



OPINION 6 URBAN VIOLENCE: HUMAN NATURE VS CITY LIFE

WORLD 9 HARRIS URGES NETANYAHU TO END WAR

MONEY 10 GOLD, SILVER PRICES BOUNCE BACK ON GLOBAL CUES

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INDIA LOOK TO MAINTAIN DOMINANCE 12 SPORTS



Modi warns Pak on terrorism



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays homage at the Kargil War Memorial on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the 'Kargil Vijay Diwas', in Dras, on Friday

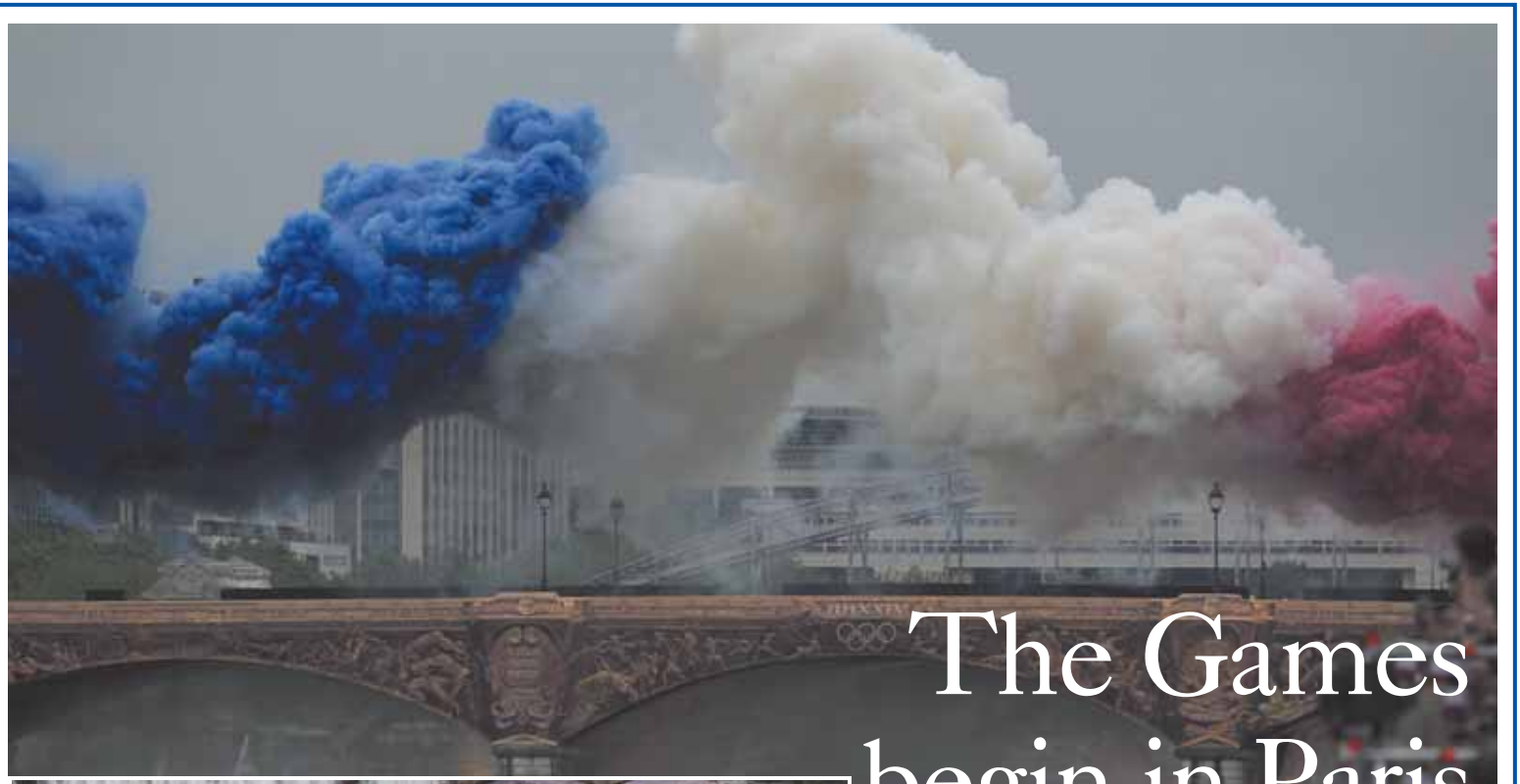
MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Sending out a terse message to the neighbouring country on the occasion of the 25th Kargil Vijay Diwas celebrations, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday warned Pakistan by asserting that the Indian soldiers will crush terrorism with full force and the enemy will be given a befitting reply. In his maiden visit to Ladakh after taking the oath of office for the third time, Modi also reminded Pakistan that it has not learned anything from the past. Without mincing any words the Prime Minister said, "In Kargil, we not only won the

war, we presented an incredible example of 'truth, restraint and strength'. The Prime Minister threw light on Pakistan's deceit at a time when India was making all efforts to maintain peace. "Falsehood and terror were brought down to their knees by truth", he added. Condemning terrorism, the Prime Minister said Pakistan has always faced defeat in the past. "Pakistan has not learned anything from its past and has continued to wage war in the garb of terrorism and proxy wars to stay relevant". Addressing the Shradhanjali Samaroh after paying homage

to the bravehearts who made the supreme sacrifice in the line of duty the Prime Minister said, "Today I am speaking from a place where the masters of terror can hear my voice directly. I want to tell these patrons of terrorism that their nefarious intentions will never succeed. Our soldiers will crush terrorism with full force and the enemy will be given a befitting reply," he added. "India will overcome all challenges that come in the way of development, be it Ladakh or Jammu & Kashmir", the Prime Minister reiterated.

Continued on Page 8



The Games begin in Paris



(Above) Smoke in the colours of the French flag billows in Paris during the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics on Friday. (Left) Team Greece travel by boat along the Seine River in Paris during the opening ceremony and (Right) Indian Badminton player PV Sindhi, arrives with others to board the boat for the opening ceremony of the 2024 Summer Olympics (AP/PTI)



Agniveers to be given weightage in UP Police, PAC: CM Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said that Agniveers who return after serving the country would be given weightage in UP Police and Provincial Armed Constabulary (PAC). He said that the country would get trained and disciplined young soldiers in the form of Agniveers. Chief Minister Yogi, while criticising the politics of the opposition on the Agniveer issue, said that the work of the opponents was to create obstacles,

hindrances and spread rumours in every progress and reform work. The chief minister said that under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India had become the fifth largest economy in the world today. He said excellent reforms had taken place in India in the last 10 years. Chief Minister Yogi said that the country was moving towards self-reliance in the modernisation of the Indian Army and its equipment. He was talking to the media at his official residence here on

Friday evening before attending the NITI Aayog meeting held in New Delhi. The chief minister said that reforms from time to time were very important for any country and society to establish new paradigms of progress and prosperity. There have been excellent reforms in every field in the last 10 years. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, work has been done to bring India's economy to a respectable position and make it the fifth largest economy of the world.

Continued on Page 8

Opp CMs to skip NITI Aayog meet, Didi to attend

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

The first meeting of NITI Aayog in the third tenure of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister is to see a "boycott call" by several non-BJP ruled Chief Ministers on Saturday. The meeting to be chaired by Modi will, however, be attended by West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee who albeit has called for scrapping of the NITI Aayog and replace it by Planning Commission. Apart from Congress and its alliance-ruled States like Jharkhand, which are part of the INDIA Bloc, declining to attend the crucial meet in the national Capital, Delhi, Punjab, and Kerala have also announced they will not be part of the meeting. Karnataka CM Siddaramaiah, Himachal Pradesh CM Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu and Telangana's Revanth Reddy have announced they will not attend the meeting over alleged bias against their States in the Union Budget. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK leader MK Stalin, Kerala's CM and CPI(M) leader Pinarayi Vijayan as well as Aam Aadmi Party (AAP)-led Delhi and Punjab Governments too called to boycott the meeting.



