: 26.01.2024 Asset-2: 24.03.2024	Asset-1: 08.05.2023
Capital cost on the date of commercial operation (Rs. in lakh)	Asset-1: 679.64 Asset-2: 2148.89	Asset-1: 4880.41

3. Details of tariff for 2019-24 block and 2024-29 block: (Rs. in lakhs)

Petition	Asset	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29
Petition-1	Asset-1	27.11	172.89	184.76	185.30	179.72	174.15
	Asset-2	9.52	508.95	559.15	542.83	526.47	510.15
Petition-2	Asset-1	1687.54	1477.77	1518.73	1535.63	1536.39	1540.60

4. A copy of the petition made for determination of tariff is posted on the website www.powergrid.in

5. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the petition may be filed by any person, including the beneficiary through the e-filing portal of the Commission, with a copy to the Petitioner within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place: GURGAON Shri V.C. Sekhar
Date: 19.07.2024 Senior General Manager (Commercial)

POWER GRID CORPORATION OF INDIA LIMITED
(A Government of India Enterprise)
Registered Office: B-9, Qutub Institutional Area, Katwaria Sarai, New Delhi 110 016
Corporate Office: Sauramini, Plot No. 2, Sector-29, Gurgaon, Haryana - 122 001
www.powergrid.in, CN: 140101D, 1989G0108121
A Maharatna PSU

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

This is to inform the sur name of mother is Shalini Pathak in school details of Manya Pathak which should be Shalini Sharma instead of Pathak. The spelling in school details is Aayansh Pathak which should be Aayansh Pathak.

NOTICE

I have changed my name from ANIS ANWAR TO AMEES ANWAR W/o Mohammad Anwar R/o 101/110, Talag Mahal, Kanpur, for all future purpose

Information

मेरे सर्विस रिकार्ड में मेरे पिता का नाम - Om Parkash Singh दर्ज हो गया है जो कि गलत है, जब कि आधार कार्ड व अन्य प्रपत्रों में मेरे पिता का नाम - Om Prakash Singh ही दर्ज है, जो कि पूर्णतः सत्य है।
Vipin kumar Singh s/o Om Prakash Singh, Fatepur majra sarai mo sharif, post Benikama, bhadokhar, Raebareli

NOTICE

I Kamla Prasad S/o Late Nayak Ram R/o House No 775 Raksha Khand, Udayan II Ashirwad, Sector-3 Rae Bareilly Road Lucknow, notify that my son Shailesh Pratap Baskar has Plot No-D-284.DLF Garden City Purnei, in Lucknow. My son died on 19-05-2020 leaving behind Kamla Prasad and my wife Ramavati Devi as the legal heir of Plot No D-284, DLF Garden City Purnei, Lucknow. If Any one want to claim his right in our property may submit his objection within 21 days.
Kamla Prasad
Phone No- 9838545126

CM monitoring flood relief

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is actively monitoring the flood-affected areas, leading to intensive relief operations in 26 cities hit by the disaster. Relief assistance has been provided to 9,23,134 individuals so far. In response to the damage to 2,138 houses, free housing has been offered to 1,759 beneficiaries, with the process ongoing for 379 more. The comprehensive efforts are aimed at addressing the immediate needs of those impacted by the floods. Relief Commissioner GS Naveen mentioned that 26 districts in the state are currently affected by floods. These include Lakhimpur Kheri, Balrampur, Kushinagar, Shahjahanpur, Barabanki, Sitapur, Gonda, Siddharthnagar, Ballia, Gorakhpur, Bareilly, Azamgarh, Hardoi, Ayodhya,

Bahraich, Badaun, Farrukhabad, Basti, Deoria, Mau, Moradabad, Rampur, Maharajganj, Unnao, Pilibhit, and Shravasti. In these flood-affected districts, 77 tehsils, 1,809 villages, 40 wards, and 141 erosion-prone villages are impacted, with a total population of over 16 lakh. Relief assistance has been provided to 9,23,134 people so far. The relief commissioner further said that 34,959 cattle have been moved to safe locations. The disaster has claimed 17 lives, and the families of the deceased have received Rs 4 lakh each from the state government. Moreover, 29 cattle have died due to the floods, and compensation has been provided to all livestock owners. So far, 2,138 houses have been damaged by the floods, with 1,759 beneficiaries receiving free housing and the process ongoing for 379 more. He said that 101 public prop-

erties have been damaged by the floods. The relief commissioner said that currently, 3,44,012.656 hectares of land in the state are affected by floods. To assist the flood-affected population, 2,773 boats and motorboats are being deployed. So far, 2,12,678 food packets and 8,01,198 lunch packets have been distributed in the affected areas, along with the operation of 52 community kitchens. Additionally, 3,492.4 quintals of fodder have been distributed for livestock. He also mentioned that the state has established 1,357 flood relief shelters, 1,508 flood control centres, and 2,014 medical teams. A total of 15,764 people have been relocated to safe places. To support health and hygiene, 9,47,932 chlorine tablets and 3,83,268 ORS packets have been distributed. Currently, 2,666 people are residing in flood shelters.

Lko-Kanpur Eway to be completed next year

Lucknow (PNS): The Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway, currently under construction, is expected to be completed by mid-next year. A senior official from the National Highway Authority of India, the agency overseeing the project, stated that construction began in 2022 and approximately 55 per cent of the work has been completed. "The work is likely to be finished by June 2025. This will reduce the travel time between Kanpur and Lucknow to 45 minutes to one hour. Currently, travelling via NH27 takes near-

ly two hours due to traffic congestion at various points within the city limits of Lucknow," he said. Providing details, the official mentioned that the Lucknow-Kanpur Expressway is also known as the National Expressway (NE-6). "This 63-km-long access-controlled highway is designed for high-speed vehicular traffic with regulated traffic flow. Additionally, it's a six-lane highway," he said. He further explained that the expressway will run parallel to NH27, with about 85 km sep-

arating the existing and the proposed parallel roads. "The expressway begins at its junction with NH27 near the Shaheed Path and connects Bani, Kantha, Amarsars, and terminates at its junction with NH27 near Kanpur. It will have two elevated sections between Lucknow and Bani, including one between Amausi and ring road and another between ring road and Bani. It will cross the Ganga Expressway in Unnao district," he said. The official noted that the construction at Bani was causing minimal traffic disturbance.

Case registered after cyclist knocked down by tractor

Gosainganj police have registered a case following the death of a 60-year-old cyclist, Ram Kumar, who was struck by an overspeeding tractor on July 27. Ram Kumar, who was transporting a sack of fertiliser, was knocked down while traveling from Lucknow. His family admitted him to the hospital after learning of the accident. Police are currently searching for the tractor driver.

In another case, a 25-year-old woman named Lali from Vinay Vihar in Indiranagar committed suicide at her home on Thursday. A native of Sitapur, Lali was the wife of Luvkush, a daily wage worker, and is survived by a son and a daughter. Police found Lali hanging from the ceiling with a dupatta tied around her neck. No suicide note was recovered. Authorities suspect family discord may have contributed to her suicide.

Mahana convenes all-party meet on Sunday ahead of monsoon session

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ahead of the monsoon session of the Uttar Pradesh assembly, Speaker Satish Mahana has convened an all-party meeting here on Sunday to ensure smooth conduct of the proceedings of the House. The meeting of the business advisory committee of the assembly has also been convened on the same day to finalise the agenda of the session. As per the tentative agenda of the session approved by the speaker, there are likely to be five sittings of the House from July 29 to August 2. The government has not given any indication of bringing important bills like the Finance Bill for supplementary grants for the current fiscal 2024-25. The government is likely to seek additional grants in view of the need of resources for the Kumbh mela in Prayagraj in January next year.

Moreover, the Yogi Adityanath government would like to put its best foot forward ahead of the coming bypolls to 10 assembly seats in Uttar Pradesh. These seats fell vacant as the incumbent MLAs were elected to Lok Sabha during the recent parliamentary elections. Besides the bypolls, the monsoon session is important as it is the first session after the Lok Sabha elections concluded on June 1, in which the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party faced huge setback and its tally was reduced to mere 33 seats out of total 80 Lok Sabha seats in UP. The opposition Samajwadi Party, upset after its improved tally of Lok Sabha seats, would do its best to fish in troubled waters of the BJP. The SP has already fired potshots on the BJP following the rumblings in the ruling party with Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and BJP state president Bhupinder

Chaudhary trying to put the entire blame at the doors of the Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath for the poor performance of the party in Lok Sabha elections. SP spokesman Rajendra Chaudhary said the BJP's double-engine governments at the Centre and in UP appear to be on a course of confrontation. "The state government did not say anything when Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman did not make a mention of UP in the Union budget," Chaudhary said. The SP, which is yet to appoint a leader of opposition in the assembly, has already given indications that it will leave no opportunity to target the BJP government in the monsoon session. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath is busy setting his house in order ahead of the monsoon session. For the past couple of days, the chief minister has been holding divisional meetings and regularly meet-

ing BJP MLAs, MPs, and organisational leaders to get feedback about the 2024 poll outcome. Yogi has directed the divisional commissioners and district magistrates to ensure that complete information is given by them well in time about the questions or other issues raised by legislators in the assembly and legislative council. Meanwhile, Principal Secretary (Parliamentary Affairs) JP Singh, in a letter sent to all divisional commissioners and district magistrates, said there should be no doubt about the facts provided and the quality of information given by them. He said all the information being sent should be signed by the respective district magistrates. In another letter, JP Singh said no meeting of divisional and district committees, having the MLAs/MLCs as members, should be convened by them during the monsoon session.

Maya: Restore old medical entrance system

Lucknow (PNS): Bahujan Samaj Party president and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati, has demanded an end to the controversial National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) and restoration of the old system. Mayawati said, on Thursday, on 'X', "This matter regarding the irregularities in NEET-Graduate Medical Examination remained hot from the road to Parliament and the Supreme Court. Now whatever be the result, the pain that lakhs of candidates and their families have suffered due to this will always haunt them."

She said, "The Centre has so far failed to assure the country about conducting such an important medical examination properly, which is making the problem more serious. The old system should be restored by ending the NEET UG-PG examination." The governments of Tamil Nadu and West Bengal have also demanded the restoration of the old medical entrance examination system.

New dates announced for police recruitment exam

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board has announced the dates of written examinations for the direct recruitment of 60,244 constables in the civil police. The exams will be held on August 23, 24, 25, and August 30, 31, 2024, stated an official press release. The exam held earlier was cancelled on the demand of the candidates following allegations of paper leak. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had directed officials to reschedule the exam within six months, ensuring adherence to the highest standards of fairness and transparency. In line with the chief minister's commitment to a transparent and fair examination process, detailed guidelines were issued by the UP government on June 19, 2024. These guidelines cover all aspects of the examination,

including preparation, selection of centres, candidate verification and measures to prevent impersonation. The upcoming exam will be conducted strictly according to these standards. The Uttar Pradesh Police Recruitment and Promotion Board will conduct the written exams for the direct recruitment of 60,244 constable civil police positions on the scheduled dates. Due to the Janmashtami festival, there will be a break in the exam schedule. The exam will be held in two shifts each day, with approximately five lakh candidates appearing in each shift. Candidates appearing for the exam will have access to free bus services provided by the Uttar Pradesh State Road Transport Corporation (UPSRTC). Candidates can avail themselves of this service as per their convenience. To use the bus service, candidates must download two extra copies of their admit card. One copy will be required for

travel to the exam centre, and the other for the return journey after the exam, and it must be presented to the bus conductor. This arrangement ensures smooth and accessible participation of all candidates, reinforcing the commitment to a fair and transparent recruitment process. It is noteworthy that the UP government has notified the Uttar Pradesh Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Ordinance, 2024 on July 1, 2024, to prevent unfair means in public examinations, such as paper leaks and tampering with answer sheets. This ordinance stipulates that using unfair means in exams, cheating, facilitating cheating, impersonating, or conspiring to leak question papers are considered crimes and are punishable under this law. In such cases, fines can reach up to Rs 1 crore, and offenders may face life imprisonment.

Municipal corpns achieving revenue growth to get grant

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

The Yogi Adityanath government is actively working towards the comprehensive development of cities in Uttar Pradesh and increasing revenue collection for urban local bodies. As part of these efforts, the Urban Development department has launched the CM-VNY, expanding various schemes and missions under the Mission to Movement initiative. Under this scheme, municipal corporations that achieve at least a 25 per cent increase in tax/non-tax revenue will receive grants ranging from Rs 2.5 crore to Rs 50 crore.

Municipal councils and district headquarters with a population over one lakh that see at least a 15 per cent increase in revenue will be eligible for grants ranging from Rs 25 lakh to Rs 20 crore. For municipal councils and district headquarters with a population under one lakh, as well as nagar panchayats that achieve at least a 10 per cent revenue increase, the grants will range from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 5 crore. In special circumstances, a maximum fund of Rs 100 crore per municipal corporation can be allocated to achieve a revenue increase of over 50 per cent and implement innovative

projects, revenue-generating initiatives, and projects of national or international significance. This provision is detailed in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for implementing the CM-VNY. The scheme aims to boost self-revenue collection by over 10 per cent compared to the base year of 2022-23, setting this as the eligibility criterion. It will be in effect for five years, starting from 2024-25, with a fund of Rs 500 crore allocated for the first year. The scheme will cover all 762 urban local bodies in Uttar Pradesh. The initiative will adopt a 3E approach to promote sustain-

able economic growth, equity, and environmental protection across all urban areas in the state. Urban local bodies will be categorised into three groups based on type, population, and area: Category-1, municipal corporations (population over 3 lakh); category-2, municipal councils and district headquarters (population over 1 lakh); and Category-3: municipal councils, nagar panchayats and district headquarters (population under 1 lakh). Various projects have been approved for each category to support the scheme's objectives. For the scheme's budget allocation, 40 per cent each of the funds have been reserved for

Category-1 and Category-2, and 20 per cent for Category-3 for the financial year 2024-25. The urban development minister may adjust these allocations for municipal corporations, municipal councils, and nagar panchayats as needed. Each urban local body will prepare a five-year vision plan and an annual action plan based on its requirements, following the guidelines and consulting with stakeholders. The action plan for the first year must be submitted to the directorate along with the vision plan. A project management unit (PMU) will be established at the directorate level to support all activities related to the scheme.

Three held for staging fake robbery

PTI ■ SHAHJAHANPUR

A 32-year-old woman and two others were arrested here on Thursday for alleged staging a fake robbery, police said. The accused, Sonam Saxena, lodged a police complaint claiming that on Sunday night some unknown people had looted her bag full of Rs 21 lakh

cash, they said. Saxena got the money by selling a land, which was gifted to her by her acquaintance Rajneesh Mishra, Superintendent of Police (SP) Ashok Kumar Meena said. When Mishra got to know about the sale, he started pressuring Saxena to give him the money she received in advance, Meena said.

During investigation, it was found that Saxena staged the robbery to avoid giving the money to Mishra, he said. Saxena, along with Shakib and Kamran, were arrested on Thursday, the Superintendent of Police said, adding that she confessed to the crime during interrogation and the three accused were sent to jail.

Two die as motorcycle crashes into tree

PTI ■ BALLIA

Two people were killed when their motorcycle crashed into a tree in Khejuri area of the district on Thursday, police said. Santosh Paswar (32) and Naresh Bharti (35) were returning home in Karmar village when a goat came in front of their motorcycle. In a bid to save the stray animal, the rider lost control and collided with the tree, police said. As a result the duo died on the spot, police said.



People stand under a tree with plastic sheets to protect themselves from the rain in Chowk area of Lucknow on Thursday

3 killed in bus-truck collision on e-way

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a tragic road accident on the Agra-Lucknow Expressway, a bus carrying 150 passengers collided with a truck around 1 am on Thursday, resulting in three fatalities and multiple injuries. According to Superintendent of Firozabad's Police (Rural) Ramvijay Singh, the bus was on its way to Delhi from Bahraich when the collision took place, killing the driver and one other person on the spot. Many passengers sustained injuries and were rushed to nearby hospitals for treatment, while about 40-45 passengers escaped unhurt and were sent home. Singh said police were investigating the cause of the collision. The deceased were identified as 40-year-old bus driver Irfan of Hapur and 45-year-old Ramdev of Ram Nagar, Bahraich. One body could not be identified. If the passengers are to be believed, there were 125-150 people in the bus, most of whom are residents of Payagpur village of Bahraich district. Everyone was sleeping at the time of the accident. The police sent the injured to hospital by eight ambulances. Meanwhile, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed condolences to the bereaved families of the deceased. The chief minister instructed the officials to provide proper treatment of the injured.

SBR tech based STP to be set up in Greater Noida

PNS ■ LUCKNOW/GREATER NOIDA

The Yogi Adityanath government, in its endeavour for progress and development, has launched two major initiatives in Greater Noida. The first involves establishing a Sequential Batch Reactor technology sewerage treatment plant in Sector-1 of Greater Noida with a capacity of 45 MLD, at an investment of Rs 79.57 crore. The process for selecting agencies and allocating work for this project, which includes establishment, operation, and testing, is already underway. The agency responsible will

first prepare a site environment plan (SEP), ensuring that various environmental standards are met, including monitoring and minimising air and noise pollution levels. The plant will also function as a water reclamation facility, with a three-month trial period established to assess and implement operational standards. A 12-month defect liability period has been set to address any issues that may arise. Additionally, the plant will feature a disposal channel located on the banks of the river Hindon and will utilise solar energy to power its hydraulic pumps.

The plant's sewage output for waste management will be collected through a deep gravity outfall sewer, channelling the raw sewage into a receiving chamber. From there, it will be transported downstream to a coarse screen, where contaminants will be removed. After screening, the sewage will enter a wet well to provide adequate hydraulic retention during average and peak flow conditions. Additionally, efforts are underway to expedite the Ganga Jal Project, by completing electrical, mechanical, and civil works across three zonal reservoirs with a capacity of 85 cusecs.

This initiative, estimated to cost Rs 11.44 crore, is being executed by the Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority, with a focus on ensuring both quality and timely completion. The Greater Noida Industrial Development Authority has outlined an action plan to complete the project within 12 months, following the selection of an agency and work allocation. This project focuses on rapidly finishing the electrical, mechanical, instrumental, and other civil works in three zonal reservoirs with a combined capacity of 85 cusecs.

NRCSS to help Kushinagar grow wide variety of spices

PNS ■ KUSHINAGAR

Kushinagar, the land where Lord Buddha attained Mahaparinirvana, will soon be known for its spices. Under the leadership of the double-engine government, efforts are being made with the help of the National Research Centre on Seed Spices (NRCSS) in Ajmer to cultivate a wide array of spices apart from Kushinagar's traditional produce turmeric. The centre will help farmers from Kushinagar to grow additional spices such as coriander, cumin, fennel, mangrail and

celery. These spices are expected to enhance the flavour of dishes not just locally, but also in the kitchens of every Indian around the world. With assistance from the NRCSS in Ajmer, certain spice varieties will be cultivated in a select number of farmers' fields during this year's Rabi crop season itself. Ashok Rai, head of the Krishi Vigyan Kendra in Kushinagar, notes that turmeric farming has a long-standing tradition in the region. The climate of Kushinagar and its surroundings is also conducive to grow-

ing seed spices, presenting a significant opportunity. Additionally, the local farmers are knowledgeable, enhancing the potential for cultivating high-profit spices. For several years, BM Tripathi of Sustainable Human Development has been focusing on turmeric farming among farmers with the help of Tata Trust and Azim Premji Foundation. Now, he is also coordinating with the NRCSS for spice cultivation. The research centre emphasises the processing of fenugreek, fennel, cumin and

carom seeds due to their flavours and medicinal properties. These spices can be made more nutritious by mixing them with millets. If the farmers of Kushinagar find spice cultivation favourable over time, all these opportunities will be available to them. India is also known as the land of spices. When the Portuguese first came to India, their main goal was to profit from the Indian spice trade. About 18 lakh hectares of land in India is used for spice cultivation. Cumin is the main

crop in Gujarat and Rajasthan, while most other spices are grown in South India. Spices are the soul of Indian cuisine. Wherever Indians are in the world, their kitchens are unimaginable without spices. The craze for spices has increased due to the rise in diseases and the medicinal properties of spices, especially after COVID-19. Therefore, the potential for spice cultivation has also grown. The international airport in Kushinagar will further enhance these prospects in the coming times.

Zonal Office
128/24 Om Laxmi Tower, H-Block, Kidwai Nagar,
Kanpur-208011, Tel: 0512-2985004

Bank of India **POSSESSION NOTICE See Rule 8 (1)**

Relationship Beyond Banking

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer Bank of India under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002, and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued demand notices to below mentioned Borrower/Guarantors to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice plus interest at other charges with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower/guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Possession of the below mentioned properties in exercise of power conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of Section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002. The borrower/guarantor in particular and public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of Bank of India. The borrowers/guarantors attention is invited to provisions of sub-section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Name of the Borrower/Guarantor	Demand Notice Dt.	Possession Date	Description of Properties
Manik Chowk Branch, Dr. Dayasagar Compound, Manik Chowk, Jhansi-284002			Mortgaged/Owner of the Properties
Borrower: Mr. Narendra Chaurasiya s/o Mr. Balmukund Chaurasiya (Borrower) & Mrs. Pushpa Chaurasiya (Co-Borrower)	Demand Notice Dt. 08.05.2024	Possession Date 25.07.2024	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Residential Plot situated at Arzi No. 319 M, Mouza Nayagaon, Near Church ITI College, Tehsil & District Jhansi UP-284002
	Rs. 14,61,022.02 (Rs. Fourteen Lakh Sixty One Thousand Twenty Two and Paise Two Only)		Boundaries- East: House of Dwivedi, West: House of Sharma J. North: House of Mukesh Sen, South: Way of 6.10 mtr Wide

Date: 26.07.2024 Place: Jhansi Authorised Office: Bank of India

STATE BANK OF INDIA
Regional Business Office-6, RACC, Jhansi

Possession Notice See Rule 8 (1) (For Immovable Property)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of State Bank of India Stressed Assets Resolution Cell at Branch - Sadar Bazar Cantt., Jhansi under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under Section 13(2) read with Rules 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice to below mentioned Borrower/Guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice plus interest and other charges with in 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower/guarantor having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the Borrower/Guarantor and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Possession of the below mentioned properties in exercise of power conferred on him under Sub-Section (4) of Section 13 of Act read with rule 8. The borrower/guarantor in particular and public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealing with the property will be subject to the charge of State Bank of India.

Sl. No.	Name of Borrower Address, Account & Branch	Description of Property	Outstanding Amount/ Demand Notice/ Possession Date
1	Borrower: M/s Radhey Auto Parts Add: House No. 156/1 New No. 151, situated at Mohalla-Hazaryana Jhansi.	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Flat No. House No. 156/1 New No. 151, situated at Mohalla- Hazaryana Jhansi. Property owned by: Sri Radhey Rai S/o Late Sri Asha Ram Rai & Smt. Radha W/o Sri Radhey Rai, Area 1440 Sq. ft., Boundaries: East: Gali, West: Plot of Rajendra Rai Presently Property of Ram Narain, North: Property of Seller Presently House of Lallu Agarwal, South: Gali	Outstanding Rs. 14,94,321/- + further interest from 19.09.2022 + Other Charges Demand Notice: 31.03.2024 Possession Date: 22.07.2024

Date: 24.07.2024 Place: Jhansi Chief Manager RACC, (Authorised Officer)

IDFC FIRST Bank Limited
(erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)
CIN : L65101TN2014PLC097792
Registered Office: - KRM Towers, 8th Floor, Harrington Road, Chetpet, Chennai- 600031.
Tel : +91 44 4564 4000 | Fax: +91 44 4564 4022

APPENDIX IV [Rule 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE (For immovable property)

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of the IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued a demand notice dated 16.02.2024 calling upon the borrower, co-borrowers and guarantors 1.RAJESH KUMAR JAISAWAL, 2. LAL JI, 3. SEETA DEVI to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being Rs.9,46,932.21/- (Rupees Nine Lac Forty Six Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty Two And Twenty One Paise Only) as on 14.02.2024 within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Demand notice.

The borrowers having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken Symbolic Possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him under sub - section (4) of section 13 of Act read with rule 8 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 on this 19th day of JULY 2024.

The borrowers in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of THE IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited) for an amount of Rs.9,46,932.21/- (Rupees Nine Lac Forty Six Thousand Nine Hundred Thirty Two And Twenty One Paise Only) and interest thereon.

The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub - Section (8) Of Section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets.

Description of the Immovable properties.
ALL THAT PIECE AND PARCEL OF PROPERTY ADMEASURING 89.21 SQ. MTRS. (GIFTED AREA), GATA NO. 1308 MIN., AREA 0.057 HECT., SITUATED VILLAGE: SULTANPUR, PARGANA: PATTI TEHSIL: RANIGANJ, DISTRICT: PRATAPGARH, UTTAR PRADESH-230301, ADMEASURING 960 SQ. FT. AREA, AND BOUNDARY AS: EAST: HOUSE OF JUMAYEE, WEST: ROAD THARIYA TIRAHAE TO SULTANPUR KOT, NORTH: HOUSE OF SADA SHIV, SOUTH: HOUSE OF MATA PRASAD

Date: 19-JUL-2024 Place: PRATAPGARH Loan Account No: 99007704

Authorised Officer
IDFC FIRST Bank Limited (erstwhile Capital First Limited and amalgamated with IDFC Bank Limited)

Minister asks officers to resolve complaints

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Uttar Pradesh Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Stamp and Court Registration Fees Ravindra Jaiswal held a public hearing in the Prime Minister's parlia-

rounding area informed the minister about their problems. Taking cognizance of it Jaiswal assured to ensure speedy disposal. When Radhika Devi of Gangapur requested for an Ayushman card for herself, the minister directed the chief

held in the city here on Wednesday. As many as 84 candidates got job offers and out of them, three candidates, including a woman got the highest job offer of Rs 3 lakh per annum package.

The Yogi government is bringing big corporate companies to the cities to give jobs to the youth. Youth are getting jobs by proving their talent in the job fairs. Companies are offering jobs to the youth as per their talent. Employment Fair in charge of Varanasi Regional Employment Office Deep Singh said that 569 candidates participated in the huge employment fair organised in the Employment Office of Varanasi on Wednesday. Out of these, 84 youth got employment in which one woman and two male youths got the highest job offer of ₹ 3 lakh per annum package for the post of relationship managers in ICICI Bank.

medical officer (CMO) to take action as per rules. When the people of Chowkghat area informed the minister about the problems of sewer and electricity, he summoned the departmental officers concerned and directed them to solve the problem immediately.

EMPLOYMENT FAIR: Many companies have shown interest in the mega employment fair



UP Minister Ravindra Jaiswal listening to complaints of people in Varanasi on Thursday.

mentary office here on Thursday. During this, he came face to face with the problems of the people and assured their resolution and disposal. In many cases, he also directed the officers concerned by talking directly to them on mobile phone to ensure immediate resolution of problems with quality.

In the 'jansunwai' (public hearing), the people of the sur-

Former MLA released from prison after Guv's pardon

PTI ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Former Uttar Pradesh BJP MLA Udaybhan Karwariya, sentenced to life in prison for the 1996 murder of a Samajwadi Party (SP) legislator, was released from prison on Thursday following his pardon by Governor Anandiben Patel. Naini Central Jail senior superintendent Rang Bahadur Patel told PTI, "The release orders of Udaybhan Karwariya were received on Wednesday evening. Acting on the order, he was released on Thursday morning."

The governor, using powers conferred on her under Article 161 of the Constitution, had passed an order to release Karwariya after accepting the state government's recommendation for his premature release.

Article 161 empowers the governor of a state to grant pardons, reprieves, respites or remissions of punishment or to suspend, remit or commute the sentence of any convict against any law relating to a matter to which the executive power of the state extends. Prayagraj's senior superintendent

of police and the district magistrate made the recommendation to release Karwariya, citing his good conduct in jail, officials said. The pardon order was issued last week. An additional sessions judge in Prayagraj sentenced Karwariya to life in prison on November 4, 2019, for the August 1996 murder of Samajwadi Party MLA Jawahar Yadav. Yadav was shot dead in Prayagraj and a case was registered against Karwariya, his brothers Kapilmuni Karwariya and Surajbhan Karwariya and another.

New municipal commissioner assumes charge

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

New Municipal Commissioner Sudhir Kumar Gahlot assumed charge at the Kanpur Nagar Nigam on Thursday. He was hitherto posted as the chief development officer (CDO) here. Immediately after assuming charge, he held a meeting with the mayor and other officers and took stock of the functioning of the Nagar Nigam and other development works. Talking to mediapersons, he emphasised on focusing on revenue recovery, sanitation and encroachment. He said most of the city roads were damaged during the monsoon. These would be made motorable after survey, he added. On the problem of house tax billing, he said to accord priority to the issue. Camps will be held in each zone and ward to resolve people's problems. He said efforts will be made to increase revenue recovery to Rs 700 crore from Rs 500 crore. Besides, arrangements for sanitation in the whole city will also be improved. He said the problem of waterlogging during rains will be solved soon. The work anti-larva spray and fogging will be intensified. He said the condition of revenue recovery in small city like Surat was



New Municipal Commissioner Sudhir Kumar Gahlot assumed charge on Thursday.

much better. He said the major problem of traffic jam on city roads was due to encroachment for which a special drive would be launched after identification. After survey in society areas, the problem of waterlogging there will also be solved, he added.

ELECTROCUTED: A youth was electrocuted after coming into contact with electric current flowing in a table fan in Gopalpur village under Bhognipur Kotwali police station area of Kanpur Dehat late on Wednesday night. His kin took him to the district hospital in the night itself where the doctor on emergency duty declared him dead. Radhey Shyam (30) was electrocuted while switching on the fan

Maha Kumbh preparations in full swing

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

Preparations for the Maha Kumbh to be held on the banks of Sangam are going on in full swing. There is a special focus on health, security and cleanliness in this Maha Kumbh Mela. In the same series, there is a plan to build two large temporary central hospitals for the convenience of devotees coming from all over the country. A large temporary one was built in the Kumbh of the year 2019, but this time due to

more crowd, it will be made two. Along with this, 10 sector hospitals will be built which will be built in different sectors. For this, instructions have been given to the officials concerned in the meeting of the apex committee by Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh. Along with this, renovation of community health centres (CHCs) and primary health centres (PHCs) in Prayagraj, Pratapgarh, Fatehpur and Kaushambi at a cost of Rs 21.24 crore and construction of Warehouse Teliyarganj near

the Maha Kumbh Mela area will be done. The chief secretary said the upcoming Maha Kumbh-2025 should be clean and green. The toilets installed in the mela area should be clean. To ensure that the toilets are being cleaned daily or not, inspection should be done by a third party. Polluted water should not flow into the Ganga. Action should be taken to connect 100 per cent houses to the sewer line. He said the devotees coming to the Mela area should not face any kind of inconvenience in movement.

Better security and traffic arrangements should be ensured by making a plan. Special arrangements should be made for foreign tourists and VIP guests coming to the Maha Kumbh. As many as 55 premium tents will be set up by the Tourism department in the Parade Ground of the mela area at a cost of Rs 351 lakh. The work of road widening, strengthening and beautification from IERT culvert (near the Peepal tree) to the Ganga river bank will be done by the Prayagraj Development Authority (PDA) at a cost of ₹789.34 lakh.

Opportunities to integrate AI & digital-based solutions in rice cultivation in UP discussed

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) organised a special brainstorming session at the Varanasi-based IRRI-South Asia Regional Center (ISARC) on Wednesday to discuss opportunities to integrate and leverage artificial intelligence (AI) and digital-based solutions in rice cultivation in Uttar Pradesh. Senior officials of the World Bank's 2030 Water Resources Group and technology companies like Microsoft, Click2Cloud etc participated in this meeting with senior scientists of ISARC. The UP government launched an AI Centre of Excellence (CoE) in Lucknow in early 2024 to support development in key sectors, including agriculture in the state and



The World Bank team and others at ISARC in Varanasi on Wednesday.

focus on AI and digital technologies. In this context, this brainstorming session was organised to deliberate on the use cases and opportunities to bring the benefits of AI and digital technologies to rice farmers in the state under the Accelerator Pragati Project. Integrating AI in rice farming can enhance crop management by providing real-time data on soil health, weather and pests,

enabling optimised irrigation, fertiliser management and pest control. This will increase yields and reduce resource use, reducing costs and environmental impact. AI can also reduce post-harvest losses through improved storage and transportation management. To support agribusiness and entrepreneurship, AI can help improve supply chain transparency, efficiency and food

security, while providing market trend predictions and demand forecasts. This will ultimately empower farmers, boost productivity, support sustainability and enhance sector efficiency and resilience of rice-based agri-food systems. In the meeting, leading scientists of ISARC also discussed low emission rice technologies that can help reduce greenhouse gas emissions without affecting rice productivity. These technologies will boost global efforts to fight climate change and AI integration will give further impetus to these efforts. This collaborative discussion laid a strong foundation for the next phases of the project so that concrete steps can be taken to revolutionise rice production, promote sustainable practices and enhance the livelihood of farmers through integration of AI.

Knowledge, wisdom give spontaneity: Sharma



Web series actor Anjum Sharma among IM-BHU students in Varanasi on Thursday.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

'Mirzapur' web series actor Anjum Sharma, and his wife Neelima Sharma, a voiceover artist, attended as the chief guests in an interactive session, organised by the Institute of Management Studies, Banaras Hindu University (IM-BHU) here on Thursday. "Knowledge, wisdom, control and power give you spontaneity," said Mirzapur web series actor Anjum Sharma, in an interactive session held by IM-BHU. "Training is essential for excellence in work," he said, sharing how he started his career with theatre and how he gained experience by doing internships with

big cinematographers, and later started doing stage plays. Giving his opinion on fashion, he said that what looks good and makes one comfortable should be fashion. Explaining the trend of OTT, he said that theatre audiences are moving towards OTT. "If your product is credible, it becomes a force that no one can stop," he added. IM-BHU Director Prof Ashish Bajpai and Dean of the Faculty of Management Studies (FMS) Prof SK Dubey commenced the programme with a welcome note and by presenting a memento. Student advisor Dr Shashi Srivastava conducted the programme and coordinated the session.

Olympics: Prayers for India's better performance

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The activists of Namami Ganga performed Maa Ganga's aarti at Assi Ghat here on Thursday on the eve of beginning of Paris Olympics-2024 wishing for a better performance of the country's Olympic participants. Till date, India's best performance was seen in the last Tokyo Olympics in 2020 when the country's team won seven medals, including a gold medal for first time in track and field event. Defending gold medal winner Neeraj Chopra will try again to repeat his show at Paris this time. Namami Ganga members encouraged the players by carrying the national flag on the banks of Ganga river apart from raising slogans like 'Bharat Vijayi Bhava'. They also raised the pictures of Olympic players and sought blessings for them from Lord Vishwanath. Through placards, they encouraged the Indian



Olympic team and appealed to the people to keep the morale of the Indian Olympic team high. Regional coordinator of Namami Ganga (Kashi Region) Rajesh Shukla said the Indian players have worked hard and the hopes of 140 crore Indians are on the Indian Olympic team. While extending best wishes, he said the whole country is supporting the Olympic team and it is the wish of Kashi residents that the Indian team wins a lot of medals. City in-charge Pushpalatha Verma, Amit Tyagi, Shalini Tyagi, Nimesh Solanki, Ravi Tiwari, Ashok Upadhyay, Swami Jagdish, Swami Narayandas etc were present.

Road accident claims elderly man's life

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

An elderly man was killed when the motorcycle he was riding was hit hard by an unidentified vehicle on the Koraon Kohdar national highway late at night in Meja. On getting information the police took the body into possession and sent it for the post-mortem examination. Reports said that Ram Bahadur (65) of Harghar village under Meja police station had come to drop his neighbour's relative in Tarav village of Koraon police station area on his bike. While returning after dropping him, he fell on the middle of the road after being hit by an unknown vehicle near Gaura village on the national highway. He died on the spot. In the morning when the vil-

lagers woke up, they saw that someone was lying dead in the middle of the road in an accident and a huge crowd of people gathered there. The people informed the Koraon police about the incident. The police reached the spot and took him to the Community Health Centre (CHC) in Koraon by an ambulance where the doctors declared him dead. The family was informed about the incident through mobile phone. As soon as the family got the information about the accident, they became inconsolable. The deceased has five daughters and a son. His son Ram Prasad said that his father had gone to drop Rakesh Adivasi, a relative of a neighbour, to Tarav village. After having dinner there, he left for home around 11 pm. But he

did not reach home till morning. He was thinking of calling him in the morning, when he got the news of his father's death. On the other hand, police station in charge Rakesh Kumar Bharti said on the complaint of Ram Prasad a case was registered against unidentified persons and the body was sent for post-mortem. Further proceedings are underway. Meanwhile troubled by debt and studies, Rajesh Kumar (21) committed suicide by hanging himself in his room. **MEMORANDUM SUBMITTED:** Angry over the alleged gang rape of a minor girl in Nagar Panchayat Koraon in Meja, family members and people gheraoed the Koraon police station here on Thursday. A memorandum

addressed to the Police Commissioner Prayagraj was handed over to the newly appointed station in-charge Nitin Shukla for taking action. The victim's father filed a complaint against two named accused and an unidentified person. The police registered a case and arrested two named accused in the case and sent them to jail. The angry family members and people gheraoed the police station again on Thursday and handed over a memorandum for action of the remaining accused. Demand was made to deploy police force near all inter colleges, at the pink police booth established near Gopal Vidyalaya, trace the vehicle involved in the incident and arrest the remaining accused immediately.

Participants encouraged to give their best in sports competitions

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The three-day 53rd Regional Sports Competitions (Boys) started at the Kendriya Vidyalaya IIT Kanpur on Thursday. As many as 246 children and 40 escorts from 33 Kendriya Vidyalayas from Lucknow region are taking part in different sports, including basketball, badminton, lawn tennis, table tennis and swimming. The winners will be selected for the national level competitions.



Balloons being released to mark the inauguration of the Sports Meet at KV IIT Kanpur on Thursday.

The programme began with a welcome song by the students of the vidyalaya. A mesmerising Bharatanatyam dance performance was also a part of the cultural programme. The school children presented a mesmerising yoga demonstration. The chief guest of the programme was Sanjeev Pathak, a

national and international-level table tennis player, who was welcomed by the Principal Ravish Chandra Pandey. The school's sports teacher, Vandana Rathore, administered the oath to the participants. In his address, chief guest Sanjeev Pathak encouraged all participants to work

hard and give their best in the sports competitions. The entire programme reflected the spirit of "Khelo India and Fit India". The programme concluded with the national anthem. The vote of thanks and anchoring of the programme was done by Priyanka Tiwari.

Camp organised in dist jail

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The District Legal Service Authority (DLSA) with the help of voluntary organisation 'Apradh Mukta Samajik Chikitsa Samiti' organised a camp in the district jail here on Wednesday. Clinical psychologist Dr Aradhana Gupta and her team comprising Pawan Mishra and Deepak Kumar counselled the inmates. Jail Superintendent Dr BD Pandey said the programme was chaired by the Additional District and Session Judge/Secretary, DLSA, Shubhi Gupta. Psychologist Dr Aradhana Gupta suggested some ways to prevent depression, the main being keeping busy in any positive activity like sports, yoga practice, painting etc. In order to keep them tension free, she stressed on doing work and interacting with more and more people to ward off loneliness/depression. Jail Superintendent Dr BD Pandey



expressed gratitude to the psychologist Dr Aradhana Gupta and her team for organising the camp and urged her to keep on conducting the same in future also. Samiti chairman Ashutosh Bajpai, general secretary Yogesh Bajpai, Secretaries Anush and Rajesh, Medical Officer Dr Samir Narain, jailor Manish Kumar, pharmacist Indrajit Singh Rana, deputy jailors Arun Kumar Singh, Kamal Chandra and Prem Narain were present.