West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee arrives at Banga Bhawan, in New Delhi, on Friday PTI

"NITI Aayog should be scrapped and Planning Commission should be brought back. Thought it's my duty to raise our voice on common platform even though I know NITI Aayog has no financial power," Mamata said and confirmed to take part in the meeting. She said she will use the opportunity to register her protest against a "discriminatory Budget" and the

"conspiracy to divide Bengal and other Opposition-ruled States." The Chief Minister said she was asked to send her written speech seven days ahead of the meeting which she has done and it was before the Union Budget was tabled. "I will stay at the meeting for a while. If I get an opportunity to deliver my speech at the meeting and record my protest against the discrimination and political bias against the Opposition-ruled States in the Budget besides the conspiracy that is being hatched to divide Bengal and its neighbouring States, I will do so. Else, I will walk out of the meeting," the Trinamool Congress supremo said. An official statement said Modi will chair NITI Aayog's 9th Governing Council meeting which

will focus on making India a developed nation by 2047. The council, the apex body of NITI Aayog, includes all State Chief Ministers, Lieutenant Governors of Union Territories, and several Union Ministers. Modi is the chairman of NITI Aayog. According to the statement, the meeting aims to foster participative governance and collaboration between the Centre and State Governments, enhancing the quality of life for both rural and urban populations by strengthening the delivery mechanisms of Government interventions. The meeting will also focus on recommendations of the 3rd National Conference of Chief Secretaries held in December last year.

NEET-UG final results declared

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Testing Agency (NTA) on Friday announced the final results of the controversy-ridden medical entrance exam NEET-UG. The results were declared following directive from the Supreme Court after taking into account marks of a physics question, which the NTA had said has two correct answers.



"The re-revised score cards are live now," a senior NTA official said. Forty-four out of the 67 candidates who were earlier declared toppers had scored full marks because of the marks awarded for that particular physics question. The number of toppers was later reduced to 61 with the agency withdrawing grace marks awarded to six candidates to make up for loss of time at few exam centres. In a major setback to unsuccessful aspirants of NEET-UG 2024, the Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed the pleas seeking cancellation and re-test of the controversy-ridden exam, holding that there was no evidence on record to conclude that it was "vitiated" on account of "systemic breach" of its sanctity. The verdict came as a shot in the arm for the embattled NDA Government and the NTA, which were facing strong criticism and protests, on streets and in Parliament, over alleged large-scale malpractices like question paper leak, fraud and impersonation in the prestigious test held on May 5. The CBI is probing alleged irregularities in NEET-UG 2024 and has lodged six FIRs. The NEET-UG is conducted by the National Testing Agency for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in Government and private institutions.



Karnwariyas walk past the shops on which banners with shopkeepers' name were put up on Kanwar Marg after an order issued by Uttar Pradesh Government, in Muzaffarnagar PTI

Top court to hear Kerala, WB pleas on Bill assent denial

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In a significant development, the Supreme Court on Friday agreed to consider the separate pleas of Opposition-ruled Kerala and West Bengal, alleging the denial of assent to Bills passed by the respective legislative Assemblies. Kerala also alleged that Governor Arif Mohammed Khan referred certain Bills to President Droupadi Murmu and those were yet to be cleared. Taking note of the pleas, the top court issued notices to the Union Ministry of Home Affairs and the secretaries of Kerala Governor Khan and his West Bengal counterpart CV Ananda Bose and sought their replies within three weeks.

The bench of Chief Justice DY Chandrachud, Justice JB Pardiwala and Justice Manoj Misra also directed the Trinamool Congress-led West Bengal Government to make the Home Ministry a party to the petition. The CPI(M)-led Left Democratic Front Government of Kerala moved the SC in March, alleging that certain Bills cleared by the Assembly were referred to the President by the Governor and these were still pending assent.

Continued on Page 8

Assam heritage site gets UNESCO tag

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Assam's historical treasure, the Charaideo Moidam royal burial complex and shrines built by Ahom dynasty that ruled the Northeastern State for around 600 years, has received the prestigious UNESCO tag, marking the first cultural site from the region to receive this honor. This was announced during the 46th World Heritage Committee session in India. With this addition, India now proudly hosts 43 World Heritage Sites. The 'Moidams' in Assam's Charaideo district with their striking pyramid-like structures captures the State's regal past, and simultaneously offers a fascinating blend of history, architecture, and folklore of the Tai-Ahom dynasty. The UNESCO tag highlights the global appreciation of the Tai-Ahom dynasty's rich cultural



heritage and historical contributions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed pride and joy over the inclusion, highlighting the cultural and historical value of the 'Moidams' while Union Culture Minister

Gajendra Singh Shekhawat called the decision a "day etched in golden letters". 'Moidams' was submitted as India's nomination for inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List for the

year 2023-24. "The Moidams at Charaideo showcase the glorious Ahom culture, which places utmost reverence to ancestors. I hope more people learn about the great Ahom rule and culture. Glad that the Moidams join the #WorldHeritage List," Modi said in a post on X. The Moidams are a mound burial system that served as a resting place for Ahom kings and queens. They were constructed by providing an earth cover over a hollow vault made of bricks, stone or earth. The designated site contains 90 moidams of different sizes, which were created over a period of 600 years, and include other cultural features like ceremonial pathways and bodies of water, said a spokesperson from ICOMOS, the advisory body of the World Heritage Committee.

Continued on Page 8

SC extends Kanwar Yatra nameplate ruling

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday extended its interim stay on the directives issued by certain States to display the names of shop/ restaurant owners and hawkers outside their premises during the Kanwar Yatra season. A Bench of Justices Hrishikesh Roy and SVN Bhatti said the interim order passed by it on July 22 will continue. "The interim order shall continue," the Bench said while giving time to the States of Uttar Pradesh (UP), Uttarakhand and Madhya Pradesh to file their responses. The Bench said it won't issue any clarification on the July 22 order as "We

have said what needed to be said in our July 22 order. Can't force anyone to disclose names." A large number of devotees travel from various places with 'kanwars' carrying holy water from the Ganga to perform 'jalabishek' of Shivalings during the Hindu calendar month of 'Shravan'. Many believers shun consuming meat during the month they consider holy. Many don't even consume meals containing onions and garlic. The Bench also made it clear that there is no restriction on shops/ eateries voluntarily displaying names of its owners and employees outside their premises.