IIIT-A selected for prestigious project

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The Indian Institute of Information Technology, Allahabad (IIIT-A) has been selected for the prestigious ERASMUS (Erasmus+) project of the European Union. In this international project, professors, PhD scholars and students of Business Informatics specialisation of IIIT Allahabad will get opportunities and support for group research and projects through joint research work and conferences, symposia and seminars with THM University of Germany. Research Project Coordinator Prof OP Vyas said on Thursday that a new course B.Tech (IT - Business Informatics) has been started in IIIT Allahabad from the year 2019 for which proposals are coming from India and abroad for joint teaching and research work. One of the proposals



received from the prestigious THM University of Germany has been approved by the European Union under which a team of business informatics experts, researchers and students of both the institutes returned after working for a week in Germany in the month of June. Under the said project, a workshop was organised in Germany on new research and applications in the field of AI (Artificial Intelligence) in

which efforts are being made towards new technology through AI in the field of health and medicine. Professor Vyas said that under the said project, being conducted under the guidance of Professor Mukul Sharad Sutawane, Director of IIIT-A, a team of professors and research students of the Department of Business Informatics from Germany is proposed to visit IIIT-A in January 2025.

LS adjourned twice

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha was adjourned twice in the post-lunch period on Thursday as a war of words broke out between the treasury and Opposition benches, triggered by Congress MP Charanjit Singh Channi's spat with BJP's Ravneet Singh Bittu.

Participating in a debate on the Union Budget, Channi referred to the assassination of Bittu's grandfather, former Punjab Chief Minister Beant Singh. This led to a war of words between Channi and Bittu, who recently quit the Congress to join the BJP.

Bittu, the Minister of State for Railways and Food Processing Industries, countered by making certain personal remarks against Channi and former Congress President Sonia Gandhi, triggering an uproar. Amid the angry exchange of words, Congress member Amrinder Singh Raja Warring tried to enter the Well of the House, but was stopped by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi. From the treasury benches, Bittu also tried to enter the Well.

BJP member Sandhya Ray, who was in the chair, then adjourned the proceedings for 30 minutes till 2 pm.

When the House reconvened, Defence Minister and Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha Rajnath Singh urged Speaker



Om Birla to remove any unparliamentary references and continue with the debate. Birla also directed the treasury and the opposition members to maintain the dignity of the House, adding that ministers especially should not break the rules. Channi then proceeded to conclude his speech. He mentioned the meeting of Rahul Gandhi with some farmer leaders on Wednesday, adding that they had also sought time to meet the prime minister. Channi also accused the government of not keeping its promises to the farmers. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal intervened and accused the Congress MP of misleading the House, saying he should authenticate the allegations he

was making. Channi accused the ruling party members of obstructing his speech and alleged that the government was overlooking the farmers. He stressed that the farmers had several demands, including one for a loan waiver.

As he alleged that National Security Act provisions were invoked against protesting farmers, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said Channi should authenticate the allegations and accused him of misleading the House. Rijju also urged the chair to move a privilege motion against Channi. The war of words between the ruling and the opposition benches went on even after Channi concluded his speech.

As Nationalist Congress Party MP Tatkaire Sunil Dattatreya started his speech, Trinamool Congress MP Kalyan Banerjee objected to a Minister taking the seat next to the member. Speaker Birla clarified that seats have not been allotted yet, and the Minister was sitting on a seat meant for NDA members. Banerjee then said he would also sit on a different seat, and sat on the treasury benches' side. He later returned to his seat. As the ruckus continued, Jagadambika Pal, who was then in chair, adjourned the House till 3 pm. The House resumed normal functioning after it met at 3 pm.

Speaking outside Parliament later, Bittu accused former Punjab Chief Minister Channi of indulging in "anti-national" behaviour.

"An ex-CM was behaving like an anti-national, and is misleading the world through the House. What did he do? He said NSA was imposed on farmers, while NSA has been imposed on those who were trying to divide the country and Punjab," Bittu said.

"An ex-CM made remarks that were aimed at dividing the country and Punjab, and Congress leader Rahul Gandhi was sitting there. When I said on the floor that he should provide evidence, he went on back-foot. The Congress party and INDI alliance have been embarrassed because of him," Bittu said.

Naidu promises enquiry into MPs charges of abrupt air fare hike

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Civil Aviation Minister Ram Mohan Naidu Kinjarapu on Thursday promised to conduct an enquiry into allegations of abrupt fare hike when MPs try to book tickets on Air Vistara airline, following complaints by MPs and a nudge by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla. He assured the House that his primary focus remains on enhancing the 'Ease of Flying' for all citizens.

Raising the issue during Question Hour in Lok Sabha through a supplementary question, DMK member Dayanidhi Maran alleged that whenever he tries to book ticket on Air Vistara for the Chennai-Delhi route, initially it shows a price in the range of around Rs 25,000. However, by the time he concludes the whole booking process, the fare goes up by two to three times more, he alleged.

The DMK leader wondered whether some technology applied by TCS, a software giant belonging to the same Tata group, drives up the air fare.

Intervening in the discussion, Birla said he had received similar complaints from a few other MPs too and the matter should be thoroughly investigated as the "money of the tickets goes from Parliament". At this, the Minister replied: "We will get the matter



inquired." Parliament sources said the MPs are entitled to travel by business class. Replying to another question, Naidu said ever since he has taken over the charge of the civil aviation ministry, he has been trying to make air travel affordable for the common people. However, he said, the air fare is market driven and lots of factors come into play while deciding the fare of any sector. "Customer is king and that is the priority of the ministry. We will do whatever we can to make the air travel affordable," he said.

The Minister also said that he will look into the allegations of high air fare during holiday season on international routes.

"As far as regulation of airfare is concerned, the government does not regulate the fares set by airlines - Indian or foreign. The fares on any route are dependent on seasonality, holidays and festivals, cost of aviation turbine fuel, competition and other similar factors," he said.

Naidu said airline pricing runs

in multiple levels (buckets or RBDs) which are in line with the practice being followed globally and due to dynamic fare pricing, the tickets bought in advance are much cheaper than those purchased near the travel date.

He said under the provisions of Rule 135(1) of the Aircraft Rules, 1937, the airlines are free to fix tariffs, having regard to all relevant factors, including cost of operation, characteristics of services, generally prevailing tariff etc.

"DGCA's Tariff Monitoring Unit (TMU) ensures that the fares being charged by the airlines are as per the tariff established by the airlines.

At present, there is no proposal in the ministry to intervene with the existing regulatory framework on airfare," he said.

Naidu, in his debut session, demonstrated exceptional capability by proactively addressing the MPs' questions and providing comprehensive answers. His performance was met with admiration and support from his peers.

Govt committed to free, fair recruitment tests, Minister assures RS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

There has been no incident of paper leak reported in the recruitment examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), during the last two years, the Rajya Sabha was informed on Thursday.

"Recently, National Testing Agency (NTA) conducted NEET (UG) examination on May 5, 2024 in OMR (Pen and paper) mode. Certain cases of alleged irregularities/cheating/impersonation/malpractices were reported," Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said in a written reply.

After review, the matter was entrusted to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) for comprehensive investigation on June 22, 2024, he said.

"No incidence/event of paper leakage has been reported in the recruitment examinations conducted by Union Public Service Commission (UPSC), Staff Selection Commission (SSC), Railway Recruitment Board (RRB) and Institute of Banking Personnel Selection (IBPS), during the last two years," Singh said. In order to provide for prevention of unfair means in public examinations, the Government has enacted the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair means) Act, 2024, which has been brought into force and subsequently rules under this law have also been notified, he added.

The Minister also informed the Upper House that the National Recruitment Agency (NRA) is conducting a detailed study of the prevalent recruitment systems in central and State Governments to conduct a free and fair examination.

The NRA, mandated to conduct online examinations to screen Government job aspirants, was given an approval in 2020 by the Union cabinet.

"NRA is conducting a detailed study of the prevalent recruitment systems in central and State Governments and the procedure followed by various Public Examination Authorities (PEAs) for conduct of examination and also examining the issues which are likely to arise in the new examination system and address them ab initio so as to conduct a free and fair examination," Singh said in a written reply. The Minister was responding to a query whether the NRA has conducted any recruitment tests since its inception. Singh said the NRA is also in the process of developing protocols and policy frameworks to address various issues associated with conduct of the new examination system as well as evolving effective means for ensuring compliance of normative standards and guidelines by all concerned. He said four Governing Body meetings have been held since the inception of the NRA, which functions from its headquarters at New Delhi.

Chhattisgarh tribals hit by Left extremism unwilling to return

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Tribal families displaced from Chhattisgarh due to Leftwing extremism are unwilling to return to the state despite the availability of rehabilitation schemes and security arrangements through security camps, the Government told Parliament.

Replying to a question by Congress MP Phulo Devi Netam, Union Minister of State for Tribal Affairs Durgadas Uikey told the Rajya Sabha that the State Government had formed teams to conduct surveys in the adjoining districts of neighbouring Telangana and Andhra Pradesh to identify tribal families displaced from Chhattisgarh due to leftwing extremism.

He said a total of 10,489 tribal people from 2,389 families were displaced from the Sukma, Bijapur and Dantewada districts due to leftwing extremism. A total of 9,702 tribal people were displaced from Sukma, 579 from Bijapur and 208 from Dantewada.

"The families so affected were unwilling to return to their original villages/place despite providing them the information of rehabilitation schemes of the State Government and the security arrangement available through security camps," the Minister said.

The Union Tribal Affairs Ministry and the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes had, in July 2019, asked Chhattisgarh, Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra to conduct a survey to ascertain the number of tribal people displaced due to leftwing extremism before December 13, 2005, so that a process could be initiated to rehabilitate them.

The states were given three months to complete the survey. In October 2019, the home ministry also wrote to these State Governments to determine how many tribal people had been displaced from Chhattisgarh. According to tribal rights activists who have repeatedly raised the issue with the National Commission for Scheduled Tribes and the tribal affairs ministry, an estimated 50,000 tribal people were displaced from Chhattisgarh due to leftwing extremism. They now live in 248 settlements in the forests of Odisha, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana and Maharashtra.

These people are living in deplorable conditions without access to drinking water and electricity. They receive lower wages and most of them do not have ration cards or voter IDs, making it impossible to prove their citizenship, one tribal rights activist told PTI.



Army contingent leaves for multinational military exercise in Mongolia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian Army contingent departed for the Multinational Military Exercise KHAAN QUEST. The exercise is scheduled to be conducted from July 27-August 9 at Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, defence ministry said here.

Giving details, officials said the exercise will bring together military forces from around the world to collaborate and enhance their peacekeeping capabilities. Last edition of Exercise KHAAN QUEST was conducted in Mongolia from June 19-July 2 last year. The exercise first started as a bilateral event between USA and Mongolian Armed Forces in the year 2003. Subsequently, from the year 2006 onwards the exercise graduated to a Multinational Peacekeeping Exercise with current year being the 21st iteration. The Indian Army contingent comprising 40 personnel is being represented mainly by

troops from a battalion of the Madras Regiment along with personnel from other arms and Services. One Woman Officer and two Women Soldiers will also form part of the contingent. Aim of Exercise KHAAN QUEST is to prepare Indian Armed Forces for peacekeeping missions while operating in a multinational environment, thereby increasing interoperability and military readiness in peace support operations under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter. The exercise will focus on high degree of physical fitness, joint planning and joint tactical drills.

Tactical drills to be practiced during the exercise will include establishment of Static and Mobile Check Points, Cordon and Search Operations, Patrolling, Evacuation of Civilians from Hostile Area, Counter Improvised Explosive Device drills, Combat First Aid and Casualty Evacuation, among others.

RS discusses makhana MSP, Ekalavya schools, Dattatreya Temple

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha on Thursday saw debate on issues like minimum support price (MSP) for makhana (fox nut) farmers in Bihar, staff recruitment in Ekalavya schools and an appeal to the Government to allocate ₹ 83.52 crore for the development of the Ganagapura Dattatreya Temple in Karnataka's Kalaburagi.

Raising the makhana issue, RJD MP A D Singh urged the Government to establish a makhana farmers' cooperative in Bihar, and extend minimum support price (MSP) for the crop. Raising the issue during Zero Hour in the Rajya Sabha, Singh highlighted that Bihar accounts for about 90 per cent of India's total makhana (fox nut) production, with cultivation primarily concentrated in nine districts of the Mithila region. The crop is largely grown by the Malar community.

"Despite its significance, farmers are not receiving fair prices for their produce," Singh said, pointing out the stark disparity between international wholesale rates and farmers' earnings. "While makhana fetches up to Rs 8,000 per kg in the international market, farmers struggle to get even Rs 400 per kg due to lack of Government support," he said. Emphasising the labour-inten-



sive nature of fox nut cultivation, Singh advocated for the formation of a cooperative to improve the livelihood of the Malar community.

He urged the Government to implement an MSP regime for the crop.

Fox nut is recognised for its high nutritional value. Bihar's annual production of 10,000 tonnes constitutes 90 per cent of the national output. Notably, India caters to 80 per cent of the global fox nut demand. Singh also noted that fox nut thrives in water-abundant areas, making it a suitable crop for certain regions of Bihar.

DMK MP Tiruchi Siva urged the Government to hand back the responsibility of staff recruitment for the Ekalavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS) to State Governments.

Speaking during Zero Hour, Siva cited concerns over decreased student engagement due to hiring of individuals from North India for schools in the South.

The MP highlighted the inefficiencies arising from the recent shift in recruitment from State Governments to the National Education Society for Tribal Students (NESTS). This centralised approach, aimed at addressing teacher shortages across 400 EMRS by filling 38,000 positions nationally, has led to unintended consequences, according to Siva. "The first batch of 303 principals, 707 junior secretarial assistants, and other staff now primarily consists of individuals from North India states appointed across South India," Siva said. He argued that this mismatch is detrimental to education, where understanding local tribal culture and context is crucial.

The DMK leader pointed out that the mandatory Hindi requirement in hiring criteria has resulted in communication gaps, affecting teaching effectiveness. "New staff members are burdened with learning the local language within two

years," he added. Siva urged the Government to revert the recruitment responsibility to respective State Governments. "Education is on the concurrent list. I urge the Government to bring it back to the state list," he emphasised, calling for serious consideration of the issue.

BJP MP Jaggesh urged the Government to allocate Rs 83.52 crore for the development of the Ganagapura Dattatreya Temple in Karnataka's Kalaburagi. Speaking in Kannada during Zero Hour, Jaggesh highlighted the temple's significance as a major pilgrimage site located on the banks of the River Bhima. He noted that devotees from across the country visit the holy place. "The temple premises are too small, surrounded by houses and shops. It's becoming difficult to manage the increasing number of pilgrims and provide adequate facilities," Jaggesh said. The MP emphasised the need for widening roads connecting to the temple. He mentioned that the Dattatreya Samithi has prepared a master plan for the development.

In a separate appeal, BJP MP Sikandar Kumar called for improving rail connectivity to the Tara Devi and Hanuman temples in Himachal Pradesh. The demands come as part of ongoing efforts to enhance infrastructure at religious sites across the country.

President educates students on global warming, climate change

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, who completed two years in office on Thursday, took up the role of a teacher and interacted with students on the issue of global warming and ways to check it.

During an interactive session with Class 9 students of Dr Rajendra Prasad Kendriya Vidyalaya in the President's Estate here, she emphasised the need for water conservation and encouraged them to plant more trees in a bid to reduce the impact of climate change. "I was thinking for the past many days to talk to you as today's kids are very talented. There is so much to learn from them," she said, addressing the class of 53 students.

At the beginning of her interaction, the President asked the students about their ambitions and subjects they liked and expressed her happiness after learning that they aspired to become scientists and doctors,

among others. "Around the world, scientists, people, administrators and rulers conduct symposiums, summits and seminars on a very big problem. Do you know what it is?" President Murmu asked and immediately got answers as "climate change", "global warming" and "environmental pollution".

The president said she was taught in school about six seasons but "we feel only four". "Out of these four, we feel summer for the maximum time because of global warming. Day by day, the temperature is rising and not only humans but animals, birds and trees all feel its impact," President Murmu said.

Because of global warming, parts of the country face drought. Thus, there is a need to conserve water, she said. "Children also know that the environment is getting polluted and we should plant more trees.



We should also take steps to reduce water wastage and conserve it. We should make rain-water harvesting pits to conserve water," President Murmu said.

Asserting that more trees than needed were being cut, the President said there was a need to have more trees, conserve forests and reduce air pollution, then "we will be able to check (global warming) in future". She also talked about the 'Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam' initiative started by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and asked the

students to plant a tree on their birthdays.

"I really felt very good interacting with you all. I got the opportunity to learn a lot from you. You are studying in Class 9 and you are so talented. You are very aware about the impact of global warming.

I am sure, when you grow up, global warming will definitely be reduced (with all people's effort)," she said while concluding her interaction on the day she completed two years of her presidency.

Born on June 20, 1958, at Uparbeda village in Odisha's Mayurbhanj district, she was sworn in as the country's 15th president on July 25, 2022. Before taking over the top constitutional office, she was the governor of Jharkhand from 2015 to 2021.

An avid reader with a keen interest in spirituality, President Murmu has devoted her life to empowering the downtrodden and the marginalised sections, besides deepening the democratic values.

CDS greets armed forces on Kargil anniversary

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) General Anil Chauhan has conveyed his felicitations and wishes to all ranks of the armed forces on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Kargil War.

In his message, he underscored that the supreme sacrifices made by the brave hearts in Kargil War, will not go in vain. "It will continue to inspire and motivate future generations of not only soldiers but also the youth of the nation," he said. Highlighting the uniqueness of the Kargil War, the CDS said, there were lessons in the war for not only the military but for all those who deal with national security. He stressed that the lessons learnt by shedding blood must not be forgotten, the mistakes must not be repeated and the right lessons must be reinforced.

Regarding the ongoing reforms in the Armed Forces, General Chauhan underlined that the Tri-services are on the threshold of a major reform, that



range from organisational, structural, conceptual to cultural.

"The underlying aim of these reforms is to improve fighting efficiency and keep the Armed Forces battle ready at all times. We must be prepared to shed the obsolete practices and adopt new ones. The shape and contour of reforms must reflect the uniqueness of the Indian environment and challenges," he said. On the occasion, CDS assured the citizens that the Armed Forces remain enthused with new energy as the nation steps into the Amritkāl and are determined to march in step with the rest of the country to make India a 'Viksit Bharat'.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Reaching out

Netanyahu seeks support for Gaza war during US Congress speech, despite many senators skipping it

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has called for US solidarity in his address to Congress, despite declining popularity and increasing opposition in his own country. In an address to the United States Congress, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu sought to rally American lawmakers behind Israel's ongoing military operations in Gaza. The speech, delivered amidst a backdrop of escalating violence and rising civilian casualties, underscored Netanyahu's determination to secure unwavering support from Israel's most powerful ally. He emphasised the existential threats faced by Israel from militant groups operating in Gaza, particularly Hamas. The Prime Minister framed the military actions as a necessary response to ongoing rocket attacks and acts of terrorism that have plagued Israeli communities. However, Netanyahu's speech did not address the mounting international concerns regarding human rights violations in the Palestinian territories. Reports from various human rights organizations, including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, have highlighted a range of human rights violations.



The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has been further exacerbated by a blockade that severely restricts the movement of people and goods, leading to shortages of essential supplies such as food, water, and medical care. The present Gaza offensive, which has gone over 250 days, has left a spree of death and destruction. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, at least 34,000 people have been killed, and more than 77,000 have been wounded in Israeli attacks. About 72 per cent of those killed are women and children. United Nations human rights chief Volker Turk has gone on record saying

that a child in Gaza is killed or wounded 'every 10 minutes.' Israel's actions violate international law and constitute collective punishment, disproportionately affecting innocent civilians and deepening the humanitarian crisis. The United States, as Israel's primary ally, plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This support has also placed the US under scrutiny, with calls for it to leverage its influence to promote peace and uphold human rights. The very weaponry provided by the US is being used by Israel against the civilian population in Palestine which is undergoing a horrendous time. There is growing advocacy within the US, both among the public and some members of Congress, for a more balanced approach. The US is urged to take a firm stand against human rights violations and to support diplomatic efforts aimed at achieving a sustainable and just resolution to the conflict. A sustainable peace can only be achieved through a comprehensive and inclusive approach that addresses the legitimate concerns of both parties. The US has a moral and strategic responsibility to advocate for human rights and justice in the region. The US can play a pivotal role in paving the lasting peace in the region by telling Netanyahu to comply with the UN directives on Gaza and stop bombing the civilian targets to minimise civilian casualties.