Continued on Page 8

World acknowledged valour of Indian soldiers during Kargil war: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Friday that the world recognised the indomitable valour and courage of Indian soldiers during the Kargil War. Speaking at the silver jubilee celebration marking the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas at Surya Auditorium of Central Command, in Cantonment here, Yogi remarked that the Kargil War was imposed on India. "Pakistan had covertly infiltrated Kashmir, imposing war on India. However, the outcome of the war was determined by our brave soldiers. Despite facing adverse circumstances, no enemy could stand against the valour of our soldiers," he said. The chief minister further stated, "I take immense pride in honouring the courageous women and families who have lost their loved ones in the Kargil War." He emphasised that India's global identity is not that of a country that forcefully monopolizes. Yogi highlighted that Indian tradition holds "Shastrena rakshite rashtr chinta pravartate," meaning that contemplation of 'shaashtra' (scriptures) is possible only in a nation safeguarded by arms. He remarked, "Even when India was a global leader in strength, intelligence and knowledge, we never initiated aggression. However, when invaders dared to disrupt our peace and goodwill, our brave soldiers made the



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath honoured the families of the martyrs at the felicitation ceremony organised during the Kargil Vijay Diwas programme in Lucknow on Friday

ultimate sacrifice to protect the motherland." Yogi stated that the state government consistently supports the brave soldiers who defend the country's borders. He mentioned that if a soldier is martyred in battle or while safeguarding the border, the state government provides Rs 50 lakh in assistance to their family. Additionally, employment is guaranteed for one family member. Since 2017, the government has committed itself to honouring the memory of martyred soldiers by naming a grand memorial, institute, or road after them in their village, city or town. Yogi remarked that Prime Minister Narendra Modi can

advance the vision of a 'developed India' only because the country's borders are secure today. On this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi honoured the father of Param Vir Chakra winner Captain Manoj Pandey, mother of Rifleman Sunil Jung, mother of Naik Abid Khan, wife of Naik Ramkesh Chandra Yadav, wife of Naik Rajendra Yadav, son of Lance Naik Ashok Kumar Yadav, Brigadier Akhil Kumar Sinha, Colonel Prabhat Ranjan, Colonel Gyanendra Pratap Singh Kaushik, Colonel Kshitij Srivastava, Naik Jitendra Singh and Sepoy Vinod Kumar Dubey. Yogi also visited an exhibition

showcasing the bravery of Indian soldiers during the Kargil War. On this occasion, Chief Minister Yogi took to Instagram to congratulate the people of the state and honour the valiant warriors of the Indian Army. He wrote, "Heartfelt congratulations to the people of the state on 'Kargil Vijay Diwas', a symbol of the indomitable valour, unparalleled bravery, and unmatched courage of the Indian Armed Forces! Salute to the immortal soldiers who made the supreme sacrifice to uphold the honour and sovereignty of Mother India! We are proud of the Indian Army's dedication and spirit of sacrifice. Jai Hind!"

Akhilesh, Maurya trade charges

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav on Friday targeted Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, calling him 'mohra' (pawn) of Delhi. The setback to the Bharatiya Janata Party in recent Lok Sabha elections has caused rumblings within the ruling party and Maurya is perceived to be creating dissidence at the behest of party high command in Delhi. Maurya hit back by calling SP chief the 'mohra' of the Congress party and suggested that he should save SP from "extinction". "The BJP has spoiled every system. Every system and every department has been ruined... I heard that (Keshav Prasad) Mauryaji is a 'mohra'. He is the password of Delhi's Wi-Fi. Tell me, will the government run

like this? UP will not run like this. They have cheated the people of UP," the SP chief said, addressing a press conference. Hitting back at Akhilesh Yadav on the 'mohra' remark, UP's Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya, in a post on X, called the SP chief the "mohra" of the Congress party. "The brave SP leader, Akhilesh Yadav, who has become a 'mohra' of the Congress, is harbouring misunderstandings about the BJP. Instead of targeting and insulting the most backward sections of society, he should focus on saving SP from extinction," Maurya posted on X. He expressed confidence that 2017 state assembly election results will be repeated in 2027 and the 'Lotus' will bloom again and the BJP will again form the government. Reacting to the UP deputy chief minister's remarks, Akhilesh said that they were

the 'mohra' of the poor people. "We are Samajwadi mohra. We are mohra of the poor," the SP chief said. Akhilesh Yadav unveiled the 'Samvidhan Manastambh' established to house a copy of the Constitution at the SP headquarters in Lucknow on Friday. Earlier on July 18, in a post on X, the SP chief had announced a "Monsoon Offer" in which he asked dissidents to bring a hundred MLAs and form the government in Uttar Pradesh. After SP chief and MP Akhilesh Yadav's "Monsoon Offer" announcement, the UP deputy chief minister called it "Mungerial ke haseen sapne" (a 1989 TV show on a daydreamer Mungerial). In a post on X, the BJP leader said that the public and the karyakartas will "wrap up the Monsoon Offer at 47" in 2027. "A sinking ship and a dying

party whose both present and future are in danger. He may see 'Mungerial ke haseen sapne' but they cannot be fulfilled," Maurya said in his post. Earlier, Maurya caused a stir with a post on X from his office that quoted him as saying, "The organisation is bigger than the government; the pain of the workers is my pain. No one is bigger than the organisation; the workers are the pride." The post made the opposition speculate that this was a sign of dissent in the BJP. Akhilesh Yadav alleged that the BJP's fight for power meant it was not thinking about the public. In the 2017 UP assembly elections, the SP managed to win only 47 seats while the BJP single-handedly won 312 seats with over 40 per cent vote share. The elections to the 403-member UP legislative assembly will be held in 2027.

Rahul stops briefly at cobbler's shop

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Former Congress president and leader of opposition in Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, once again presented an example of his simplicity and connection with the common people. While returning from the court to Lucknow airport, Rahul stopped at a roadside cobbler's shop in Guptarganj area of Sultanpur district on Friday afternoon. He stopped near MLA Nagar intersection under Kurebhar police station and enquired about shoe-making from the cobbler. He also asked the cobbler about the income

from making shoes. Talking to the media, cobbler Ramchet said that Rahul saw him stitching shoes and took information related to stitching and also listened to his problems. On meeting Rahul Gandhi, cobbler Ramchet said, "I told him (Rahul Gandhi) that we are weak in terms of money, I am poor, please help us a little. I showed

him how shoes are stitched," Rahul Gandhi interacted with people on the way from Sultanpur to Lucknow. He stopped his car and listened to the problems of the students he met on the way. He also discussed the paper leak with the students and asked what was its solution. The Congress leader had come to Sultanpur to

appear before an MP-MLA court in a defamation case against him. Local BJP leader Vijay Mishra filed the complaint on August 4, 2018 against Gandhi for his alleged objectionable comments against Amit Shah at a press conference in Bengaluru in May of that year during the Karnataka elections.

India set to become world's third-largest economy within next three years: CM

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, said that under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India was set to become the world's third-largest economy within the next three years. He emphasised that this milestone signifies a new era of prosperity and a significant step toward achieving self-reliance. The chief minister was addressing the Rajat Jayanti Samaroh held at Kargil Smriti Vatika on the occasion of Kargil Vijay Diwas. Reflecting on the 1999 Kargil war, he said, "It was a deceitful attack by Pakistan, which was met with a resolute response from Indian soldiers. This victory showcased India's bravery and valour to the world. India remains a peaceful nation committed to democratic values and ideals, which is why it has

never attacked any country." Highlighting the contribution of UP in building India as a self-reliant nation, Chief Minister Yogi said that work was going on at a fast pace on the six nodes of the defence industrial corridor in the state. Here, defence-related companies from India and abroad are setting up manufacturing units, presenting a new example of India's self-reliance in the defence sector, he added. "Under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, the country has entered the Amrit Kaal of independence. In light of this, we need to rise above personal interests and work towards realising the concepts of a developed India. We should prioritise national interest over individual concerns," he said, adding that today the country has a peaceful and harmonious environment, which paves the way for the nation's

prosperity. He paid tributes to the martyrs who sacrificed their lives defending the country's borders and extended his congratulations to the entire state on Kargil Vijay Diwas. Before the programme, Chief Minister Yogi paid tributes to the martyrs Major Ritesh Sharma, Captain Manoj Pandey, Captain Manoj Mishra, Lance Naik Kevada Nand Dwivedi and Rifleman Sunil Jung by laying wreaths on their statues installed in the Kargil Smriti Vatika and paid homage to their memories. During this, Urban Development and Energy Minister AK Sharma, Mayor Sushma Kharkwal, MLC Dr Mahendra Singh, Mukesh Sharma, Ramchandra Pradhan, Pawan Kumar Chauhan, Engineer Avnish Kumar Singh, Suresh Trivedi, MLA Neeraj Bora, and other dignitaries were present.

STF raid exposes how tech used to solve CSIR-NET paper in Meerut

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amidst allegations of opposition parties of paper leaks in all recruitment examinations, yet another case of cheating has come to light during the CSIR-NET examination in Meerut's Subharti University. A surprise raid conducted by the sleuths of the Special Task Force on Friday exposed how the students were helped in solving the question paper through use of technology. According to reports, on the basis of confidential inputs, a search operation was conducted by STF in the CSIR-NET examination centre, Subharti University, in Meerut. During the search, an extra admin computer was found connected through the local area network from the server room of the examination lab and two laptops were found in the server room in which Any Desk remote access tool was found.

UP STF chief informed the media that confidential information was received about cheating in Subharti University

The deleted history of the phone, the police found the names, data and roll numbers of the 11 candidates. Three employees of TCS, Usman, Arun Sharma and one more, have been arrested by the STF team and interrogations are on to extract details of others, including candidates, involved in the entire racket. UP STF chief Amitabh Yash informed the media that confidential information was received about cheating in Subharti University and the raid was conducted on this basis. He said that legal action had been initiated against all the accused involved in this case. Meanwhile, registrar of the Subharti University, Syed Zafar Hussain, denied the university's role in the cheating. "The university is closed due to Kanwar Yatra and the online examination centre on the campus was managed by officials of Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) so they are responsible for what happened and the university had no role in the examination," Hussain clarified. He further said that they had a contract with the TCS for conducting the exams so they had sought full details from it as their conduct had defamed the university.

Yogi concludes review meetings with public representatives, leaves for Delhi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, on Friday, concluded the extensive review meetings with public representatives from all 18 divisions of the state, focusing on the results of Lok Sabha elections. Over the past 20 days, MLAs, MLCs and MPs from each division presented the issues and expectations of their constituencies to the chief minister. Yogi held the meetings with the public representatives to have first-hand account for the cause of the setback suffered by the party during the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections. Yogi started the divisional review meetings from July 7 with a meeting with the MLAs from Devipatan and Ayodhya divisions. The meetings concluded on Friday after the chief minister met the representatives of Lucknow division. The meetings, officially described as a 'normal feedback' exercise to discuss development projects and to collect inputs on different issues, are believed to be aimed at pacifying the MLAs and party leaders who, in recent weeks, have questioned the functioning of the state government and bureaucracy. On July 22, during his visit to Azamgarh, the CM held a meeting with the elected representatives of Azamgarh division along with senior officials. "The chief minister emphasised the need for timely and high-quality implementation of public interest and welfare schemes. He directed that development projects be monitored consistently," according to a state-



Public representatives of Lucknow division paid a courtesy visit to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at his official residence in Lucknow on Friday

ment issued by the chief minister's office. On Friday, the chief minister asked the MLAs to pull their socks and start preparations for the 2027 state assembly elections. He asked the MLAs to make detailed analysis of the polling pattern in their respective assembly constituencies and prepare their action plan for the 2027 assembly elections on the basis of the results of the analysis. The chief minister assured of prompt action on the complaint by the MLAs about dereliction of duty by the government officials in implementation of the welfare schemes run by the government. During the review meetings lasting 20 days, the chief minister asked the MLAs to vociferously fight the false narrative spread by the opposition for destroying the social harmony and expose the canard spread by the opposition and bring factual position before the people. The chief minister also asked the MLAs to be in constant communication with the youth and women organisations and tell them how the recruitments to the government services were being made without bribes and without any discrimination on the basis of caste and religion. The

chief minister also asked them to be in touch with the sports-person of their respective constituency. The chief minister, during the review meetings, gave patient hearing to the elected representatives and directed the officials to prepare a strategy for regional development as per the aspirations of the people. During the review meetings, the chief minister gave important instructions to the MLAs for the next state assembly elections in 2027. He particularly pointed out that the elected representatives should be active on social media for effective communication with the people. He said it was the duty of the elected representatives to ensure that people were apprised of the achievements of the government and the development works done in their respective constituency. The CM also asked the MLAs to remain in touch with the beneficiaries of the welfare schemes. Later in the day on Friday, Chief Minister Yogi left for Delhi. He will attend the meeting of the NITI Aayog on Saturday, to be presided over by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. He will also meet the top leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party.

'Give Bharat Ratna to Kanshi Ram or stop misleading Dalits'

Lucknow (PNS): Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati on Friday hit out at the Bharatiya Janata Party over a party MP seeking Bharat Ratna for Kanshi Ram, saying the saffron party, which is in power at the Centre, should either award the highest civilian honour to the BSP founder or stop misleading Dalits. BJP MP from Shahjahanpur, Arun Kumar Sagar, on Thursday demanded in the Lok Sabha that Kanshi Ram be conferred with the Bharat Ratna. Hailing Kanshi Ram as a 'Bahujan Nayak', Sagar said the Bahujan Samaj Party founder was an ace politician and a social reformer who dedicated his entire life to the welfare of the downtrodden. The BSP chief and former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mayawati, in a post in Hindi on X on Friday, said if the BJP-led Central government conferred the Bharat Ratna on Kanshi Ram, the party would welcome it wholeheartedly. Mayawati also accused the Central government of not allocating enough funds to the state of Uttar Pradesh in this year's budget.

बैंक ऑफ इंडिया Bank of India **POSSESSION NOTICE**

Whereas, The undersigned being the authorized officer of the Bank Of India, under the Securitization 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 upon the borrower to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice. The borrower having failed to repay the amount, notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken 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. The borrower 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 Bank Of India Suratganj for an amount 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.

S. No.	Name & Address of Borrowers & Guarantors	Description of the Immovable property Mortgaged/ Owner of the property	Amount O/S as mentioned in the notice U/S 13(2) Date of Demand & Possession Notice
SURATGANJ BRANCH			
1.	Mr. Shiv Om Mishra S/O Raj Kumar Mishra & Mr. Hari Om Mishra S/O Raj Kumar Mishra	All that part and parcel of the property consisting of Land and Building at plot admeasuring 0.0885 Hectare situated at Khasra No. 372 min at Village: Baraiyya, Pargana & Tehsil: Ramnagar, District: Barabanki Bounded; On the North by Khadannja On the South by Khet of Ram Singh On the East by Khet of Bitana West by Khet of Durga Dayal	8,94,620.64/- + interest & other charges Demand Notice Dt. 13.05.2024 Possession Notice Dt. 23/07/2024
Date : 27/07/2024		Place : SURATGANJ	Authorised Officer, Bank of India

बैंक ऑफ बड़ोदा Bank of Baroda **Regional Office, Kanpur Metro Region: 118/330, 1st Floor, Gumti No. 5, Kaushalpuri, Kanpur - 12**

Possession Notice

Whereas the undersigned being the Authorised Officer of Bank of Baroda under the Securitization 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 calling upon the borrower & guarantor to repay the amount mentioned in the notice being within 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 borrowers/guarantors and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein below in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13 (4) of the said Act read with rule 8 & 9 of the said rules. The borrower/guarantor in particular and the public in general are hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the first charge of Bank of Baroda for amount & interest thereon. The borrower's attention is invited to provision of sub-section (8) of 13 of the act, in respect of time available to redeem the secured assets.