PICTALK



Members of the State Disaster Management Authority perform rescue operation during a mock drill, in Prayagraj PTI

Union budget 2024: A major thrust on agriculture

The budget's focus on sustainable agriculture and innovation highlights the Government's commitment to support the farmers and ensuring food security

Union budget 2024 - a thrust on agriculture for a visit Bharat Biju Dharmapalan In the Union Budget 2024 presented by Smt. Nirmala Sitharaman, great emphasis has been placed on agriculture and space. Both are essential pillars for transforming our country into a developed nation.



The latter is futuristic, and the former is the lifeline of the present generation. No nation can survive without the farming community, and they are the 'Annadata'. In the changing global climate and environmental conditions, the traditional farming sector would not be sufficient to feed the population. The government has allocated Rs.1,51,851 crores for the agricultural and allied sectors. Stress has been given to agricultural research to increase productivity and release 109 new high-yielding and climate-resilient varieties of 32 field and horticulture crops. Climate-resilient crops have become essential under the prevailing global climatic conditions. During the past few years, we have noticed changes in the climate in

various parts of the country. We had severe summers even in high altitudes of the Himalayas and a deficit in rain during the monsoons. This has badly affected the agricultural sector, where most of our crop cultivation is based on climatic patterns. Farmers are forced to grow temperate plants like apples and grapes in plains. People are even trying to grow rain-fed crops like paddy in garden pots. Change in agricultural patterns is inevitable. Climate change affects agriculture in numerous ways. Heat stress triggers alterations in respiration and photosynthesis, resulting in a reduced life cycle and decreased plant yield. Additionally, higher temperatures can lead to increased evapotranspiration, necessitating more water for crops when water resources

are scarcer. Experiencing drought-like situations in several parts of the country due to climate changes has badly affected the soil health, making the farmland unhealthy for future farming. Moreover, the frequency and severity of droughts are expected to rise, particularly in regions that are already water-stressed. Drought conditions reduce crop yields and affect soil health, making it more difficult for future crops to grow. On the other hand, excessive rainfall and flooding, becoming more common, can destroy crops, erode soil, and wash away essential nutrients. Extreme weather patterns will not only affect crop productivity and microbial biodiversity, which keeps our planet healthy. In addition, it will expedite the emergence of new pests and diseases that may affect crop growth and productivity. The emergence of new diseases may even lead to a pandemic affecting several crop species across the globe. This may jeopardise our food security. Developing resilient crops for the next century is a challenging task. It requires significant investment in research and devel-

opment. Our laboratories in the agricultural universities need thorough transformation. They need to be equipped with state-of-the-art facilities that can handle molecular breeding programmes and large crop phenomics facilities that can speed up the development of new crop varieties. Our scientific community should acknowledge the farmers and share the benefits of the genes taken from traditional varieties for developing resilient crops. By promoting healthy soils, biodiversity, and resilience, natural farming has the potential to support long-term food security and environmental health. Agriculture is not merely an occupation; it is the bedrock of our food supply and a critical component in balancing the health of our planet. So, we need to promote and incentivise our farmers who take up new technologies so that farming remains a viable and respected profession for youngsters.

(The writer is an adjunct faculty at the National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bengaluru; views are personal)



BIJU DHARMAPALAN

Pushpa Kamal Dahal falls from grace

The new coalition, dominated by the pro-India Nepali Congress, will now be led by the communist leader Oli who will have a daunting task of ensuring political stability



K S TOMAR

Politicians have been grabbing the power by following Machiavillan principle of showing complete disrespect to means, the morality and values. This is true of Pushpa Kamal Dahal who fell from the grace after facing humiliating defeat while seeking trust vote in Nepal parliament. While seeking trust vote in Nepal parliament, Prachanda faced the worst type of humiliating defeat as he got 63 votes (Rashtrīya Swatantra Party-21, CPN(US)-10 and his party-32) as against 194 votes of new coalition combination of Nepali Congress (89 MPs) and Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) (78 MPs) which also got support from other smaller parties like Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), Janata Samajwadi Party (Upendra faction) etc. in the house of 275 where majority mark was 138 only. Oli has staked claim after president Ram Chandra Poedel invited the political parties having strength to form the government.

In a positive move, Dr. Rajan Bhattarai, the Foreign Affairs Department chief and a Standing Committee member of the CPN-UML emphasized that CPN-UML believes that Nepal's progress or the welfare of its people can be achieved only by adopting a Pro-India stance. He made it clear that the party's chairman, KP Sharma Oli, is keen on taking Nepal-India relations to new heights thereby aligning with the requirement and urgency of the modern era. Due to fragile nature of democracy in Nepal, unabated and persistent instability has been trademark of the government which is evident from 16 time change of guards in the span of 13 years thereby hitting the interests of the common people in the country besides pushing the country into financial crisis and debt liabilities especially huge loans advanced by China.

In a midnight swoop and a dramatic turn of events on July 9, a secret deal was clinched between two former Prime ministers viz. Sher Bahadur Deuba of Nepali and K.P.S. Oli of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) which sealed the fate of current PM, Pushpa



Kamal Dahal, Prachanda. In this manner, yet another coalition of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and Nepali Congress came into existence today following the humiliating defeat of Prachanda, a diehard loyalist of China' on the floor of house. New regime will be headed by Ex PM, Oli which had preceded withdrawal of the support to current PM, on July 3, 2024 thereby reducing it into minority. The Janata Samajwadi party led by Ashok Rai having 7 PMs also withdrew the support and recalled three ministers from Prachanda government. The coalition government will be dominated by Pro India, Nepali Congress, though a die-hard communist leader, former PM, Oli will be heading it for a term of one half year which will be followed by a takeover by former PM, Deuba of Nepali congress as agreed by two coalition partners.

Foreign policy experts say that major factors responsible for the collapse of coalition of Prachanda-Oli, duo, included Power Struggle, style of functioning of prime minister, Policy Differences, Coalition Dynamics and Coalition Dynamics which may lead to more stable dispensation comprising of Nepali Congress, Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) and Janata Samajwadi party. Amidst the toppling game,



OLI AND DEUBA COMBINE WILL BE UNDER COMPULSION TO KEEP EQUI-DISTANCE WITH TWO REGIONAL POWERS VIZ INDIA AND CHINA WHICH HAVE GOT GEO-POLITICAL AND STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN THE AFFAIRS OF NEPAL

midnight power sharing agreement between two former Prime ministers, viz. Sher Bahadur Deuba, and Nepali Congress and K.P.S. Oli chairman of Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) was signed on July 5, 2024 thereby leading to a sudden change of regime in Nepal. New coalition government of Oli and Deuba is bound to face multiple challenges which will be key to success otherwise its fallout could be midterm polls. The fragile nature of the new government consisting of the communists (Pro China) and Nepali Congress (Pro India) having opposing ideologies could pose a major challenge to keep them in unison and amalgamated.

Oli and Deuba combine will be under compulsion to keep equi-distance with two regional powers viz. India and China which have got geo-political and strategic interests in the affairs of Nepal. Oli's previous stint as PM was marked by his extreme Anti India action of redrawing the map which had shown Indian territories including Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura and Kalapani as part of Nepal. It had exasperated India which rejected this misadventure thereby terming it as baseless besides being an attempt to spoil ties. Now, as dominant partner in the coalition, the onus of checking this tendency will lie on Deuba to prevail upon Oli to come

out of Anti-India mentality and protect age-old relations between two nations.

The communists regimes led by Prachanda always gave clear indications about the commitment to China which will expect new government to go ahead with Belt and Road (BRI) initiative especially when outgoing PM has approved the proposal which had been signed between two countries on May 12, 2017.

It will be an uphill task for Oli to stick to his predecessors' resolve to toe China's line about BRI as Nepali congress is totally opposed to it hence chances of any progress seem to be remote. It will be a test of the new government to deal with India's Agnipath scheme which is one of the major irritants so far. Nepal's border issues with India, including disputes over territories require a multifaceted approach. Strengthening the Nepal-India Joint Boundary Commission to expedite the resolution of boundary issues through technical and diplomatic means may yield positive results. The survival of the coalition will depend solely on mutual trust of partners and balanced diplomatic strategy and refrain from offending two regional giants which had been lacking in the past.

(Writer is a senior journalist and a political analyst; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

BUDGET REACTIONS

Madam — Apropos the news headline "Less Tax, More Jobs" (July 24). Finance Minister (FM) Nirmala Sitharaman's 2024 Union budget should be the budget of the whole country, but the FM has presented it as if it is the NDA's budget. To make matters worse, taxpayers have to foot the bill for the NDA government's political survival. There is nothing wrong when the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi criticizes the NDA government's Union Budget, claiming it undermines India's federal structure. He highlights neglect towards other states and vows to advocate for equal justice. INDIA protests against the 'Kursi Bachao' Budget in Parliament.

Interestingly, FM Sitharaman, elected from Karnataka, provided nothing in the budget for her state, which is ruled by the Congress. In her Purvodaya scheme for the all-round development of Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal, Odisha, and Andhra Pradesh, only Bihar and Andhra Pradesh benefit significantly. For instance, Rs 11,500 crore was allocated to Bihar for flood mitigation, while West Bengal, one of the worst flood-affected states, is crying for help. Salaried employees in the new tax regime will save up to Rs 17,500 in income tax. Corporate tax rates on foreign companies were reduced to 25%. Family pensions were enhanced from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000. However, nearly 60 lakh EPF pensioners have been receiving Rs 920 to Rs 1000 per month since 1995 without any increase. The government deserves praise for exempting three cancer medicines from custom duties and allocating Rs 2.2 lakh crore to make housing more affordable. It's also commendable that FM Sitharaman has introduced an internship program similar to Congress' Nyay Patra. Overall it is a mix bag but could have addressed the pressing issues on priority.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Tragedy at Tribhuvan International Airport



It is deeply shocking that eighteen people have lost their lives in a deadly plane crash at Tribhuvan International Airport, Kathmandu. The plane, a twenty-year-old Bombardier CRJ-200 regional jet owned by the

private airline company Saurya Airlines, skidded off the runway and crashed. It seems that the aviation industry in Nepal has fallen short of both standards and expectations, failing to keep pace with other countries in terms of modernization and sophistication. It is a pity that Nepal has not learned any lessons from past incidents, leading to a continuing series of plane crashes.

The aviation sector is crucial for Nepal's tourism and businesses. It is high time that the government of Nepal, along with private airline owners, collaborate to revamp the deteriorating aviation sector. They must pay due attention to improving passenger safety, modernizing logistics and infrastructure, and introducing new jets to avoid future accidents. Path-breaking reforms are essential. Janga Bahadur Sunuwar, Bagrakote

Janga Bahadur Sunuwar | Bagrakote

CONTROVERSIAL REMARKS

Madam — The Telangana-cadre IAS officer Smita Sabharwal is being criticized for questioning the need for a disability quota in civil services. She asked the "rights activists" to examine why the policy was yet to be implemented in police services, foreign services, and the defense sector. By raising such questions, she violated the code of conduct for civil servants and is punishable under the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016 and other relevant laws. Prominent coach and mentor of civil services aspirants in Hyderabad, Bala Latha Mallavarapu, challenged Smita to sit for the UPSC examination again and beat her score. The Supreme Court recently ruled in favor of Pankaj Kumar Srivastava, a 100 percent visually impaired candidate who cleared the Civil Services Examination in 2009 but was denied an appointment. This ruling marks a significant milestone in the fight for disability rights in India. Inappropriate remarks.

Yash Pal Ralhan | Jalandhar

BIDEN WITHDRAWS FROM THE RACE

Madam — Joe Biden Withdraws from Presidential Race. Accepting the views of prominent Democratic leaders, including former President Barack Obama, President Joe Biden has announced his withdrawal from the presidential race. Age is not on his side, and Donald Trump, after surviving an assassination attempt, has gained momentum. Vice President Kamala Harris is likely to take on the aging Donald Trump. In India, Kamala Harris' presumptive nomination elicited only lukewarm enthusiasm. During the 2019 election campaign, she criticised Prime Minister Modi's policies on Kashmir, saying, "We have to remind Kashmiris that they are not alone in the world." The possibility of tension in relations between the two countries, despite statements of warm friendship, cannot be ignored.

Haridasan Rajan | Kozhikode

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FIRST COLUMN

BUDGET BALANCES FISCAL DISCIPLINE AND EMPLOYMENT

Union budget takes definitive steps to create jobs for India's youth



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The eleventh full-term budget under Modi 3.0 walks the fiscal discipline path, despite being a coalition government, he is heading. The surprise results from June 4th, which threw in a coalition government for Prime Minister Modi, perhaps for the first time in his career, did not stop his budget proposals, political with sound economics in the background. In the run-up to the budget, many had expected, that the Finance Act would be populist keeping in mind the state elections of Haryana, Maharashtra and Jharkhand scheduled later this year. However what came out from Nirmala Sitharaman's tab, was a document that chose to focus on core areas of long-term growth and decent infrastructure spending, without giving in to populist demands. The key theme as highlighted by Government is Employment.

Questions have been raised in post-budget analysis regarding the feasibility of the schemes announced for creating lakhs of jobs for the youth of the country. The apprentice scheme promising a government stipend for lakhs of youth per year, in some of the largest companies of India, may only be a game changer if these young interns are attentively skilled to be formally absorbed into jobs, once their tenure is over. There are serious concerns regarding the abundant availability of a relatively unskilled workforce, hanging around in large offices, without learning any meaningful skills.

Similar questions have been raised regarding the EPFO-linked new job incentivisation scheme, which has various blindspots, possibly pushing a well-thought-out policy push into a dark corner. It may be said that the policy push is primarily to bring more youth employed in the informal sector within a formal standard workforce and instil a financial literacy discipline in them early on. However, this financial literacy falls flat when one looks at the changes made in the tax structures for any investor punting in the speculative equities market. The increased rate of capital gains tax and a general push to the new income tax regime, seem to be at cross purposes of the financial literacy programme, the government wants youth to undertake to avail of full benefits of INR 15,000, as a first month's salary subsidy. The earlier tax regimes instilled a sense



of financial responsibility for any youth entering the formal job sector, with several choosing at least one product, as a means to save and claim tax rebates in the future. This set them off for a long financial discipline path during their tenure as working professionals, which now seems to be slowly being eased out. The counter-argument the government may have is, that they want the consumer economy to grow first, led by the youth, who may be more willing to spend on food items, entertainment etc, with the monthly salaries they would be drawing in their new jobs. However, it prevents them from getting a into habit of savings, which are useful during rainy days or Covid type crises. Yes, the government, did well to maintain the fiscal discipline glide path, buoyed by a better than expected GDP growth, and lumpy dividend payouts from the central bank. Overall inflations, except for food are also within tolerable levels, giving the government, a cushion for spending on welfare projects, it feels are essential. Union budget 24-25 is an attempt woo back disgruntled voters.

The lesson BJP appears to have taken from the June 4 results is, that the youth are excited about huge temples, few smart glitzy trains, and cheap mobile data in their 'Made in India' phones, but they are increasingly getting anxious to earn money, have an engaging occupation, which feeds into their aspirational upwardly mobile lifestyle. Then there are pulls and pressures of coalition politics, with NDA's two partners TDP and JD(U) having their wish lists for catering to their core constituencies. A long-term dice has been rolled, perhaps NDA 3.0 with this budget has achieved the goldilocks balance.

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

Budget 2024: A blueprint for long-term growth



DEEPAK SOOD

The Union Budget 2024-25 reaffirms the Govt's dedication to long-term growth. India is well-positioned to harness its immense potential for rapid development



In a pivotal move aimed at strengthening India's economic prowess, the Union Budget for the fiscal year 2024-25 has made significant strides in assuring continuity of progressive reforms. There is cheer in the MSME, E-commerce and start-up worlds, which have been extended additional support as the country progresses on the road towards a Viksit Bharat. The Finance Minister made various announcements to empower the Garib, Mahila, Yuva and Kissan. The announcements made under this budget are timely and set to propel the Indian economy to new heights during the Amrit Kaal, enhancing its resilience in an ever-evolving global landscape.

A booster for MSMEs

The budget rightfully supports the bottom of the industrial pyramid by offering much-needed ease of credit for the MSME segment. India has 633.9 lakh MSMEs, where over 99% of them qualify as micro-enterprises that make up 630.5 lakh enterprises. One of the critical reasons why micro enterprises (with investments up to INR 10 million) do not graduate to being small or medium enterprises is the lack of access to formal credit. By doubling the MUDRA loan amounts and setting up new SIDBI branches, credit will now be more accessible to these organizations. Other steps (mandatory Trade Receivables Discounting System) have improved liquidity, while Industrial parks will provide the much-needed digital support that MSMEs usually cannot afford for growth. Additionally, the new credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs offers term loans without collateral or third-party guarantees, significantly easing the financial burden on small business owners and fos-

tering entrepreneurship. Such positive support for this crucial sector is bound to give it the confidence to shed its risk-averse nature and grow with ambition on the road to 2047.

Skilling and Job Creation

With this budget, the Government has responded positively to the need for job opportunities and skill development among youth in our country. The continued emphasis on skilling will allow training institutions and large corporations to participate in creating a pool of professionally trained manpower that would be readily absorbed by them and the larger MSME ecosystem, which is often strained for funds for training purposes. Meticulous implementation will, however, be key to setting the ball rolling in the right direction of creating jobs. Rural Economy

The rural economy

continued to receive support from the government, as strengthening this segment will be crucial for the sustained economic growth of the country. Budget 2024 had some big announcements for them that would increase productivity and food security in grains and oilseeds. Such measures will go a long way in creating new economic clusters that will support sustained growth. With 1 crore farmers to be trained in natural farming, marketing, certification, and brand-

ing, organic farming is all set to receive a big stimulus. The focus on addressing the impact of climate on our food basket showcases the government's long-term vision towards building resilience in the ecosystem.

Start-ups and E-Commerce

There is general cheer in the start-up ecosystem across India over the abolition of the angel tax, proposed in the budget. Angel tax, introduced in 2012, was imposed on the capital raised by unlisted companies through the issue of shares to Indian investors if the share price exceeded the fair market value (FMV) of the company. Traders and artisans using e-commerce sites got a lift up in this budget when TDS was not just reduced but TDS delays were decriminalized.

E-commerce exports, \$2 billion now, are expected to be \$350 billion by 2030. With revised custom duties, the Government hopes to give the required fillip to these artisans/traders who sell their wares using websites, in line with its Make in India strategy.

Energy security

India is a fast-developing economy and our energy needs are rising rapidly. By encouraging private investment in setting up small nuclear energy reactors and encouraging R&D into newer forms of nuclear energy, the budget aims to achieve India's goals of energy security. With regular energy audits across

clusters, larger commercial thermal plants and a pumped storage policy, the budget aims to help India cope with the rising demand without missing a step. However, our green economy targets are very ambitious and much more needs to be done to ensure our transition to green fuels.

Digitization of Land Records

This one step is perhaps the most impactful step the budget has outlined for the growth of India's economy. Vast tracts of our land, especially in rural India, are often embroiled in disputes with no proper documentation. This is a key hurdle in land acquisition for major projects. By digitising these records across India, the Government will end middlemen and reduce the number of land cases in the legal system. Overall, the Union Budget 2024-25 reinforces the Government's commitment to sustained long-term growth.

With strategic investments and forward-looking policies, India is poised to navigate global challenges while harnessing its immense potential for socio-economic development. The road towards Viksit Bharat could have its set of challenges, especially given the global dynamics, but the sustained vision and progressive policy support will help realise the dream of a Viksit Bharat.

(The writer is secretary general of ASSOCHAM; views expressed are personal)

THERE IS GENERAL CHEER IN THE START-UP ECOSYSTEM ACROSS INDIA OVER THE ABOLITION OF THE ANGEL TAX, PROPOSED IN THE BUDGET

Commemorating 25 years of Kargil victory: A tribute to India's bravehearts

As we remember the 527 soldiers who laid down their lives, we celebrate the enduring legacy of their heroism and dedication to the nation

Visitors to Drass, a town situated at an altitude of 10,760 feet (3,279 metres) in India-administered Kashmir, are greeted with a signboard that says at -60 degrees Celsius on January 9, 1995, it was the second-coldest inhabited place on the planet. Drass, located in Kargil district, has an additional claim to fame. In the summer of 1999, it was on its western edge with rocky and barren Himalayan peaks that India and Pakistan fought their last war.

That year, Pakistan's military and Kashmiri rebels occupied strategic positions on the Indian side of the de facto border between them (known as the Line of Control or LoC), prompting a counter-offensive by India. While



RAHUL KAMBLE

Pakistan had named its move to take over the control of Indian posts along the LoC as 'Operation Badr,' India called its offensive 'Operation Vijay.' It was a war fought in the era of satellite news channels. The battles were broadcast directly to homes in both countries, making Drass and Kargil as a whole, a symbol of India's nationalism, inspiring a raft of jingoistic Bollywood movies. This July 26 is the 25th Kargil Vijay Divas. On this day in

1999, the Indian forces threw out the Pakistanis from the incursion points in the general area of Kargil, which they had illegally occupied, bringing to a close a two-month war. It was a tough war, fought on sheer grit and courage, as gutsy young officers, most of them in their twenties, led equally brave soldiers up naked rock faces and managed to evict the enemy within weeks. Names such as Tiger Hill, Tololing, Point 5140, Point 4700, Three Pimples, Chorbat La, Point 5203, Point 4875, Khalubar, and Jubar Top became household names across the country. On 26 July 1999, the Kargil conflict officially came to an end. The Indian Army announced the complete eviction of Pakistani intruders, but a price was paid

for it in blood and tears. We lost 527 of our brave soldiers; 1363 came back wounded. The Indian army has marked July 26 - the day the Kargil war ended - as 'Vijay Diwas' (Victory Day). Every year for the past 25 years, the whole nation celebrates proudly on this day. Army also undertakes commemorative treks on the icy features, where our Braves became invincibles. What seemed an impossible task to the world, was accomplished in a mere 50 days, with all the features lost, back under our control. The '50 Day War' as it is fondly called, was a record in itself. Whenever the story of Kargil is told, it shall be incomplete without paying homage to the steely resolve and cold



courage of these young men who went to fight for their nation knowing that they might never return. Barely out of the academy, they fought against all odds, with single-minded devotion, and set new benchmarks in heroism. Their spirit and daring will be difficult to replicate. The war will always be remembered for its strategic and tac-

tical surprise, the self-imposed national strategy of restraint in keeping the war limited to the Kargil-Siachen sector, military strategy and planning, and the dedication, determination and daring junior leadership at the tactical level. In fiercely fought combat actions, on the most difficult terrain that gave immense advantage to the enemy, we were able to evict Pakistani troops from most of their surreptitiously occupied positions. The Pakistani leadership was forced to sue for a ceasefire and seek the withdrawal of its troops from the remaining areas. Operation Vijay - the Indian codename for the war - was a blend of strong and determined political, military and diplomatic actions, which enabled us to transform an

adverse situation into a military and diplomatic victory. As two prime ministers of Pakistan later acknowledged, 'Kargil war was Pakistan's biggest blunder and disaster.' A reflection on the Kargil War can never be complete without a mention of the brilliant junior leadership that we witnessed during battles. Such acts by young officers and men can never be forgotten. They make us proud. Commanding officers of many infantry battalions displayed steely resilience and single-minded devotion to duty. There were actions by young artillery forward observation officers and battery commanders who took over infantry companies when their company commander colleagues were killed. A victory in war is

achieved when battles are won. Battles are won when soldiers put duty before themselves. Soldiers who put their lives at stake in wars and war-like situations and expect nothing in return. But what the nation owes to them is recognition and gratitude. For every single brave deed noticed and recognized, many went unnoticed in the fog of war. These legendary tales deserve mention not only in our military history books but also in school textbooks to serve as inspiration for young people. This success shall not be taken for granted. With heights averaging 15000 feet, bone-chilling temperatures and a dominating hostility, the Kargil war in itself is a global legend.

(The author is freelance writer; views are personal)

No systemic breach in NEET-UG: SC junks plea for retest

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trashing pleas for re-test on grounds of paper leak and other malpractices, the Supreme Court has said there is no evidence to conclude that the entire result of NEET-UG, 2024 was vitiated and there was a "systemic breach" in the sanctity of the examination. On July 23, the top court dismissed the pleas seeking cancellation and re-test of the controversy-ridden exam and the order was uploaded on Wednesday night. "At the present stage, there is an absence of material on the record to lead to the conclusion that the entire result of the examination stands vitiated or that there was a systemic breach in the sanctity of the examination," said the 14-page interim order penned by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud. The detailed and reasoned judgement on as many as 40 petitions would be delivered later. The bench, also comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra said, "The data which has been produced on the record city-wise and centre-wise and the comparison of data for the years 2022, 2023 and 2024 are not indicative of a systemic leak of the question paper impacting the sanctity of the examination."



It said ordering a re-test this year "would be replete with serious consequences for over two million students who have appeared in the examination." The order said adopting such a course of action would lead to a disruption of admission schedule, setting back the entire process by several months, and would lead to a cascading effect on the course of medical education. It said the order of re-test would also impact the availability of qualified medical professionals in the future and "cause a serious element of disadvantage to students belonging to marginalized communities and weaker sections for whom reservation has been



made in the allocation of seats." The top court also asked the National Testing Agency (NTA) to revise its merit list by treating the answer suggested by a panel of three experts of IIT Delhi to a controversial physics question as correct. It scrutinised issues like whether the alleged breach took place at a systemic level and if the breach was of a nature which affected the integrity of the entire examination process. It also examined whether it was possible to segregate beneficiaries of the fraud from the untainted students. As per earlier judgements, a re-test can be ordered if segregation of beneficiaries of fraud

from genuinely successful candidates is not possible. It said an interim order was needed for providing certainty and finality to a dispute which affected the careers of over two million students. "The fact that a leak of the NEET (UG) 2024 paper took place at Hazaribagh in the state of Jharkhand and at Patna in the state of Bihar is not in dispute," the order said. Referring to the Central Bureau of Investigation's (CBI) status report, the order said the probe is continuing and as per the evidence, which emerged during the probe so far, there were about 155 students, who took up tests at examination centres in Hazaribagh and Patna, are prima facie beneficiaries of the fraud. While refusing to order a re-test, the bench said it was guided by the well-settled test of whether it is possible to segregate tainted students from those whose candidature does not suffer from any taint. "If the investigation reveals the involvement of an increased number of beneficiaries over and above those who are suspects at the present stage, action shall be pursued against every student found to be involved in wrongdoing at any stage, notwithstanding the completion of the counselling process," it said. No student,

who is revealed to have engaged in fraud, would be entitled to claim a vested right in continuation of the admission in the future by virtue of the findings in this judgment, it said. It took note of the submissions of the Centre that it has constituted a seven-member expert committee chaired by K Radhakrishnan, former Chairman, ISRO to suggest measures to strengthen the examination mechanism to ensure fair play. "The Committee will abide by such further directions as may be issued by this Court in its final judgment and order in regard to the areas which should be enquired into by it so as to ensure that (i) the process of conducting the NEET (UG) and other examinations falling within the remit of the NTA is duly strengthened; and (ii) the instances which came to light during the course of the present year are not repeated in the future," it said. Doubts about the sanctity of the exam arose when a total of 67 students scored a perfect 720, unprecedented in the NTA's history, with six from a Haryana centre figuring in the list. The number of candidates sharing the top rank came down to 61 from 67 after the NTA announced the revised results on July 1.

Kejriwal allowed two additional meetings with legal team in jail

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court has allowed a plea filed by jailed Delhi Chief Minister (CM) Arvind Kejriwal to hold two additional meetings with his legal team while he is lodged in Tihar Jail, saying 'special situations call for special remedies'. Kejriwal, who is hitherto entitled to two meetings with his lawyers a week, in accordance with prison rules. Justice Neena Bansal Krishna granted the relief to Kejriwal in recognition of his fundamental right to fair trial and effective legal representation. "Special situations call for special remedies. In view of the foregoing discussion, it is held that in recognition of fundamental right of fair trial and effective legal representation, the petitioner be granted two additional legal meetings with the Counsel through video conferencing in a week, till he is confined to jail. The petition, is accordingly, allowed," the Court said. In its order, the court said, "It can also not be ignored that similar relief of additional legal meetings has been allowed to co-accused/Sanjay Singh. While the Learned special

counsel for the respondent No. 2 has explained that the said Order was essentially ex parte, is not tenable since the respondents had appeared in the end while the Order was being passed and even thereafter, it has not been challenged by the State". However, the High Court has now opined that Kejriwal is only seeking the enforcement of his fundamental right to a fair trial and legal consultation while he is confined to Tihar Jail as he has 30-40 cases in various States against him. "To confine this fundamental right to a particular case and to insist on an independent application in each case is not only taking a myopic view but would result in a multiplicity of similar relief being asserted in different cases; in fact it can lead to utter confusion if such relief is considered a pertaining to individual case and not individual person. To ask the petitioner to move independent Application in each case would lead to delay but may indirectly be denying him the right of effective legal help," the Court said. The Court concluded that any objections on such aspects are only technical objections that hold no merit.

"It is pertinent to observe that the Jail policy has been enacted by the concerned Jail Authority after having due regard to all the modalities and the infrastructural capacity and number of the inmates of the jail. Therefore, generally, the courts are slow to interfere in the matters of policy," reads the order. However, when balancing the policy with the fundamental rights of the jail inmate, the request of the petitioner for two additional legal meetings with his Lawyers through video conferencing, in the given circumstance of huge number of cases pending against him, cannot be termed unreasonable," reads the order. The AAP leader's counsel had submitted he was facing around 35 cases across the country, and for a fair trial, he required two additional meetings with his lawyers via video conference. The plea was vehemently opposed by the Counsel for the Enforcement Directorate (ED) and Tihar jail authorities. The AAP leader was arrested by the CBI on June 26 from Tihar Jail, where he was lodged in judicial custody in a connected money laundering case filed by the ED.

Bengal Assembly Speaker asks MLAs to behave responsibly

PTI ■ KOLKATA

A day after senior BJP Leader Suvendu Adhikari was involved in a verbal spat with Trinamool Congress MLA Tapan Chatterjee on the assembly premises, Speaker Biman Bandyopadhyay on Thursday asked legislators to behave responsibly. Adhikari had alleged that the TMC legislator abused him verbally and tried to assault him on the premises of the assembly. In a letter to the Speaker, the BJP leader said he was feeling "insecure" in the assembly and demanded action against Chatterjee. The TMC MLA, however, had claimed he did not threaten or assault Adhikari but merely confronted him over some comments by the BJP leader against him and his daughter during an election meeting at his constituency. On the contrary, Chatterjee alleged, Adhikari had threatened him with dire consequences when he wanted his explanation at the assembly lobby for the comments. Taking a serious

view of the incident, the Speaker said, "What happened in the assembly premises yesterday is unfortunate, unexpected and inappropriate." "We need to behave with restraint. We need to conduct ourselves appropriately as stakeholders of the assembly," he said addressing both treasury and opposition benches. Referring to Adhikari's claim that he and other opposition MLAs were feeling insecure in the House, andyopadhyay said, "Adequate security arrangements are in place in the House but people's representatives should not act in a provocative manner." Adhikari was not present in the House when the Speaker made the observation, but Chatterjee was around. The Speaker had said on Wednesday he has initiated an investigation into the allegations of Adhikari. Adhikari, the BJP MLA of Nandigram, in his letter also held the Speaker somehow responsible for the incident since he disallowed entry of personal bodyguards of MLAs inside the assembly.

Rashtrapati Bhawan...

From Page 1 "It lost relevance after India became a Republic, that is, 'Ganatantra'. The concept of 'Ganatantra' is deeply rooted in Indian society since the ancient times, making 'Ganatantra Mandap' an apt name for the venue," the statement said. Its corridor displays the busts of former Indian presidents, carved by noted sculptors from across the country. Six tall banners in deep red with the national emblem of India in gold also adorn the hall. Against the wall is placed a fifth century AD statue of Lord Buddha on a crimson velvet background. In front of this statue is placed the president's chair. Earlier, two thrones for the viceroy and the vicereine were placed at this spot. On renaming the 'Ashok Hall', the president's office said it was originally a ballroom. 'Ashok Mandap' pays homage to Emperor Ashok, known for promoting peace and unity, reflecting values deeply rooted in Indian traditions. "The national emblem of the Republic of India is the lion capital of Ashok from Sarnath. The word also refers to the Ashok tree, which has deep significance in Indian religious traditions as well as arts and culture," it added. The hall is used for presentation of credentials

by heads of missions of foreign countries and as a formal place of introductions for the visiting and Indian delegations prior to the commencement of the state banquets hosted by the president. While the floor is wooden and has springs beneath the surface, the ceilings are decorated with oil paintings. With the glow of six Belgium glass chandeliers, the hall provides a fascinating sight to visitors. A loft was also designed in the state ballroom as a space for the orchestra. However, it is now used for playing the national anthem during important functions, according to the Rashtrapati Bhavan. Remarkable art pieces adorn the hall. These include a long case clock that was made in England and has a marking of British Clock Enfield by Cooke & Kelvey Limited, Calcutta. The Persian style carpet, measuring 32 metres by 20 metres, was designed especially for the hall, keeping in mind its grandeur. The carpets were said to have engaged five hundred weavers for two years, according to its official descri This renaming initiative reflects a commitment to align these spaces with India's cultural values and ethos.

Reel makers face DMRC heat

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro, often referred to as the city's lifeline, has become a hotspot for "reelers" and "Instagrammers" using the trains as backdrops for their social media content. This trend has not only caused discomfort among fellow passengers but has also led to a significant increase in prosecutions for creating nuisances. Between April and June, over 1,600 commuters were booked for making reels and other disruptive activities on metro premises, marking a three per cent rise from the same period last year. Be it two girls indulging in obscene activities in the metro of making videos while putting colours on each other or a girl dancing to a Bollywood song and shooting it with people visibly uncomfortable around, the Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) has taken a strict approach to curb such nuisance from happening in the metros. According to the data, 1,647 penalties were issued for creating nuisance in three months under Section 59 of the Metro Railways



(Operations and Maintenance) Act. The corresponding number for the same period last year was 1,600. A senior DMRC official on Thursday said creating nuisance may also include offences such as sitting on the floor of the train and eating inside the train, among others. The DMRC issued 610, 518 and 519 penalties in April, May and June, respectively while the corresponding

numbers for the previous year were 528, 485 and 587, the data showed. DMRC Managing Director Vikas Kumar said they penalised people for creating nuisance in the metro area. "We use our machinery so that such kind of incidents should not happen on the metro premises. We have a provision of penalising if someone creates nuisance on the metro premises and we do penalise them. It is an ongoing process

and the more you keep doing it, the more people will get discouraged," he said. "But the issue is that we do not have enough manpower to check every corner. If we have 67 lakh passengers a day, then monitoring such a huge number of people is not easy. We have CCTV surveillance through which we get to know if anything happened on the premises," he added. The DMRC has also put up posters at several metro stations, dissuading passengers from making reels and causing discomfort. In April, the DMRC asked the Delhi Police to conduct a thorough investigation after a video emerged online of two women applying colours on each other inside a train. The video, which surfaced ahead of Holi, drew criticism from a large section of commuters. The DMRC had said at the time that it was running various campaigns, both online and offline, to discourage passengers from indulging in any activity that might cause inconvenience to fellow commuters. Mobile checking squads are also deployed at times to check activities considered inappropriate.

Modi meets Maha NDA allies...

From Page 1 Sources said a section of the BJP leadership is in fix over the being party to Ajit Pawar led NCP who besides pressing for maximum number of seats for forthcoming assembly polls has been demanding a cabinet berth in the Union Council of Ministers. The party opted out from the Council of Ministers when it was formed by Modi who took over as PM in his third tenure last month. Sources said the Prime Minister took feedback from all the MPs regarding the upcoming assembly elections in the meeting. During the conversation, the PM also gave a mantra to all the MPs on how to win the elections by keeping a close watch on activities at booth level. The Prime Minister asked the MPs to be active from the booth to the ground and work for the people. He told the MPs that everyone should focus on how to reach as many people as possible. During the meeting, Modi also asked the newly elected MPs from Maharashtra about their experience so far. "Meeting was scheduled soon after the canards were spread by the Opposition ranks that Maharashtra has been completely ignored in the Budget announced this week.

PM personally desired to set aside apprehensions and shared that all representatives of the Maharashtra coalition should reach out to the people and explain how several projects and many funds have been allocated to the State," sources said after the meeting that transpired between the PM and MPs in the Parliament. During his meeting with Amit Shah, Pawar insisted on seat distribution at the earliest and asked to avoid lingering around till the last minute like the Lok Sabha polls. After his meeting with Amit Shah, Ajit Pawar also met deputy CM Devendra Fadnavis and other senior BJP leaders in the national capital. According to sources, Pawar is likely to make another visit on July 28. The Ajit Pawar-Amit Shah meeting comes as he was blamed for NCP's alliance with the BJP for the latter's loss in the just concluded Lok Sabha elections. The Ajit Pawar-led NCP won just one seat, Raigad, while the Sharad Pawar led NCP bagged eight. On the other hand the Shiv Sena faction of Chief Minister Eknath Shinde is determined to contest 100 seats while the BJP has set a target of 160 to 170 seats of the total of 288 Vidhan Sabha.

UPSC to... BJP slams... J&K on high...

From Page 1 "The Commission intends to make use of the latest digital technology to match and cross-check the biometric details of the candidates and to monitor various activities of the candidates during the examination to prevent cheating, fraud, unfair means and impersonation," said UPSC. The UPSC will provide the data and images submitted by applicants during the online registration process to the service provider to prevent impersonation. This data will be used for Aadhaar-based fingerprint authentication and facial recognition systems to verify candidates on the exam day. Fingerprint scanners and facial recognition devices will be deployed at examination centres to ensure candidates' identities are accurately verified. UPSC conducts 14 examinations annually, including the prestigious Civil Services Examination (CSE), along with various recruitment tests and interviews for induction to Group 'A' and Group 'B' posts within the Government of India.

From Page 1 Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla too asked members to maintain respect and not make remarks that would hurt the dignity of the House. With the opposition members protesting, Birla said there was a lot of respect for the House and also the Parliamentary tradition. Riji said opposition leaders did not say anything on the budget, they just indulged in politics during the discussion on the Budget which began on Wednesday. "They have insulted the mandate of the people. The opposition leaders have abused the prime minister," Riji said. He said the floor leaders of political parties should direct the members not to create ruckus in Parliament and have a civilised and sensitive debate during the Budget session. Birla on his part said members can express their views, participate in discussions but should also ensure the respect and dignity of the House and that they should not be doing things that would hurt its dignity.