Sl. No.	Name and Address of Borrower/Guarantor & Description of Mortgage Property & O/S Amount as per Demand Notice/Demand Notice Date & Possession Notice Date
1.	Borrower : Shri Hari Prasad Kushwaha, Shri Suresh Kumar Kushwaha, Shri Lakhpal Rai Kushwaha and Shri Lala Ram Kushwaha, All S/O Late Ram Sanegi, All R/O : House No. 117/O/116, Geeta Nagar, Block-O, Scheme No. 1, Kakadeo, Kanpur Nagar. Branch : Tilak Nagar, Kanpur Demand Notice Date: 09-05-2024 • Date of Constructive Possession: 25-07-2024 Property : House No. 117/O/116, Constructed over Plot No. 389, Block-O, Scheme No. 1, Geeta Nagar, Kakadeo, Kanpur Nagar in the name of Shri Hari Prasad Kushwaha, Shri Suresh Kumar Kushwaha, Shri Lakhpal Rai Kushwaha and Shri Lala Ram Kushwaha, All S/O Late Ram Sanegi. Area : 338 Sq. Yards. Bounded-North : Railway Line, South : 40 Ft. Wide Road, East : Plot No. 388, West : Plot No. 390. Outstanding Amount as on Dated 18-03-2024 : Rs. 6,12,968.39 + Intt. + Others Charges
2.	Borrower : Smt. Deepika W/o Shri Ashok Balauda and Shri Ashok Balauda S/o Shri Satya Veer Balauda, Both R/O : E-269, EWS, Shatabdi Nagar, Phase-3, Panki, Kanpur Nagar and also at House No. 122/445, Shastri Nagar, Kanpur Nagar. Branch : D.I. Office, Kanpur Demand Notice Date: 07-02-2024 • Date of Constructive Possession: 23-07-2024 Property : Freehold Plot No. E-177A, Block EWS, Yojna-Kapli, Shatabdi Nagar, Phase-3, Situated at Gram Kapli, Distt. Kanpur Nagar in the name of Smt. Deepika W/o Shri Ashok Balauda, Area : 30 Sq. Mtr. Bounded-North : Plot No. E-178, South : Plot No. E-177, East : Plot No. C-37, West : 7.50 Mtr. Wide Road. Outstanding Amount as per Demand Notice : Rs. 16,73,021.01 + Intt. + Others Charges Total Dues Amount as on Dated 23-07-2024 : Rs. 17,48,263.45 + Intt. + Others Charges
Date : 27-07-2024	
Place : Kanpur	
Authorised Officer	

सेंट्रल बैंक ऑफ इंडिया Central Bank of India

"CENTRAL" TO YOU SINCE 1911

Regional Office: 117/H-1/240, Pandu Nagar, Kanpur

Demand Notice Under Sarfaesi Act, 2002 under {section 13[2]}

As per securitization and reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Securities Interest Act 2002 the Authorised Officer of Central Bank of India and Securities Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002 in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13 (2) read with Rule 3 the undersigned had issued a Demand Notice to return the loan as per Amount described in the list within 60 days from the date of Demand Notice. The undersigned had sent letters / demand notice to concerned debtors under registered post but returned without delivery. In connection with the above. Once again the borrowers/ guarantors are informed to make payment of the loan amount as per described in the list along with interest within 60 days of publication at concerned branch of Central Bank of India.

S. No.	Name & Address of the Borrowers/Guarantors	Date of NPA	Date of Demand Notice Amt. Outstanding (Rs.)
1.	Borrowers: Smt. Laxmi Devi W/o Shri Ved Prakash, Address: Premises No. 117 Q/42, Sharda Nagar Naveen Nagar, Kanpur-208025, Co-Borrower: Shri Jitendra Kumar S/O Shri Ved Prakash, Address: Premises No. 117 Q/42, Sharda Nagar Naveen Nagar, Kanpur-208025 Branch : Sisamau, Kanpur	29.05.2024	30.05.2024 Rs. 4,89,831.00 as on 30.04.2024 and interest thereon
Description of the Immovable Property		Property situated at: Residential Land & Building on House No.116/257 (Old), 362/627 (New), situated at Arazi No.257 Min, Part, Rawatpur Gaon, Kanpur Nagar-208019 Admeasuring: 83.61 Sq Meter Boundaries: East: Plot of Sultan Ahmad, North: Plot of Smt. Ramvati Pandey And Smt. Savitri Sahu, West: 16.00 Feet Wide Road, South: House of Smt Sheela Singh	
Date: 27.07.2024		Place: Kanpur	
		Authorised Officer, Central Bank of India	

Prez, Ministers pay tributes to armed forces on Vijay Diwas

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, Home Minister Amit Shah and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday paid tributes to armed forces on the occasion of the Kargil Diwas.

In her salutations, President Murmu said the Kargil Vijay Diwas is an occasion to pay tributes to the courage and extraordinary valour of the country's armed forces.

Kargil Vijay Diwas is observed on July 26 every year to mark India's victory over Pakistan in the 1999 war.

The Indian Army had launched a fierce counter-assault to push back Pakistani forces that had stealthily occupied important heights in Ladakh.

"Kargil Vijay Diwas is an occasion for a grateful nation to pay tribute to the courage and extraordinary valour of our armed forces," Murmu said in a social media post in Hindi. "I pay tribute to each soldier who made the supreme sacrifice while protecting Mother India on the peaks of Kargil in 1999 and bow in reverence to their sacred memory. I am sure that all countrymen will draw inspiration from their sacrifice and valour. Jai Hind Jai Bharat!" she said.

Rajnath said "Today, on the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, we remember the indomitable spirit and courage of the brave soldiers who fought valiantly in the 1999 war," in a social media post. "Their unwavering commitment, valour and patriotism



ensured that our country remained safe and secure. Their service and sacrifice will continue to inspire every Indian and our coming generations," he said.

Home Minister Shah said Indian soldiers displayed the ultimate valour in the inaccessible hills of the Himalayas during the Kargil War and forced the enemy army to kneel. Kargil Vijay Diwas is a symbol of the unwavering resolve of the valour of the brave soldiers of the Army, he said.

"During the Kargil War, the brave soldiers displayed the ultimate valour in the inaccessible hills of the Himalayas and forced the enemy army to kneel and made the country proud by hoisting the Tricolour again in Kargil," Shah said in a social media post. The Home Minister said the grateful nation would never forget the sacrifice and dedication of the Indian soldiers. "Today, on Kargil Vijay Diwas, I salute the brave soldiers who protected the motherland with their courage in this war," he said in

the post in Hindi. Chief of Defence Staff(CDS)General Anil Chauhan and all ranks of the armed forces also recalled the supreme sacrifice of the "Bravehearts".

"We draw inspiration from the heroes of Kargil, and we will continue to honour their legacy by defending our nation with courage, honour, and sacrifice," the headquarters of the Integrated Defence Staff said. Various events were organised across the country, including at the Kargil War Memorial in Dras, to mark the occasion. More than 500 soldiers made supreme sacrifice in the conflict. Jaishankar also paid tributes to the brave soldiers who defended the Nation's territory during the conflict. "On Kargil Vijay Diwas, salute the valour and dedication of our brave soldiers. The legacy of their courage and patriotism acts as a guiding light for all Indians," he said.

Parliament paid rich tributes and as a mark of respect for the soldiers who laid their lives in the war, both Lok Sabha and

Rajya Sabha members stood in silence for a brief while.

In the Lok Sabha, Speaker Om Birla recalled the bravery shown by the soldiers despite the tough conditions during the war, and paid tributes to their efforts in ensuring unity of the country. Birla also expressed empathy for the relatives of the armed forces personnel who lost their lives in the war.