From Page 1 The Shinkun La Tunnel Project consists of a 4.1 km long Twin-Tube tunnel which will be constructed at an altitude of around 15,800 feet on the Nimu - Padum - Darcha Road to provide all-weather connectivity to Leh. Once completed, it will be the highest tunnel in the world. The Shinkun La tunnel will not only ensure swift and efficient movement of our armed forces and equipment but also foster economic and social development in Ladakh. Former Army Chief Gen VP Malik along with several other army veterans, Veer Naris, and the next of kin of fallen soldiers have assembled at the Kargil

War Memorial to pay their homage to mark the occasion. Meanwhile Punjab police have also released a sketch of one of the suspects who spotted the seven 'suspicious' men in the Phangtoli. A joint team of the security forces has also launched an operation along the International Border (IB) in the Samba sector to detect underground and cross-border tunnels. "A comprehensive anti-tunnel exercise has commenced to ascertain the presence of any cross-border tunnels," said a police officer involved in the operation. The search operations also involve the deployment of drones and are being conducted daily in response to the ongoing security threats posed by potential terrorist infiltrations, he said. "Security forces are clearing dense bushy

areas to eliminate the possibility of the existence of tunnels," the officer added. Reports also indicate that between 50 to 60 foreign terrorists have infiltrated Jammu via the International Border and Line of Control over the past few months, according to police. In Kathua, two alleged overground workers (OGWs) were arrested for their involvement in a terror attack on an army patrol party in Jammu and Kashmir's Kathua district, police said. According to a police spokesperson, "two OGWs were apprehended for their involvement in supporting terror-related actions". On July 8, five army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, were martyred and five others were injured in the attack by heavily armed terrorists in the remote Machedi area of the district.

populist remarks" on the current situation in neighbouring Bangladesh that could affect the nation's external affairs. In her remarks on Sunday, Banerjee also referred to the UN Resolution on refugees as justification for her stand over the possible humanitarian crisis that may emerge on account of the severe law and order breakdown that gripped Bangladesh. "I should not be speaking on the affairs of Bangladesh since that is a sovereign nation and whatever needs to be said on the issue is a subject matter of the Centre," Banerjee said.

State govt cracks the whip on Ballia cops

From Page 1 received from ADG Varanasi office, inputs about extortion and collection of money at Bharouli checkpoint was received several days ago. However, continuous recce was done for four days, and when the matter was confirmed, the raid was conducted. The action started after midnight at Bharouli picket across the Ganga river bridge on the

UP-Bihar border of the Narhi police station area on a complaint of illegal recovery from trucks laden with sand as well as vehicles carrying liquor and cattle at the border. The team took into custody three policemen and 17 others from the picket. A large number of motorcycles, registers and mobiles were also recovered from the spot. All the

accused were kept at a nearby temple and interrogated throughout the night. On Thursday morning, the vehicle used for carrying prisoners was called from Ballia and the people caught were brought to Narhi police station. The team's action continued at the Narhi police station and the room of station in-charge was sealed. Police station in-charge

Pannelal was missing from the spot. After this, searches of the policemen's barracks were also started. In the morning, DIG Vaibhav Krishna and SP Devranjan Verma, along with the additional superintendent of police and circle officer also reached the spot. DIG Vaibhav Krishna, who came out of the police station

after hours of investigation, told media that Narhi police station in-charge Pannelal as well as in-charge of Korantadih police post of the police station, along with all the policemen posted there, had been suspended. He said police recovered Rs 37,500 in cash and 14 bikes. Three policemen are absconding and a case is being registered against all of them.

Biden says he quit re-election bid to save US democracy

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US President Joe Biden has said his decision to quit the 2024 presidential race and endorse Kamala Harris as the Democratic presidential nominee was aimed at unifying the nation and passing the "torch to a new generation."



serve as president but in the defence of democracy, which is at stake, I think it's more important than any title," he said.

personal ambition, so I've decided the best way forward is to pass the torch to a new generation," Biden said in a speech which lasted about 11 minutes.

On Vice President Harris, Biden said she is "experienced, she's tough, she's capable" and called her an "incredible partner" during their three-and-a-

half years together. "I've made my choice. I've made my views known ... Now, the choice is up to you, the American people," he said.

While Biden did not mention Donald Trump by name, he tried to draw a clear contrast with the former president, whose ambition led him to claim victory in an election he did not win in 2020.

now will determine the fate of our nation and the world for decades to come," he said.

Harris, 59, who is of Indian and African origin, has now emerged as the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party.

After the president concluded his remarks, Jill Biden walked to the Resolute Desk and stood next to her husband. Harris watched Biden's Address to the Nation from Houston.

Biden in his remarks said that America is going to have to choose between moving forward or backward, between hope and hate, between unity and division.

Biden said he was the first president in this century to report to the American people that the United States is not at war anywhere in the

world. "We'll keep rallying a coalition of proud nations to stop Putin from taking over Ukraine and doing more damage. We'll keep NATO stronger, and I'll make it more powerful and more united than at any time in all of our history," he said.

"I'll keep doing the same for allies in the Pacific. When I came to office, the conventional wisdom was that China would inevitably surpass the United States. That's not the case anymore. I'm going to keep working to end the war in Gaza, bring home all the hostages and bring peace and security to the Middle East and end this war," said the president.

Biden said he now believes a new path is necessary. The president did not address ongoing Republican criticisms about his fitness to serve.

Washington (AP): Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to make a long-awaited White House visit Thursday to meet with President Joe Biden and likely Democratic nominee Vice President Kamala Harris at an important moment for all three politicians.

Netanyahu's White House visit, his first since before President Donald Trump left office in 2020, comes at a time of growing pressure on all three to find an endgame to the nine-month war that's left more than 39,000 dead in Gaza. What's more, dozens of Israeli hostages and the remains of others who have died are still languishing in Hamas captivity.

Netanyahu will meet with Biden and Harris

Following their midday talks, Biden and Netanyahu will meet the families of American hostages. Harris, who will meet separately with Netanyahu later, is trying to demonstrate that she has the mettle to serve as commander in chief. She's also being scrutinized by those on the political left who say Biden hasn't done enough to force Netanyahu to end the war and by Republicans looking to brand her as insufficient in her support for Israel.

Protestors burn US flag near Congress

Washington (PTI): Pro Palestinian-protestors on Wednesday lowered an American flag and burned it down a few blocks away from the US Congress and hoisted a Palestine flag in its place.

The protesters in several hundreds were protesting against the US policy in the Middle East and the bombing of innocent civilians by Israelis in Gaza and parts of Palestine. Six people were arrested by the local police.

The protests were also held in several parts of the city as Netanyahu addressed the

Cease-fire talks face delays after Netanyahu's fiery speech

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Officials from Egypt, Israel, the United States and Qatar were expected to meet Thursday in Doha with the aim of resuming talks for a proposed three-phase cease-fire to end the war between Israel and Hamas and free the remaining hostages. But an Israeli official said Israel's negotiating team was delayed and would likely be dispatched next week.



Relatives and supporters of the hostages held captive by Hamas in the Gaza Strip take part in a protest to demand their immediate release outside of the U.S. Embassy Branch Office in Tel Aviv, Israel, Wednesday.

they are sleeping in the streets. The Health Ministry in Gaza says more than 39,100 Palestinians have been killed in the war. Hamas slammed Netanyahu's speech to Congress.

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's fiery speech to the United States Congress, accusing him Thursday of obstructing efforts to end the war and return the hostages.

after the International Criminal Court requested to issue arrest warrants against him for war crimes. The ICC also requested warrants for his Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, Hamas officials Mohammed Deif, Yehya Sinwar, and Ismail Haniyeh.

after being detained in Washington dur In Tel Aviv - A group representing the families of Israeli hostages held in Gaza said Thursday that six hostage relatives have been released after they were briefly detained during Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the joint session of Congress.

They also rejected Netanyahu's vision for Gaza's future — which would consist of a demilitarized civilian administration in the enclave — and accused Netanyahu of being dishonest about aid delivery into the Gaza Strip and downplaying the number of Palestinians killed in the ongoing war.

Kamala Harris unfit to rule: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Unleashing a volley of attacks against his new campaign opponent Vice President Kamala Harris, former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has said she is "unfit to rule" and described her as a "radical left lunatic" whom voters will reject in November.



Harris, 59, will be officially announced as the party's presidential candidate at its Democratic National Convention in August.

country if she ever gets the chance to get into office. We're not going to let that happen," Trump said.

Trump, who has previously called Biden "Sleepy Joe," gave Harris the nickname "Lyn Kamala".

gerous people. When you're dealing with them, you can't be too nice. You really can't be. So if you don't mind, I'm not going to be nice. Is that okay?" he asked his supporters amidst huge applause from the audience.

Harris is the most liberal elected politician in American history, he said. This November, the American people are going to tell her, no thanks, Kamala, Trump said. "You've done a terrible job. You've been terrible at everything you've done. You're ultra-liberal. We don't want you here. We don't want you anywhere. Kamala, you're fired. Get out of here. You're fired," Trump said.

Trump continued linking Harris to Biden and his policies and argued that both worked to cover up the president's physical decline while in office. She was appointed by this horrible president, this horrible guy...that they've done to our country is unthinkable," he alleged.

four more years of dishonesty, incompetence, weakness and failure, Trump said. Trump alleged everything Harris touches turns into a total disaster. He mentioned Harris as many as 45 times in his speech. "When Kamala Harris was sent to Europe to deter Russia from attacking Ukraine, how did that work out? Russia answered by launching the invasion just five days after she left. Putin laughed at her like she was nothing. She is nothing. She's so bad for us. Everything Kamala touches turns into a total disaster. She's destroyed San Francisco with the policies," Trump said.

"She'll destroy our country if she's elected. So we won't let her be elected. We can't let that happen. Unbelievably, despite all of the damage she's caused, radical, liberal Kamala Harris now wants a promotion to deliver four more years of chaos. We've had the worst four years," he said.

British officer suspended over ill-treating man

London (AP): A British police officer was suspended from all duties Thursday after a video was posted on social media that appeared to show an officer kicking and stamping on the head of a man lying on the floor of a terminal at Manchester Airport.

Greater Manchester Police said the incident occurred while police were trying to break up a fight at the airport's Terminal Two on Wednesday. Three officers were assaulted, with one suffering a broken nose and another requiring hospital treatment, the force said. "We understand the deep concerns that have been widely raised with us, and will continue to meet and discuss these feelings with Greater Manchester residents and elected representatives, whilst this independent investigation takes place," Police said in a statement.

NORAD tracks Chinese and Russian bombers near Alaska

AP ■ BEIJING

Two Chinese and two Russian long-range bombers were tracked flying over international waters near Alaska and US and Canadian fighter jets were sent up in response, their joint aerospace command said. The Chinese and Russian military activity Wednesday was not seen as a threat, the North American Aerospace Defense Command, known as NORAD, said. China and Russia confirmed Thursday that they had conducted a joint air patrol over the Bering Sea, which divides Russia and Alaska.

Defense Ministry said the joint patrol also flew over the Chukchi Sea, which is on the north side of the Bering Strait. Russian fighter jets and strategic bombers were joined by Chinese strategic bombers in the exercises, which lasted more than five hours, the ministry said. The joint patrol tested and improved coordination between the two air forces, said Zhang Xiaogang, a spokesperson for China's Defense Ministry. He said it was the eighth joint strategic air patrol since 2019. He declined to comment when asked if it was the first such patrol over the Bering Sea.

Another photo posted online by the military channel of China's state broadcaster CCTV showed Russian and Chinese long-winged bombers flying in parallel formation against mostly blue skies. The Japanese military has grown increasingly concerned about joint China-Russia drills and the potential threat they represent to the security of Japan and the region. A fleet of Russian and Chinese warplanes including Tu-95s and H-6s was seen flying together last December over the waters between Japan and Korea, Japan's Defense Ministry said. At the time, China's Defense Ministry called it the seventh joint strategic air patrol with Russia. Chinese naval ships have showed up in international waters near Alaska, most recently in mid-July when the Coast Guard spotted four ships in the US Exclusive Economic Zone, which extends 200 nautical miles (370 kilometers) from the shore.

Nepal: Black box of crashed aircraft found, probe committee formed

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepalese authorities on Thursday recovered the black box of the aircraft that crashed here a day before and handed it over to a probe team formed to inquire into the tragic accident that killed 18 people, including a child. A Pokhara-bound Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft of Saurya Airlines, carrying 19 people, crashed and caught fire shortly after taking off from the Tribhuvan International Airport here on Wednesday, killing 18 people aboard, and seriously injuring the pilot.



director general of the Civil Aviation Authority, said the black box of the crashed aircraft has been recovered and handed over to a probe team for necessary action. The probe team is headed by Ratish Chandra Lal, former director general of the Civil Aviation Authority, and

includes four other experts. The team has to submit its probe report along with recommendations within 45 days. The dead bodies are in the process of identification after conducting a post mortem and they will be handed over to the family members by Friday, Pandey said.

Pilot miraculously survived deadly crash

Kathmandu (PTI): Captain Manish Raj Shakya, the lone survivor of a deadly plane crash in Nepal that killed 18 other people on board, was saved after the cockpit of the aircraft was sheared off by a freight container seconds before the rest of the aircraft went up in flames, a media report said on Thursday. The Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft of Saurya Airlines, carrying 19 people, including two crew members, technical staff of the airline and a child and his mother caught fire shortly after taking off from the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA) here on Wednesday. The aircraft was found for the

Pokhara International Airport for regular maintenance service. Of the deceased, 15 died on the spot while three died during treatment at a local hospital, authorities said. Airport security personnel said when the plane hit the container, the front part of the cockpit got stuck in it, while the rest of the plane fell to the ground reaching another side of the ground. According to Deputy Inspector General and Chief of TIA Airport Security Office Ram Dutt Joshi, Captain Shakya, 37, was rescued from inside the container which was on the TIA premises.

"We rescued Captain Shakya from inside the container," The Rising Nepal newspaper quoted DIG Joshi as saying. Doctors have initiated an investigation into the brain scars of Shakya. Shakya is currently receiving treatment at Kathmandu Medical College (KMC). According to the doctors involved in treatment, although the injuries in different parts of the body and the broken bones at two places of the backbone have not caused serious problems, the doctors are investigating to find out the cause of the scars on Shakya's brain. Neurosurgeon Dr Amit Thapa said that he could provide fur-

ther information only after the Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan of Shakya's brain scars. Captain Shakya's health condition showed improvement on Thursday as compared to Wednesday. The doctors said he is "free from danger" and can speak. He can also consume liquid food. According to KMC sources, Captain Shakya sustained several internal injuries despite not being burnt in the fire. The doctors are preparing for surgery to address his broken bones. In solemn tribute to the 18 lives lost, the Nepal government has decreed that the national flag will be flown at half-mast

on Thursday. In response to the tragedy, a five-member probe commission has been formed to investigate the incident. The commission will be led by Ratish Chandra Lal Suman, former Director General of the Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal (CAAN). The commission is tasked with delivering its report and recommendations within 45 days to prevent similar accidents in the future. Authorities are conducting an autopsy on the 18 people who lost their lives in the accident. The postmortem of the deceased began on Wednesday evening at the Tribhuvan University Teaching Hospital (TUTH).

I-T Act review attempt to make it simpler for taxpayers: CBDT chief

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Budget announcement about a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act, 1961, is an attempt to make the "bulky" law "simpler" to understand and comfortable to use for taxpayers along with aligning new technology processes with it, CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal has said. The Act that started its journey in 1922 contains 298 sections, 23 chapters and other provisions in its current form of 1961. Speaking to PTI during a post-budget interview on Wednesday, Agrawal said the Act has seen "redundancies" over a period of time making it "thick and bulky." "The taxpayers also feel that the Act is not so simple, as it ought to be...It is cumbersome...So the attempt is if we can make this Act simpler, simpler to comprehend, simpler in terms of language, simpler in terms of presentation, then that hitch of the taxpayer to actually not see the Act and take the help of a tax practitioner or someone (maybe eased)..."



"We are working towards how can we make it (Income Tax Act) simple so that the taxpayer feels comfortable seeing the provisions himself or herself and that it is more user friendly," the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) head said. It is also important to review the law as technology has become an integral part of tax administration and "we have to see where the gaps are and how we actually can align technology with the provisions of the Act," Agrawal said. We are looking to undertake further improvements (in the law), he added. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while

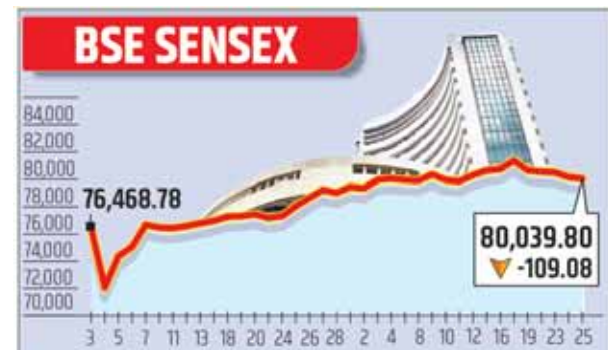
presenting the Union Budget for 2024-25 on Tuesday, announced a "comprehensive" review of the Income Tax Act of 1961. "The purpose is to make the Act concise, lucid, easy to read and understand. This will reduce disputes and litigation, thereby providing tax certainty to the taxpayers. It will also bring down the demand embroiled in litigation. It is proposed to be completed in six months," she said. Sitharaman added that a beginning was being made in the Finance Bill by simplifying the tax regime for charities, TDS rate structure, provisions for reassessment, search

provisions and capital gains taxation. Asked about the budget proposal of granting immunity from penalty and prosecution to a 'benami' (in whose name a benami asset is standing) under the Benami Transactions Prohibition Act, the CBDT chief said this was aimed to make the act "effective". The minister said the move was intended to "improve conviction" under this law, which was enacted in 1988 but implemented in November 2016 by the Modi government. A convict under this law can be sentenced to a rigorous imprisonment of up to seven years and a fine of up to 25 per cent of the fair market value of the property. Benami properties are those in which the real beneficiary is not the one in whose name the property has been purchased. Agrawal also said that the Income Tax Department has completed about 6.5 lakh assessment cases and about 2 lakh appeals under the faceless assessment regime that was launched by the government in 2019-20.

Markets extend losses for 5th session

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Equity market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty stayed on the back foot for the fifth straight session on Thursday as investors offloaded metal, banking and finance stocks amid a lacklustre trend in global markets. Heavy foreign fund outflows after a hike in securities transaction tax and short-term capital gains tax also impacted markets' sentiment negatively, traders said. However, strong buying in oil & stocks, energy and auto shares helped the indices offset some losses, they added. After a sharp fall in intra-day trade, the 30-share BSE Sensex managed to recover some of the lost ground to settle 109.08 points or 0.14 per cent lower at 80,039.80, as a sharp rally in Tata Motors and Larsen & Toubro restricted its fall. During the day, it tanked 671 points or 0.83 per cent to 79,477.83. Shares of Larsen & Toubro ended nearly 3 per cent higher after the company posted a 12 per cent rise in consolidated profit after tax (PAT) in the June quarter. Tata Motors jumped nearly 6 per cent. The NSE Nifty dipped 7.40 points or 0.03 per cent to 24,406.10. Intra-day, it tumbled 202.7 points or 0.83



per cent to 24,210.80. In five days, the BSE benchmark has tumbled 1,303.66 points or 1.60 per cent, while the Nifty declined 394.75 points or 1.59 per cent. "Overnight slump in US equities caused a major slump in domestic markets in early trade due to heavy profit-taking in banking, IT, metals and realty stocks. "However, markets recouped most of its losses towards the end, with Sensex managing to close above the crucial 80k-mark amid buying in oil & gas and automobile stocks, indicating that investors are willing to bet on good fundamental sectoral stocks despite rising concerns of the stretched valuations of the Indian markets," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. From the Sensex pack, Axis Bank declined over 5 per cent

after the company's June quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Nestle, Titan, ICICI Bank, Tata Steel, IndusInd Bank, ITC, JSW Steel and State Bank of India were the other laggards. Sun Pharma, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bajaj Finance and Power Grid also ended in the positive territory. "After a volatile session, the Indian market concluded on a flat note, influenced by lower-than-expected earnings growth from major banks. Global indices also reacted pessimistically due to the disappointing results from top US tech companies. "However, the government's commitment to improving consumption and bridging the gap for energy transition in the budget buoyed sectoral sentiments," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit

Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge declined 0.22 per cent, and smallcap index dipped 0.14 per cent. Among the indices, metal lost 1.19 per cent, bankex (1.10 per cent), realty (0.80 per cent), telecommunication (0.65 per cent) and financial services (0.60 per cent). On the other hand, energy, healthcare, industrials, utilities, auto and oil & gas were among the gainers. "Global stocks tumbled on Thursday after a tech-fuelled sell-off on Wall Street last night. A slew of disappointing results caused traders to panic that the artificial-intelligence frenzy that has powered the bull market this year may have been overdone," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory in the mid-session deals. US markets ended significantly lower on Wednesday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 5,130.90 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 1.73 per cent to USD 80.31 a barrel.