In the Upper House, Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said a grateful Nation is celebrating the 25th anniversary of Kargil Vijay Diwas, cherishing the indomitable courage and valour displayed by the Indian armed forces during the Kargil war. "On this occasion, this House salutes the determination and commitment of our armed forces, for their extraordinary bravery leading to the resounding victory over the enemy despite the adverse weather conditions and difficult terrain of Kargil," the Rajya Sabha Chairman said. Over 500 soldiers made the supreme sacrifice in the conflict.

Noisy scenes in RS over Karnataka corruption issue

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha on Friday witnessed noisy scenes during the Zero Hour after Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar rejected notices by ruling party members to suspend listed business of the House to discuss an issue related to corruption in Karnataka, but allowed a BJP member to raise the matter.

Treasury members were on their feet to protest rejection of the notices under Rule 267 of procedure and conduct of business of Rajya Sabha, while Opposition, mainly Congress MPs objected to Chair's permission to BJP's Iranna Kadadi to raise the issue of corruption in Karnataka. Maharashtra Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation (KMVSTDC) as part of his Zero Hour mention. Kadadi, Brij Lal, Naresh Bansal and Sudhanshu Trivedi of BJP had given the notices. Dhankhar had to repeatedly ask the protesting members from both sides to accept his



ruling and bring order in the House.

Soon after the House paid homage to martyrs of Kargil War and laying of listed papers, the Chairman said while there were no notices under Rule 267 during the past two days, he has received four from MPs belonging to the ruling party demanding discussion on the issue of corruption in KMVSTDC by suspending the scheduled business. "All of them (notices) belonged to the ruling party. These

notices ignore my directives which were explicit. There may be issues of great importance, many have been raised under 267 earlier (by Opposition), I declined all of them. No issue which is otherwise of great urgency and contemporary relevance call for invocation of Rule 267.

This invocation notwithstanding your feelings on the issue does not come up to the requirement of Rule 267," he said while rejecting the notices. However, he said Kadadi has

been permitted to raise the matter as part of his Zero Hour mention.

When Kadadi's turn came to speak on the KMVSTDC issue, Congress members objected saying his name does not appear in the list of speakers for the Zero Hour morning session.

Senior Congress leader P Chidambaram said since Kadadi's name is not in the list circulated, the chair may allow him to speak on the issue some other day.

Dhankhar said while giving his ruling on the notices under Rule 267, he had categorically informed multiple times that Kadadi has been allowed to raise the issue during the ongoing Zero Hour.

Tiruchi Siva (DMK) requested the Chairman that other members too should be given permission as has been given to Kadadi.

To this, Dhankhar said he would allow provided a member seeks such permission.

Dhankhar asks Govt to place Shah panel report in House

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday asked the Government to explore the possibility of placing an authentic copy of the Shah Commission report on Emergency excesses on the table of the House, as it had investigated the "darkest period of democracy".

The Shah Commission report relates to atrocities committed during the Emergency imposed in 1975. During the Zero Hour, Dhankhar asked the Government to take note of the issue raised by Deepak Prakash, a BJP MP from Jharkhand, regarding the matter relating to the Shah Commission report.

"The Government must examine the possibility of having the authentic report (of Shah Commission) and place it on the table of the House for the benefit of the members and public at large," he said.

The Shah Commission was set up to investigate the 'darkest period of democracy' and the report relates to atrocities committed during the Emergency imposed in 1975, he noted.

Earlier raising the issue, Prakash said, the Shah Commission, which was set up in 1977, conducted 100 sittings and evaluated 48,000 documents. The final report was presented on August 6, 1978. This report was published in three



volumes. "Indira Gandhi led Government came in 1980. This report was destroyed. But one copy of the Shah Commission report is available in the National Library of Australia. This report will reveal the real facts of the Emergency," he said. He demanded that the Shah Commission report should be made public.

Meanwhile, Sushmita Deb, a Trinamool MP from West Bengal, demanded the release of funds to deal with the situation arising from Assam floods.

Harbhajan Singh, an AAP MP from Punjab, demanded to convert Bhakra Beas Management Board Hospital in Talwara into either a post graduate institute (PGI) or All India Institute of Medical Science.

No expert committee to extend Ayushman Bharat coverage: Jadhav

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of State for Health Prataprao Jadhav on Friday said that no expert committee has been set up to extend Ayushman Bharat coverage to citizens aged 70 and above.

In his response to the Lok Sabha, Jadhav stated that the existing Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) already covers all eligible family members regardless of age, providing up to ₹ 5 lakh per family per year for hospitalisation.

He was responding to a question on whether the Government proposed to cover citizens aged 70 and above by expanding Ayushman Bharat through the launch of National Health Claims Exchange and if an expert panel had been set up to strengthen the format of the scheme for the planned expansion.

Intriguingly, last month on June 27, President Droupadi Murmu had announced that all citizens aged above 70

years will receive free treatment under the Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme.

This declaration was made during her address to the joint sitting of Parliament in the National Capital.

President Murmu had also highlighted the progress of the Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY), which currently provides free health services to 55 crore beneficiaries.

However, Jadhav, in a written reply, said all members of eligible families, irrespective of age, were covered under Ayushman Bharat - Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana.

The scheme provides health insurance cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalisation to 55 crore individuals, corresponding to 12.34 crore families, he said.

"No expert committee has been set up for extending the health benefits to cover senior citizens aged 70 and above," he stated. Responding to another question,

Jadhav said.

He said 34 insurers and third-party administrators were live and approximately 300 hospitals ramping up to start sending their claims on the National Health Claims Exchange (NHCX), which aims to streamline and fasten health insurance claim processing, as on July 21. Jadhav said the government built the NHCX gateway under the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission.

It serves as a gateway for exchanging health claim information among insurers, third party audit, healthcare providers, beneficiaries and other relevant entities and ensures interoperability, machine-readability, auditability and verifiability, making the information exchange accurate and trustworthy, the minister said.

Supported by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India and the General Insurance Council, the NHCX will enable standardised and faster health insurance claim processing, Jadhav said.

Over five crore cases pending in courts

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

More than five crore cases are pending in various courts across India, with a maximum of over 1.18 crore in the subordinate courts of Uttar Pradesh, according to the government's written reply in the Lok Sabha.

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal said while 84,045 cases are pending in the Supreme Court, 60,11,678 were pending in the various High Courts. District and subordinate courts are the biggest contributors, with 4,53,51,913 cases pending with them, according to the minister.

Meghwal said several reasons lead to the pendency of cases, including the availability of physical infrastructure and supporting court staff, the complexity of facts involved, the nature of evidence, and the cooperation of stakeholders, including the bar, investigation agencies, witnesses and litigants. Proper application of rules and procedures also plays a key role, he said.

Other factors that lead to delays in the disposal of cases include lack of prescribed time frame by courts for disposal of various kinds of cases, frequent adjournments and lack



of adequate arrangement to monitor, track and bunch cases for hearing, the Minister added.

He also informed the House that over 200 proposals sent by various High Court collegiums for High Court judgeship are at various stages of processing.

In a written reply, Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal also cited an opinion of the Supreme Court Collegium that expression of views by a candidate does not disentitle him or her to hold a constitutional office so long as the person proposed for judgeship is a person of competence, merit and integrity.

There have been instances in the past where the Government had either held back or returned to the collegium for consideration names of persons who had expressed their views on various issues as advocates.

Meghwal told the House that the Government, as an important stakeholder in the process of appointment of Judges in the High Courts and as laid down in the Memorandum of Procedure, provides inputs which mainly contain information on the suitability, competence and integrity of the candidates under consideration for appointment to high constitutional post in the judiciary. The recommendations along with inputs are then submitted to the SC Collegium for advice.

As per the procedure, the High Court collegiums send their recommendations to the Department of Justice in the law ministry which adds inputs on the candidate along with IB reports and sends it to the SC Collegium to take a call. As on date, 205 proposals recommended by the various High Court Collegiums are at various stages of processing, he said.

Appointment of SC and HC judges is a continuous, integrated and collaborative process between the Executive and the Judiciary. It requires consultation and approval from various constitutional authorities both at state and central level, he noted.



Coast Guard rescues 14 Indian crew of grounded vessel

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Coast Guard (ICG) evacuated 14 Indian crew of grounded vessel bulk carrier JSW Raigad off the coast of Alibaug, Maharashtra at about 0930 am on Friday, Defence Ministry said here.

Giving details, officials said the ICG Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) Mumbai, received a distress call from the carrier at 1327 hours on Thursday. The vessel measuring 122 meters with 14 Indian crew on board ran aground on reefs approximately 01 nautical miles from Alibaug. It reported anchor dragging, flooding in the engine room and loss of control. In the backdrop of extreme sea conditions along the Maharashtra coast and presence of reefs in the area, airlift emerged as the only viable rescue option.

Opp criticises PM Modi over remarks on Agnipath recruitment scheme

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Opposition parties on Friday criticised Prime Minister Narendra Modi over his remarks regarding the Agnipath scheme while paying tribute to martyrs on Kargil Vijay Diwas and demanded a review of the scheme.

Modi said the Agnipath recruitment scheme was an example of necessary reforms undertaken by the Army and accused the Opposition of playing politics over the recruitment process aimed at keeping the average age in the armed forces low.

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge and other party leaders accused the Prime Minister of indulging in "petty politics" over the Agnipath issue and said the Prime Minister's remarks that his Government implemented the scheme at the behest of the Army was a "blatant lie".

"It is very unfortunate and deplorable that Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji is doing petty politics even on occasions like paying tribute to martyrs on Kargil Vijay Diwas. No Prime Minister has ever done this before," Kharge said.



"Modi ji is saying that his Government implemented the Agnipath scheme at the behest of the Army. This is a blatant lie and an unforgivable insult to our valiant armed forces. Modi ji, it is you who is spreading lies! he said in a social media post.

Asserting that many retired officers had strongly criticised the scheme, the Congress chief said the Agnipath scheme was endangering National Security and the aspirations of the rural youth.

All this is on record, he said and demanded that the scheme be completely scrapped. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh accused Modi of "lying" even on Kargil Vijay Diwas. "He (Modi) says the Agnipath/Agniveer scheme was introduced by the Army,

General M M Naravane, who was Army chief at that time, has written that the scheme came as a complete surprise to the Army and as a 'bolt from the blue' to the Navy and Air Force. Modi is now trying to evade responsibility for this disastrous scheme," he said in a social media post.

Congress MP Vivek Tankha claimed the scheme was brought with very little consultation. Those consulted did not have to courage to suggest changes, he alleged.

"You kept the absorption rate at 25 per cent which is very low. If it was 50 per cent or 75 per cent, people may not have opposed it..."

How can you abandon them (Agniveers) after four years," he asked. Congress leader Karti

Chidambaram termed Agnipath an "ill-conceived scheme".

"Modern warfare and modern military campaigns require a professional army which is tremendously technology oriented. Agniveer scheme neither gives training nor does it give Commission. It does not equip a soldier for modern warfare," he said.

"It (Agnipath) is a temporary outsourcing arrangement. The Government is doing this only because it wants to save money by not giving them (Agniveers) the benefits that would come from a full commission. This does not in any manner serve the needs of a modern army," he said.

Congress MP Ranjit Ranjan asserted that when his party comes to power, the scheme will be scrapped.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) MP Mahua Maji said the scheme needs to be reviewed as it does not provide any social security to the Agniveers.

"I salute the martyrs of Kargil. Whenever foreign nations have attacked us, our brave soldiers have sacrificed their lives," she said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Honouring the heroes

Kargil Vijay Diwas marks India's triumph over adversity and the enduring spirit of its armed forces

Twenty-five years ago, India won a war that was thrust upon it. The war with Pakistan was won by some exemplary soldiers who fought valiantly and many laid their lives for the honour of the country. Kargil Vijay Diwas, commemorating the victory in the Kargil War against Pakistan in 1999 is celebrated on July 26. Prime Minister Modi paid rich tributes to the martyrs on the Vijay Diwas at Kargil Memorial. This year is special as the nation celebrates the silver jubilee of the victory. Prime Minister Modi visited the Kargil War Memorial in Drass, Jammu and Kashmir, to pay homage to the brave soldiers. However, the Indian borders are still far from secure. Terrorist activities are on the rise. So the big question is where do we stand today? Have we learnt our lessons? The Kargil War took place in the months of May and July 1999 and was a result of Pakistan's infiltration into the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC). Pakistani soldiers, disguised as militants, occupied strategic heights in the Kargil sector of Jammu and Kashmir. This unexpected intrusion led to Operation Vijay; a historic military campaign launched by India to reclaim the occupied territories. Despite the adverse circumstances, the Indian Armed Forces displayed unparalleled bravery and strategic acumen. The conflict culminated on July 26, 1999, with India successfully regaining control over the occupied regions. The Kargil expedition of Pakistan was indeed an eye-opener. India came to know of it rather late and that too from the locals who reported suspicious activity in the hills.



This was indeed a glaring intelligence failure that cost more than five hundred lives of soldiers. The war underscored the need for better intelligence and surveillance. India has since fortified its intelligence network and improved border security to prevent such infiltrations. The Kargil War also highlighted the importance of modern weaponry and equipment. In response, India has made significant investments in modernising its military capabilities. But the biggest lesson learnt by the Indian army was to prepare itself for high-altitude warfare. The conflict emphasised the need for specialised training for high-altitude warfare. The Indian Army has since established dedicated training programs and infrastructure to prepare soldiers for such challenging environments. The war also showcased the significance of international diplomacy. India effectively garnered global support against Pakistan's actions, leading to increased diplomatic pressure on Islamabad. The lessons learnt from the conflict have led to significant advancements in military strategy, technology, and international relations. However, we have a long way to go as the strained relations with two neighbours — Pakistan and China — can anytime erupt into a war. Indeed, Prime Minister Modi's visit to the Kargil War Memorial serves as a reminder of the nation's gratitude and respect for its armed forces. It also reinforces the commitment to safeguarding the nation's integrity and sovereignty. Jai Hind!

The change has taken place in the course of the past few thousand years, which, says Morris, is "almost instantaneous" in evolutionary terms. Human beings have adapted themselves so brilliantly to their new environment that they have come to believe this to have been a gradual process, and they are biologically fully equipped to deal with it. This is not the case. Biologically, humans remain the simple, rural animals described in scene one above. According to Morris, they "lived like that, not for a few centuries," but "for a million hard years." They "changed biologically" and

PICTALK



A soldier pays homage at the Kargil War Memorial on the 'Kargil Vijay Diwas', in Drass

Urban violence: Human nature vs city life



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Urban violence and crime persist globally, often blamed on policing and socio-economic factors. However, the deeper cause is the conflict between urban life and human nature

Urban violence and crime have been matters of continuing global concern. While the quality and adequacy of policing, and some social and economic factors, have been discussed in this context, the basic, underlying cause has escaped sufficient attention. It is the conflict between the very character of urban life and the orientation of the human ethos as it has evolved. The matter has been dwelt upon comprehensively by Desmond Morris in The Human Zoo. His focus has not been on crime but on the wider consequences of the conflict in terms of the future of human beings. His observations, however, have implications which no serious researcher in urban violence and crime can ignore. The primary cause of conflict between urban life and human ethos, according to Morris, is overcrowding caused by population growth. He describes two vastly different scenarios at the very beginning of the book. In the first, people are members of a tribe, comprising a "compact group" of 60, living in a piece of land 20 miles long and 20 miles wide, which is forested and inhabited by "animals, small and large." In the second, they live in an area of the same dimensions but which is "civilized, inhabited by machines and buildings," and where there are a "compact group of six million human beings," a "hundred thousand individuals for everyone in the first scene."