Rationalisation of duties on leather sector to help create more jobs, push exports: CLE

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Rationalisation of customs duties in the Budget on leather sector will help create more jobs and push exports, CLE said on Thursday. The Council for Leather Exports (CLE) said that the Budget announcement of support for setting up working women hostels, establishing creches and women-specific skilling programmes will further enhance the women workforce in the sector. The employment linked incentive scheme is a major support measure for the leather and footwear sector, as this is a labour-intensive sector, CLE Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan said. "Two major measures have been announced for the leather and footwear sector in the Union Budget. One is the rationalisation of export duties on leathers and the other is the inclusion of more inputs including wet blue chrome tanned leather, wet white leather, crust leather and finished leather under the Duty Free Scheme for leather garments, leather



products and footwear exporters," he said. Jalan added on the export duty front, the levy on wet blue and crust leather has been brought down from 40 per cent to 20 per cent. This will facilitate the export of value-added processed leathers from the country as there is a huge demand for these leathers in the global market, he said. "We hope that the government will further reduce this export duty for crust leathers from 20 per cent to nil in future, so as to achieve our objective of enhancing the export of

value-added leathers by USD 1 billion in the next 2-3 years," Jalan said. He added that allowing duty free imports of critical raw materials and inputs, including wet blue, crust and finished leathers, will help facilitate the export of value-added products from the country. "This will be a major step in realising our ambition of achieving the exporter target of USD 13.7 billion by 2029-30 by the leather and footwear sector, from the export value of USD 4.69 billion during 2023-24," he said.

Map war intensifies, Google announces new features to woo users in India

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Amid rising competition from homegrown challenger Ola Maps, Google on Thursday announced a slew of new features on Google Maps to woo users in India, including EV charging station information, flyover callouts and AI-driven routing capability to reduce narrow road usage for four-wheeler drivers. It is "an exciting time in mapping," Google Maps said announcing its lineup of new features, which comes in the backdrop of a pitched battle with Ola. Google recently decided to cut the pricing of Google Maps platform for developers by up to 70 per cent from August 1, just weeks after Ola Founder and CEO Bhavish Aggarwal openly nudged Indian developers to shun Google Maps and offered them sweeteners like one-year free access to Ola Maps. Replying to a question on the timing of Google Maps' price cuts - coming right after an offensive from Ola - Google Maps senior executives said that while "it's tempting to think that way, but we actually do not focus on competitors".



"We're very focused on making sure we're serving our user base and our partner community, which is our developer partners. And to be honest, we timed it with our IO Connect event in Bengaluru," Miriam Daniel, VP and GM at Google Maps, said at a briefing. Daniel added: "...This is something our partners have been requesting of us for a while, and we've been working on it for quite some time to make sure our infrastructure, our pricing systems are localised and adapted to the needs of our partners in India." On Thursday, the company announced six ways it is enabling more efficient and sustainable journeys on

Google Maps in India, powered by AI and local partners. "These new features reaffirm our commitment to making digital mapping even more helpful for users, businesses, developers and society at large. "We're excited to continue our journey of innovation and build the future of Google Maps right here in India," a blogpost by Daniel and Lalitha Ramani, GM at Google Maps, India, read. Stating that navigating narrow or congested roads in unfamiliar areas can be a challenge for four-wheeler drivers, Google Maps announced it is introducing a new feature for users in India designed to reduce the use of

narrow roads when driving four-wheelers. "To address this, we've developed an AI model specifically for Indian roads that incorporates multiple signals satellite imagery, Street View and other information like road types, distance between buildings, paved sections, etc. To estimate road widths at scale. Using these road width estimates, we've fine-tuned our existing AI routing algorithms to help four-wheelers avoid narrow roads whenever possible, without significantly impacting travel time or distance," the blogpost said. This means four-wheeler drivers can enjoy a less stressful driving experience, and it also benefits bikers, pedestrians and other commuters who can now use these narrow roads more safely and confidently, it added. Google Maps is starting to roll out this feature on Android devices this week in eight cities - Hyderabad, Bengaluru, Chennai, Coimbatore, Indore, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar and Guwahati, and has promised to bring the feature to iOS and more cities soon.

Another new feature on Google Maps is call-out flyovers along the recommended route. This feature helps users anticipate upcoming flyovers and prepare ahead of time to get onto the flyover. "Starting this week, you'll see these flyover callouts in 40 cities across India for both four-wheeler and two-wheeler active navigation on Android apps and Android Auto. iOS and CarPlay support will be coming soon," it said. Both Narrow Roads and Flyover features have been pioneered in India, tailored to the unique navigation needs of users, it said. To ensure EV drivers have the tools they need to confidently hit the road, the company has also announced the availability of information about EV charging stations on both Google Maps and Google Search in India. "To achieve this, we're collaborating with leading EV charging providers in India ElectricPe, Ather, Kazam, and Statiq to add authoritative information for over 8,000 charging stations, representing a significant portion of available charging stations in India," it said.

Sugar industry body proposes bio-refinery transition plan to Govt



Sugar industry body ISMA on Thursday said it has presented a plan to the government to transform sugar mills into bio-refineries, aiming to boost production of sustainable aviation fuel and other green energy sources. The representatives of the Indian Sugar & Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA) met with Food Minister Pralhad Joshi to discuss a policy framework for the transition, which would expand beyond ethanol, bioelectricity, and biogas production, a statement said. ISMA Director General Deepak Ballani said the initiative would help India meet international aviation blending targets set to take effect in 2027 under CORSIA mandates while supporting the country's net-zero and

self-reliance goals. "We see a future where local resources drive national development," Ballani said in the statement adding that "This aligns with the government's vision for a self-reliant India." The plan aims to create alternative markets for India's estimated 55 million sugarcane farmers, building on the success of the current ethanol blending programme in increasing farmer incomes. The government launched 400 E-100 fuel pumps last year. Joshi stressed the need to promote E-100 use, particularly given India's leadership of the Global Biofuels Alliance. ISMA pledged to work closely with the government on the swift implementation of the bio-refinery plan, which is expected to set new benchmarks in the sector and strengthen India's energy security.

Indian cybersecurity startups poised for strong growth amid rising global spend, says Accel

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's cybersecurity market has posted a compounded annual growth rate of 25 per cent since 2019, crossing the USD 6 billion mark in 2023, and is projected to expand further with global spending touching USD 200 billion this year, Prayank Swaroop, partner at global VC fund Accel, said on Thursday. Cybersecurity startups in the country are poised to see a steady growth on the back of higher spending in the domestic market, he said at the Accel Cybersecurity Summit 2024 in Bengaluru. Highlighting the potential of the country's cybersecurity market, Swaroop said Indian cybersecurity startups are poised to make a global impact, and continue their growth momentum amid a sharp rise in spending for cybersecurity globally. The Accel Cybersecurity Summit 2024, India's largest cybersecurity summit, saw participation from across the world. The gathering included prominent founders, global cybersecurity experts and CISOs (chief information security officer) of major enterprises. "Our mission with this summit is to elevate the ecosystem of cybersecurity founders and operators by bringing together some of the best minds in the domain," said Swaroop. Data available with IDC, Gartner, and other leading



research firms suggest that global spending in cybersecurity is expected to cross USD 200 billion in 2024. "Indian cybersecurity startups will impact the global landscape as the market proliferates significantly," he said, adding that the country's cybersecurity market witnessed a 25 per cent CAGR since 2019 and crossed USD 6 billion in 2023. Indian cybersecurity startups received USD 157 million funding in the past two years. Multiple reports attest to the spike in global spending for cybersecurity, with an IDC report projecting spends upwards of USD 36 billion in the Asia Pacific alone. This spike in spending, the growing importance of security awareness, a need to foster a robust security system and looking for solutions to the rising spectre of cybersecurity threats were the crux of Swaroop's inaugural address at the summit. Despite growing interest, data

management, and reporting, thereby allowing cybersecurity practitioners to dedicate more time to strategic initiatives and strengthening defences against cyberthreats. The growing importance of AI in cyber defence, especially in areas such as early vulnerability detection, automated threat modelling, and real-time threat detection, was also emphasised. According to Swaroop, generative AI has emerged an indispensable tool in the war against cyber threats. "In the future, AI will play an increasingly pivotal role in cyber defence. It is reshaping the industry by enhancing key areas such as early vulnerability detection, automated threat modelling, and real-time threat detection. "Moreover, it improves vendor risk management, penetration testing, and addressing new attack surfaces created by AI technologies," he said. The evolution of AI solidifies its status as an indispensable tool in the ongoing war against cyber threats. "We think it is important to secure the AI stack against threats like data poisoning and supply chain vulnerabilities while ensuring compliance and security," Swaroop said. The Accel partner concluded his address by highlighting the importance of integrating AI technologies to create new opportunities and face more formidable challenges as the broader cybersecurity market expands.

Budget proposals for marine sector to boost India's aquaculture, seafood exports: MPEDA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Budget announcements for the marine sector such as rationalisation of customs duties and financing facilities will help boost the country's India's aquaculture and seafood exports, MPEDA said on Thursday. The Marine Products Export Development Authority (MPEDA) also said the Budget includes a range of strategic measures aimed at bolstering the competitiveness of marine products, with a particular focus on shrimp production and export. Various inputs used in the manufacture of shrimp and fish feed will now enjoy customs duty exemptions, it said adding a number of feed inputs such as mineral and vitamin pre-mixes, krill meal, fish lipid oil, crude fish oil, algal prime, algal oil are fully exempted from any import duty. Artemia and Artemia cysts which are key nutritional inputs in aqua hatchery were also fully exempted from any import duty. The Basic Customs Duty (BCD) on essential aquafarm/hatchery inputs such as Vannamei and black tiger broodstock, polychaete worms, and fish/shrimp feed has been



reduced to 5 per cent. Import duty for insect meal and single-cell protein has been cut down to 5 per cent. "These announcements made in the Union Budget 2024-25 are set to significantly enhance aquaculture and seafood export sectors," the authority said. It also said that the government has committed to providing substantial financial support to establish a network of Nucleus Breeding Centres (NBCs) for shrimp broodstocks. "This initiative is anticipated to drastically reduce India's reliance on imported broodstock, potentially saving the industry up to Rs 150 crore annually," it said adding hatchery operators are expected to benefit significantly, with projected savings of 50 per cent on broodstock costs.

Indians eye double-digit medal haul as Paris Olympics set for grand start

PTI ■ PARIS

Some would be carrying a huge burden of expectations, some others would look to spring a surprise and a few more would be eyeing the perfect closure to their glittering careers as the 117-strong Indian contingent aims for a better-than-before performance in the Olympic Games, starting here on Friday.

India returned from Tokyo with seven medals, and it is only natural that a double-digit performance is now desired in Paris.

Except for wrestlers, who have waded through a highly controversial build-up, athletes in all disciplines have had no complaints about their preparations.

Whether it was training abroad or getting the best of facilities to sharpen their skills, there was planning in place.

But will the hard work, the strategies and the unbridled support translate into medals?

THE BIG PICTURE

It will be a Herculean task to match the Tokyo figures of seven medals, given that except for reigning Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra, not many are top contenders in their respective disciplines.

More than half of the 117-member contingent is from three sports -- athletics (29), shooting (21) and hockey (19). Of these 69 athletes, 40 are debutants.

In other sports too, there are debutants like tennis player N Sriram Balaji and wrestler Reetika Hooda. They are not exactly inexperienced, but largely, India's campaign will be driven by the



athletes, who will be competing on a stage this grand for the first time. Then there are the seasoned ones who would be expected to raise their game suitably. Two-time medallist shuttler PV Sindhu, tennis player Rohan Bopanna, legendary table tennis player Sharath Kamal and hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh are certainly playing their last Olympics.

The hockey team has endured patchy form in the build-up to the Games, the boxers and wrestlers are lacking in real competition time. The shooters too have notched up mixed results heading

into the Olympics. The track and field athletes, especially Avinash Sable, have done well of late, but compared to their global rivals, their performances don't seem enough to put them in the bracket of medal hopefuls.

For instance, steeplechaser Sable has been consistently bettering his own national record. His best stands at 8:09.94 but there are seven international runners who have achieved better timing than that in the run-up to the Games. Given this, Even making the finals will be considered a huge achievement.

BEST CHANCE

India's hopes for podium finishes largely hinge on Neeraj, despite concerns around his adductor niggle, and the in-form badminton duo of Chirag Shetty and Satwiksairaj Rankireddy.

The coveted 90m mark has eluded Neeraj from Tokyo to Paris but the ace javelin thrower seems to be doing just enough, and most importantly, consistently, to land global titles.

On big competition days, Neeraj has fared better than his other fancied rivals and if he is fit, the javelin thrower from Panipat will have a chance to become only the

third athlete in India's sports history to win back-to-back Olympic medals.

Only Sindhu (2016 Rio and 2012 Tokyo) and wrestler Sushil Kumar (2008 Beijing, 2012 London) have managed to win two consecutive medals.

Rankireddy and Chirag have grown into one of India's most formidable men's doubles teams and they are being seen as certain medal winners.

Talking about Sindhu, she is not in the best of form and has also got a tough draw but if she can come through the initial rounds, the vast experience could help her make

the medal round.

HOCKEY: The men's hockey team has been inconsistent. It lost all five games in Australia recently after a mixed run in the Pro League. It was a far cry from the Asian Games in Hangzhou where the team emerged champion.

Penalty Corner conversion and maintaining the tempo throughout a match remain a concern.

And if that's not enough, the Indian team has been clubbed with heavyweights Australia, Belgium, Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland. There is no room for error if the team has to make the top-four from this pool.

SHOOTING: It's been a quiet build-up for the 21-member shooting contingent, the biggest ever, compared to London and Tokyo where stars such as Manu Bhaker and Saurabh Chaudhary had raised medal hopes with their exceptional performances in the run-up to the Games.

Even Divyansh Panwar and Elavenil Valarivan were hailed as future superstars but all of them have flattered to deceive.

There is hardly any spotlight on shooters but still Sift Kaur Samra (50m three position), Sandeep Singh (10m air rifle) and Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar (men's 50 m rifle) have it in them to end the 12-year wait for a medal.

Gagan Narang, who is now India's Chef de Mission, was the last Indian shooter to climb the podium when he won the 10m air rifle bronze in the 2012 London Games.

WRESTLING: The sport has delivered a medal for India in the last four editions. The hopes of winning four to five medals were

raised for the Paris Games but the protest against the Wrestling Federation of India brought the sport to a standstill.

There was no national camp, and no competition for a long time. The qualified wrestlers have trained on their own at the centres of their choice -- both in India and abroad.

Fitness status of many is not known, but going into the Games, Anshu Malik, Antim Panghal and Aman Sehrawat are considered India's best bets. Reetika Hooda, the U-23 world champion, will be a dark horse.

OTHERS: The archers and TT players have qualified for the Games on the basis of their rankings. While it is a huge achievement for TT players, the same can't be said about the archers.

They have promised a lot in the past too but have not been able to deliver. The recent episode of their coach being denied the Games accreditation means the campaign has started on a negative note.

Weightlifter Mirabai Chanu, the Tokyo Games silver-medallist, has struggled with injury and form of late and is perhaps not in the best frame of mind. There are question marks if she will be able to repeat her success.

Experienced boxer Nikhat Zareen and Nishant Dev will be watched keenly as their latest results have been encouraging. So far, India have won 35 medals at the Olympics with shooter Abhinav Bindra (2008) and Neeraj Chopra (2021) being the only two individual gold medal winners.

It's time to turn aspirations into achievements. Let the Games begin.

Ankita best-placed Indian at 11th in individual event

PTI ■ PARIS

Debutant Ankita Bhakat left behind seasoned campaigners like Deepika Kumar to emerge as the best-placed Indian archer at 11th in the Paris Olympics' women's individual recurve qualifications as the country secured a quarterfinal spot in the team event by finishing fourth here on Thursday.

The 26-year-old Ankita was the top-ranked Indian woman with 666 points, followed by Bhajan Kaur (22nd with 559 points) and Deepika Kumari (23rd with 658 points).

In the team event, India grabbed the fourth spot by scoring 1983 points. South Korea topped the standings with 2046 points. China finished runners-up while Mexico grabbed the third spot. The top four in the team standings directly advance to the quarterfinals, while those ending between 5th to 12th play the Round of 16 fixtures.

India will face the winner of the contest between France and Netherlands in the quarterfinals.

If they clear the quarters, India could be headed for a



semifinal showdown with heavyweights Korea. The Korean women's team has been invincible in the Olympics, winning a ninth straight medal in Tokyo three years ago. In the individual section, Korea's Lim Sihyeon smashed a world record score of 694 to top the standings, while her compatriot Suhyeon Nam scored 688 points to finish second. China's Yang Xiaolei was third with 673.

Ankita, who hails from Bengal and represents Tata

Academy, was the surprise package on the day from the Indian perspective, even as four-time Olympian Deepika faltered to return her worst ever qualification result at the Games.

Deepika will, for the first time, miss out on the mixed team berth as Ankita topped among the Indians.

Ankita will partner the top Indian finisher in the men's qualification in the mixed team finals.

The men's qualifiers get underway in the afternoon session.

There's a lot of improvement, you will see that on court: Sindhu

PTI ■ PARIS

From spending time in a hypoxic chamber to sparring with a variety of partners to adapt to different styles, Indian badminton ace PV Sindhu has left no stones unturned to be battle-ready for the Paris Games, where she will be chasing an unprecedented third consecutive Olympic medal. Sindhu's form has been patchy of late but she says the hat-trick of medals is very much possible because the last eight months spent with mentor Prakash Padukone has instilled confidence in her.

No Indian player has won three Olympic medals on the trot and a podium finish will make Sindhu arguably India's greatest athlete.

"I am aiming for a medal, definitely, yes. Whether it's one or two or three, it doesn't matter. I've won two medals and I don't want to take pressure by thinking that, oh, what is the third one," she said after a training session at Porte de la Chapelle Arena here.

"Every time I play Olympics, it's a new Olympics for me. So every time I go out there, I want to get a medal and hopefully, I will do that hat trick soon."



Sindhu had won silver and bronze in the last two Olympics at Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo respectively.

Before coming to Paris, Sindhu trained at Sportcampus Saar in Saarbrücken, Germany where the altitude, the weather, and the conditions are similar to the French capital.

There she created a hypoxic chamber (low oxygen) in her room and slept for a couple of days. Hypoxic chambers help prepare an athlete's body to function at higher-altitude places.

"I couldn't go to the high

altitude training center. I didn't have much time and obviously, there I couldn't have been playing. So I just thought, it would be good for me instead of going somewhere, getting it here and doing some changes and sleeping that way," she explained.

So, if the conditions demand the maximum from an athlete, with such training they feel ready to negotiate the challenge.

Sindhu said she has improved her strokes and is more consistent during the long rallies.

"Being much more confident in strokes," she replied when asked what difference she finds after training with Padukone.

"In women's singles now, there are a lot of long rallies and long matches, being consistent. I am confident in that now," she said.

"With every opponent, it's a different style and, you need to play the right stroke at the right time. And that's what Prakash sir also keeps saying. We've been working on that. And that's almost there. There's a lot of improvement. You will see that on court."

The 29-year-old also shared her training regime in Germany, where she sparred with all kinds of players and sometimes competed against two players at the same time.

"Saarbrücken training was really good. I was there for almost a couple of weeks and I got my own sparring partners as well. I got an opportunity to train with different people. One was like a left-hander and one was an attacking player, a rally player.

"And I had a Nigerian guy, who also was sparring with me. And one was a German singles player who was also playing with me for a couple of days."

Sindhu was an underdog in the 2016 Olympics, while she competed at Tokyo Games as an experienced player.

Talking about her journey, Sindhu said: "I've experienced two different kinds of Olympics where, in one, a lot of people shouted and cheered, but there was no pressure. In the second one, there were a lot of responsibilities and pressure, everybody wanted you to get a medal, but there was no crowd.

"But now it's a mixture of both (in Paris). I'm hoping for the best medal to come out there."

I watch clips of my goals to boost confidence ahead of Olympic debut: Hockey forward Sukhjeet

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian hockey forward Sukhjeet Singh is unfazed by the pressure of playing at the highest level and is watching the clips of his international goals to boost his confidence ahead of his Olympic debut at the Paris Games.

"I made my debut in the Indian team in 2022 and scored a goal in my debut match against Spain in the FIH Pro League. The journey so far has been good and I try to do my best in every match," he told PTI Bhasha in an interview before departing for Paris.

Having scored 22 goals in 70 international matches so far, Sukhjeet is prepared physically and mentally to face the pressure of the Olympics.

He is one of the five debutants -- Sanjay, Abhishek, Rajkumar Pal, and Jarmanpreet Singh -- who have joined the 11 members of Tokyo Olympic bronze medalist team for the Paris Games.

"I am not feeling any pressure



at all. We have played big tournaments, so we know how to handle pressure. We are confident of playing well against big teams in the pool as our preparation has been really good," said the 27-year-old.

The team will begin its campaign on July 27 against New Zealand, followed by matches against Argentina (July 29), Ireland (July 30), Belgium (August 1) and Australia (August 2). India and Australia have clashed on the hockey field a

total of 43 times since 2013, according to data from the FIH Data Hub.

Australia have emerged victorious 33 times, while India have won 8 games and 7 matches ended in a draw. Similarly, India has 8 wins, 16 losses and 6 draws in 30 matches against Tokyo Olympic champion Belgium in the last 10 years.

Sukhjeet had scored six goals in his debut tournament -- FIH Pro League -- in 2022. After this, he scored three goals in the 2023 World Cup

held in India. He was also part of the Indian team that won the gold medal in the Asian Games in Hangzhou.

"I watch my clips of the matches in which I scored goals before big matches. This increases my confidence and I try to do better in the next match. My previous performance makes me mentally stronger," he said when asked about mental preparations for the Olympics.

"Apart from this, talking to a sports psychologist before the semi-finals or finals in the Asian Games and also during the Asian Champions Trophy has benefited a lot. They tell us how to handle pressure. The tips I get from them are very useful.

"Senior players in our team, Shree Bhai (PR Sreejesh), Manpreet, Harmanpreet have a lot of experience. They tell us about their experiences and motivate us to perform well. If we have any problem, we talk to them."

Sukhjeet was introduced to hockey by his father Ajit Singh when he was six years old. Former Punjab Police

hockey player Ajit could not play for the national team but he wanted his son to don the India jersey.

"My father used to play for Punjab Police and he always had a dream to see his son represent India. It is because of his support that I am at this stage. It will be a proud moment for him and my entire family when I step on the field in Paris," he said.

Asked which players he is eager to meet in the Olympic Games Village, Sukhjeet said that at present the focus is on his preparation.

"I am looking forward to meeting Australian hockey team forward Blake Groves, against whom I have played many matches. But the focus is on our preparation, not on the glamour of Games Village.

"There is a good coordination between young and experienced players in the team and we are sure that the trend started in Tokyo will continue further in Paris," said Sukhjeet, who loves to listen to Punjabi songs to relax and unwind amid rigorous training.

PTI ■ PARIS

Experienced table tennis player Harmeet Desai believes the Indian men's TT team has "a very good chance" of reaching the optimum level of performance at the Paris Olympics and beat any side on its day, having prepared in earnest for the Games.

The Olympics will begin in the French capital on Friday with a grand opening ceremony in the iconic Seine river.

"On a given day, I think we really have a very good chance of beating any team. We have won against top teams in the world in the past and it is possible this time also if we give our best.

"In the Olympics, if all three of us can put on the best show then anything is possible," the 31-year-old said during an interview with Ultimate Table Tennis.

He played an important role in helping India clinch Commonwealth Games gold medals in 2018 and 2022. Desai is part of the Indian men's team along with Achanta Sharath Kamal,



Manav Thakkar and Sathiyar Gnanasekaran. He will also be competing in the individual events.

Desai's confidence stems from the fact that the Indian men's team had defeated the mighty Japan in the quarter-finals to clinch the bronze medal at the 2018 Asian Games. Speaking about the rise of Indian table tennis on the world stage, Desai credited the government's various schemes and the launch of Ultimate Table Tennis in 2017

for the development of the sport.

"UTT has helped us get more experience and exposure to play with international players and get guidance from foreign coaches. That was not the case before 2017.

"So, this kind of experience has helped the players get more self-belief and perform well in the international arena," he said.

The Indian table tennis contingent created history earlier this year when both the men's and women's teams qualified for the Olympics for the first time and the preparatory camps, in Bengaluru from June 7-16 and in Saarbrücken, Germany earlier this month, were focused on working out the perfect combinations for the team events.

The Indian men's team will face China in the opening round while the women's side will open their campaign against Romania. The individual events will be played from July 27 to August 4 whereas the team events are scheduled from August 5 to 10.

GAMBHIR'S FIRST HEADACHE: PANT OR SAMSON FOR T20I SERIES

PTI ■ COLOMBO

New India head coach Gautam Gambhir will have the onerous task of choosing between Rishabh Pant and Sanju Samson during the three-match T20I series against Sri Lanka starting from Saturday. While most of the key stars of the T20 World Cup winning side sans the retiring duo of Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are in the Island nation, the choice between two flamboyant wicketkeeper batters Pant and Samson won't be an easy one. Worse, even with two slots vacant, one can't fit in both the hard-hitting batters. Pant with 171 runs was the third highest run-getter for India in the T20 World Cup in the Americas but Samson, though was part of the team, didn't get into any game. A bilateral series against Sri Lanka, of late, has become a low-stakes affair with the two countries often engaged in inconsequential series, some of which India plays to help other international cricket boards stay afloat. One such series was supposed to be the upcoming one against Sri Lanka but it has assumed greater significance



after Gambhir took over as the coach and Hardik Pandya, a sure-shot candidate for captaincy was surpassed by Suryakumar Yadav. In this backdrop, the presence of Gambhir, a fiercely opinionated former India opener and a successful franchise-level mentor, will certainly have a broader say in the team composition, something that will be built over two years in the run-up to the next T20 World Cup. The choice of a keeper-batter



in T20Is hasn't exactly been a straight forward one for India, especially during the time Pant was out of action due to a horrific car accident in December, 2022. Ishan Kishan was around for some time before he fell out of favour after leaving the tour of South Africa midway. Samson has featured in some games, so has Jitesh Sharma and Dhruv Jurel in the interim. Samson, one of Pant's contemporaries, has so far played 28 T20I games with a

couple of fifties and strike rate of 133 plus. But it will be fair to say that 27 of those matches have come in the period between 2020 to present, having made his debut back in 2015. So in three and half years, 27 matches sporadically isn't a lot of games to build on confidence. While average is a slightly less important aspect in the shortest format, the Kerala star would himself admit that 21.14 doesn't do justice to his immense potential. On the other hand, Pant from his 74 T20I games has three fifties and a strike-rate of a shade below 127. Samson's average is thus pretty similar to the Delhi Capitals skipper, who scored at 22.70 per game. In terms of sheer numbers there is not much to choose between the two. Both are audacious stroke-makers, Pant's falling pull shots are fascinating while Samson on his day can hit the fastest of bowlers over extra cover for bay.

It will also purely depend on what the new team management feels. When it came to Rohit Sharma, he has blind faith in Pant's capabilities and Samson despite being in the squad wasn't even up for discussion during the T20 World Cup. However, in the next tour following the T20 World Cup when most first XI boys were rested, Samson played the last three games in Zimbabwe and was also appointed vice-captain to Shubman Gill. In terms of keeping, Pant is a far better keeper to spinners like Ravi Bishnoi but in T20Is, keeping skills aren't that important as there are very few balls that would pose trouble for the glovesmen. Gambhir was Pant's first first-class captain and has seen him as an 18-year-old even before he played for the India U-19s. But he has also been a big advocate of Samson's T20 prowess and vocal about his inclusion during his days as a TV pundit. It will be a very tough choice and even if Pant is picked for the series, he knows that he would have to not only score quick but also play a few big innings to stack up the numbers and keep Samson at bay.



F1 driver Esteban to join American Haas team from next season

AP ■ KANNAPOLIS (US)

Frenchman Esteban Ocon will drive for Haas from next season as a replacement for Kevin Magnussen, the American Formula 1 team said on Thursday. Details of the deal were not announced, with Haas only saying that the 27-year-old driver committed to a "multi-year contract starting with the 2025 FIA Formula 1 World Championship". Ocon, the only driver to win a race for Alpine since it rebranded from Renault at the end of 2020, has picked up just three points this season and had already announced he was leaving the French-owned team. His Alpine contract is expiring at the end of the season. Ocon made his F1 debut in 2016 with Manor and joined the then-Renault team for 2020. His sole career win

came at the Hungarian Grand Prix in 2021 for Alpine after a crash in wet conditions took out much of the field. "I am thrilled to embark on this new chapter in my Formula 1 career," Ocon said. "I'll be joining a very ambitious racing team, whose spirit, work ethic, and undeniable upward trajectory has really impressed me." Haas announced last week that Magnussen would leave Haas at the end of the season when his contract expires. On the eve of the Belgian Grand Prix, team principal Ayao Komatsu said Ocon will bring crucial experience to the team after 19-year-old Oliver Bearman also joined. The British driver will take the seat vacated by German driver Nico Hulkenberg, who is joining Sauber at the end of the year ahead of its rebranding to Audi for 2026.

Djokovic, Nadal could meet in 2nd round at Paris Olympics, Swiatek faces

AP ■ PARIS

Top-seeded Novak Djokovic could meet his longtime rival Rafael Nadal in the second round of the Paris Olympic tennis tournament. Djokovic was drawn Thursday against Australian Matthew Ebden and Nadal faces Hungary's Marton Fucsovics, with the winners of those matches meeting in Round 2. The 38-year-old Nadal won a record 14 of his 22 major trophies at the French Open. He won gold in singles at Beijing in 2008, and in doubles with Marc López at Rio de Janeiro in 2016. "Roland Garros as everybody knows is the most special place in tennis for me. I am enjoying the fact I am back for the Olympics," Nadal said on stage after the draw. "I am just trying to enjoy every single moment." French Open champion Carlos Alcaraz takes on Lebanese player Hady Habib. Top-ranked Iga Swiatek of Poland faces Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania in the opening round of the women's draw with second-seeded American Coco Gauff taking on Australian Ajla Tomljanovic. Gauff is the reigning US Open champion and is making her Olympic debut. She is a flag bearer for the US team at Friday's opening ceremony along with basketball star LeBron James.



She will be the first tennis athlete to carry the US flag. Djokovic and Swiatek have not won Olympic gold. Djokovic owns 24 Grand Slam trophies, more than anyone else in tennis apart from Margaret Court, but his only Olympic medal was a bronze in Beijing in 2008. Swiatek has won the French Open four of the past five years on the same clay courts at Roland Garros. Four-time major winner Naomi Osaka of Japan takes on three-time major champion Angelique Kerber of Germany. Men's and women's first-round play begins Saturday, and the top-ranked man won't be playing. Jannik Sinner pulled out on Wednesday because of tonsillitis. The 22-year-old from Italy posted on X that he took medical advice to sit out the Summer Games. Tokyo Games champion Alexander Zverev of Germany plays Australian Alex de Minaur.

WOMEN'S ASIA CUP SEMI-FINAL India start firm favourites against Bangladesh

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

Shafali Verma will be aiming to come out all guns blazing while Smriti Mandhana will be more than motivated to get a big one as India start overwhelming favourites against Bangladesh in the semi-final of the women's Asia Cup here on Friday. Shafali, with 158 runs, has been the second highest run-scorer in the tournament so far and against Nigar Sultana's team, which has a host of slow bowlers, she will have to give India a good start. The 'Women In Blue' pummeled the opposition in all three games -- winning by seven wickets against Pakistan, 78 runs against UAE and by an 82-run margin against Nepal.

However, skipper Harmanpreet Kaur knows that in Asia Cup, it is only the semi-final and final matter the most and they would not miss the fact that Bangladesh on select days can be a dangerous side. The start will be very important for India and Shafali will want her senior opening partner Mandhana to also fire in unison. The elegant left-hander was in great nick during her 45 against Pakistan, which could have been a bigger one in terms of volume. With UAE and Nepal being two of the three opponents during the group league stage, the Indian team would certainly face a sterner test against a bunch of decent slow bowlers in the Bangladesh



ranks. Slow left-arm orthodox Nahida Akhter and young leg-spinner Rabeya Khan have both claimed five wickets apiece. While Nahida with a parsimonious economy rate of 3.25 would like to build the pressure on an experienced batting line-up while leg-break bowler Rabeya is likely to push for wickets.

The medium pace department comprises veteran Jahanara Alam along with Ritu Moni, who also has chipped in with three wickets. However, with Harmanpreet, Richa Ghosh and Jemimah Rodrigues coming in the middle-order and all-rounders Deepti Sharma and Puja Vastrakar to complement them, India have a lot of quality

in their ranks. With pitches at the Dambulla Stadium slowing down considerably during the second half, India would like to defend a total on the big day. The semi-final will, however, be an afternoon game. Off-spinner Deepti has been very consistent with the ball taking eight wickets in three games so far. The economy rate of 4.66 has been equally impressive compared to Radha Yadav, who has been on the slightly expensive side. The Indian new ball duo of Renuka Singh Thakur and Vastrakar have been on target during the games. For Bangladesh, they haven't had too many impactful batters and if India can post anything in the range of 140-plus, it

could well be enough for a place in the final. **TEAMS** **INDIA:** Harmanpreet Kaur (C), Richa Ghosh (WK), Uma Chetry (WK), Smriti Mandhana (VC), Shafali Verma, Deepti Sharma, Pooja Vastrakar, Arundhati Reddy, Jemimah Rodrigues, Renuka Thakur, Dayalan Hemalatha, Asha Sobhana, Radha Yadav, Shreyanka Patil, Sajana Sajeevan. **BANGLADESH:** Nigar Sultana Joty (C), Shorna Akter, Nahida Akter, Murshida Khatun, Shorifa Khatun, Ritu Moni, Rubya Haider Jhelik, Sultana Khatun, Jahanara Alam, Dilara Akter, Ishma Tanjim, Rabeya Khan, Rumana Ahmed, Marufa Akter, Sabikun Nahar Jesmin.

Former AICF chief Sanjay Kapoor elected FIDE India zone president

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former All India Chess Federation (AICF) chief Sanjay Kapoor has been unanimously elected the president of FIDE India Zone, the sport's apex body in the country said on Thursday. The announcement was made during the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of AICF in Ahmedabad. Kapoor has been elected as the zone president for four years, and FIDE president Arkady Dvorkovich congratulated the Indian

administrator. Kapoor's new role marks a pivotal moment for chess governance in India, entrusting him with the responsibility of overseeing the game's growth and development across the globe. Speaking on his appointment, Kapoor said, "It is an immense honour to be elected as the FIDE India Zone President. I am committed to the growth of chess in every corner of our country and ensuring that we produce Grandmasters from each and every state." "My experience with the 44th

Chess Olympiad has shown me the incredible potential we have, and I am excited to work towards a bright future for chess in India and internationally," he added. Kapoor has been at the forefront of successfully staging the 44th edition of the Chess Olympiad in India. He was the AICF president when India hosted the event. Meanwhile, On International Chess Day (July 20) last week, FIDE also launched its Guinness World Record attempt for the most games played online and over-the-board in 24 hours.

Indian athletes' confidence has reached new high: Gagan

PTI ■ PARIS

Olympic medallist shooter Gagan Narang said Indian athletes' mindset has changed over the years and their confidence has touched unprecedented levels, encouraging them to set their sights on a gold medal. The London Games bronze medallist, who is serving as India's Chef-de-Mission at the Paris Olympics, felt the Indian athletes are now not intimidated by their counterparts from other countries. "There is a huge change in the motivation and the level

of thinking our athletes have today. We used to feel scared, under-confident because other countries were better. But slowly that's changed, the mindset (has) changed," Narang told reporters here. "People started watching sports, playing it, then we had great performances. The confidence is at a new high. Today's athletes don't go just to participate, they go to perform. "Someone in the top 8 or 5 wants to win a medal today and not just any medal but a gold. That's the difference in thinking of the athletes today.

"They don't think anyone is above them. They rate competitors at par and that's a very positive sign for Indian sport," Narang added. The 41-year-old said there has been an "unprecedented coordination" between the Sports Ministry, Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the national federations. "The support we have got from the government (this time) we never got before. The support has increased in the past few years, TOPS' players have increased, they have got all the facilities they wanted.

Paris aims to reset Olympics with audacious games and wow opening

AP ■ PARIS

Paris has long been a city of dreamers: Just look at the Eiffel Tower, for decades the world's loftiest structure. Audacity also underpins the French capital's plans for its first Olympic Games in a century, which open Friday with an opening ceremony for the ages. The most sprawling and elaborate Olympic opening ever — a gala spectacular Friday evening on the River Seine that even French President Emmanuel Macron says initially felt like "a crazy and not very serious idea" — kicks off 16 days of competition that promise to be ground-breaking, with

nearly every corner of the city hosting some aspect of competition. After two toned-down, pandemic-hampereed Olympics, expect a bold celebration. The heady marriage of sports and France's world-renowned capital of fashion, gastronomy and culture could also help secure the Olympics' longer-term future. Olympic organizers were struggling to find suitable host cities for their flagship Summer Games when they settled on Paris in 2017, enticed by its promise of innovations and the potential for the city of romance to rekindle love for the

Olympics, especially with younger audiences that have so many other entertainment options. But Paris' challenges are huge, too. Past and present sorrows hang over the Games. The city that has been repeatedly struck by deadly extremist attacks has to safeguard 10,500 athletes and millions of visitors. The international context of wars in Ukraine and Gaza add layers of complication for the gargantuan security effort. French elite special forces are part of the security detail for Israel's delegation. Still, if all goes well, Paris hopes to be remembered as a before-and-after Olympic watershed.

The first Games with nearly equal numbers of men and women, an advance that's been a long time coming since 22 women first got accepted as Olympians 124 years ago, also in Paris, will take another step toward aligning the Olympics with the post-#MeToo world. Paris also hopes to reassure climate-conscious Generations Z and beyond by staging Games that are less polluting, more sustainable and more socially virtuous than their predecessors. Many of the sports venues are temporary, because Paris didn't want to repeat the mistake of previous Olympic host cities that built new arenas and then had no use

for them. With iconic Paris monuments as backdrops — beach volleyball in the Eiffel Tower's shadow — and breakdancing added to a growing list of Olympic sports that target young audiences, expect plenty of viral moments on Instagram, TikTok and elsewhere. Crowds will be back for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic forced Tokyo to push back its Games to 2021 and keep spectators away, and the Beijing Winter Games in 2022, when China was locked down. Prize-winning French theater director Thomas Jolly is turning central Paris into

an open-air stage for the opening ceremony that will run through sunset and showcase France, its people and their history. The 330-meter-tall (1,083-foot-tall) Eiffel Tower will surely feature prominently. Hundreds of thousands of people, including 320,000 paying and invited ticket-holders, are expected to line the Seine's banks as athletes are paraded along the river on boats. During the extravaganza, a no-fly zone extending for 150 kilometers (93 miles) around the capital will close Paris' skies, policed by fighter jets, airspace-monitoring AWACS surveillance flights, helicopters that can carry sharpshooters and drone-disabling equipment. Helping Parisians move past the attacks of 2015 Showcasing and celebrating Paris could be joyously cathartic for the city that was plunged into mourning by extremist attacks in 2015. Guesses about the identity of the person or people who might get the honor of lighting the Olympic cauldron include soccer icon Zinedine Zidane and other French sporting heroes, but also survivors of Islamic State-group gunmen and suicide bombers who killed 130 people on Nov. 13, 2015. Paris is also taking gambles in hopes of leaving an

indelible impression on the Olympics' global audience of billions. The decision not to stage the opening ceremony in the traditional setting of France's biggest stadium — the Stade de France that was among the 2015 attackers' targets and is now the venue for Olympic track and field and to host skateboarding, archery and other sports in temporary arenas in the heart of Paris have made safeguarding the Games more complex. Rights campaigners and Games critics worry about the broad scope and scale of Olympic security, including the use of AI-equipped surveillance technology.

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