The change has taken place in the course of the past few thousand years, which, says Morris, is "almost instantaneous" in evolutionary terms. Human beings have adapted themselves so brilliantly to their new environment that they have come to believe this to have been a gradual process, and they are biologically fully equipped to deal with it. This is not the case. Biologically, humans remain the simple, rural animals described in scene one above. According to Morris, they "lived like that, not for a few centuries," but "for a million hard years." They "changed biologically" and "evolved spectacularly" during this period when the pressures of survival, which were great, moulded them. The problem, according to Morris, is that humans had evolved as tribal animals and "the basic characteristic of the tribe is that it operates on a localized, inter-personal basis. To abandon this fundamental social pattern, so typical of the ancient human condition, was going to be against his grain." This, however, is precisely what humans had to do with the emergence of towns. Inter-city coordination developed with the growth of agriculture and trade. The human being "became a citizen, a super tribes man, and the key difference was that as a super tribes man he no longer knew personally each member of his community." It was this change from the personal to the impersonal society, "that was going to cause the human animal the greatest agonies in the millennia ahead. As a species we were not biologically equipped to cope with a mass of strangers masquerading as members of our tribe. It was something we had to learn to do, but it was not easy we are still fighting against it in all kinds of hidden and ways—and some that are not so hidden." People have tried to satisfy



EVEN WITHOUT MOBS AND GANGS, TRIVIAL CAUSES SPARK VIOLENCE WHEN OVERCROWDING GRATES ON ONE'S NERVES. INSTANCES OF 'ROAD RAGE' ARE EXAMPLES OF THIS

their desire for cooperative personal relationships by forming tribe-sized "sub-groups or pseudo-tribes within the main body of super-tribes" with social or professional companions. This, however, has also meant viewing other sub-groups as being beyond the pale and enabling their members—even those personally known to one—to be treated as badly as members of an impersonal mob. This writer feels that criminal gangs constitute a form of such sub-groups or pseudo-tribes. These are small groups whose members can be compared to tribal hunters searching for prey, which, instead of animals, are the human victims of their crime. This is particularly so in instances of armed robberies or targeted mob violence. Gang leaders, like leaders of the earlier hunters, guide and protect gang members but also demand unquestioning obedience and treat mercilessly anyone who, they feel, have deserted or betrayed them. Mobs have been a part of urban life since the very beginning, and a proneness to violence and criminal activity is inherent in their dynamics. The anonymity it lends to members, hinders detection in cases of collec-

tive violence. Also, tussles for leadership lead to attempts to garner support by resorting to competitive encouragement of violence. Equally, individual members of mobs can try to stand out in a crowd by perpetrating or calling for singularly violent acts. Even without mobs and gangs, trivial causes spark violence when overcrowding grates on one's nerves. Instances of "road rage" are examples of this. Things are going to get worse as rising temperatures, cloudbursts, flash floods, cyclones, tornados and massive tidal waves, become increasingly frequent as a result of climate change—thereby severely affecting cities and towns. There has to be a serious global discourse on all aspects of urban life including law and order. There can doubtless be no question of reversing the course of history and returning to tribal life. One can, however, think of devising patterns of community existence which consciously addresses this problem, encouraging inter-personal contacts and diminishing the scope for sub-group conflicts. Unfortunately, no such effort is under way. (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SC MUST INTERVENE

Madam — At last, the Supreme Court of India has stepped in to play a crucial role in involving the state governments of Punjab and Haryana to find a positive solution to the ongoing farmer protests at the Sambhu border. The Court has suggested forming a committee of independent individuals to negotiate with the farmers. It is indeed frustrating that the farmers, the "annadata" (food providers) of our country, are back on the streets fighting for a legal guarantee of the Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops and other demands to reach the NDA government. Currently, the Centre, under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, seems to have turned a blind eye to the plight of farmers, particularly in Punjab and Haryana. The prolonged standoff between the Haryana government and protesting farmers, which began on February 13, has led to road blockades, disrupted public life, and traffic movement, compelling the Supreme Court to act. The Centre has yet to address or resolve the farmers' issues, leading to renewed protests with uncertainty. The Congress has only offered hollow assurances and remained a passive observer. It is hoped that the recent meeting between farmer leaders and Rahul Gandhi in Parliament, along with the Apex Court's efforts, will lead to a resolution of the issue without further delay.

Janga Bahadur Sunuwar | Jaipur

BUDGET: THE GOOD BAD AND THE UGLY

Madam — The Union Budget for 2024-25 can be viewed in three layers. The positive aspect is its focus on boosting economic activity and generating employment opportunities across various sectors, with significant support for MSMEs. However, the budget fails to address the needs of the salaried class, leaving them with unmet expectations. The most concerning aspect is the complete disregard for senior citizens,

SC stays nameplate diktat



This refers to the news article, "SC Stays Nameplate Diktat on Kanwar Yatra Path" (July 23).

The Honorable Supreme Court has taken a constitutional, legal, and practical stance by issuing an interim stay on the Yogi government's order regarding name plates along the Kanwar route. The order from the Yogi government appears to have been issued to protect the sentiments of Kanwar Yatrias. However, there are differing opinions on this issue within society. Creating a false identity or concealing one's caste, religion, or creed can be considered condemnable, anti-social, and illegal. Currently, the matter is under review by the Honorable Supreme Court, and all related aspects will be examined, taking into account social, religious, and legal provisions. Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

as the Finance Minister has not increased savings interest rates or provided health support through government schemes. Despite Modi 3.0 winning with the support of young and senior citizens, the government seems to have prioritized coalition partners from Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, neglecting these crucial demographics. This budget highlights a troubling trend of prioritising political alliances over national interests. The government could have showed more concern to the marginalised groups and given them more concessions in the budget rather than pleasing its allies. The budget is supposed to be for the entire nation not for the political allies, so it should take care of all.

A P Thiruvadi | Chennai

CONCERNS OVER PM POSHAN SCHEME

Madam — Lakhs of underprivileged schoolchildren struggling with anemia and malnutrition have benefited from the "PM POSHAN scheme," which addresses both hunger and education

Exploring our bonds: From castes to communities



SANJAY CHANDRA

Our innate desire for connection spans from school rivalries to the unique structures within organisations revealing the deep-seated need for identity and bonding

Humans, as we are now, evolved around 700,000 years back. It took us millennia to be domesticated, seeking warmth and the safe environs of a family, community, caste, religion, faith, ideology, locality, city, and the country. One only has to travel in a train to understand these bonds. No sooner are you settled, when the friendly co-traveller wants to know the place that you belong to. The ice breaker is enough for complete strangers to explore more intimate details and search for relatives in case of a shared caste, or neighbours or even mutual friends otherwise. I remember a few interesting incidents. I was around 8, when our teacher asked us our castes. I was not aware and was tasked to inquire from my parents. The next day I excitedly raised my hand to blurt out the response, the teacher stumped me with yet another googly - my sub caste. Almost three and a half decades later, my daughter was also asked the same question in her class. She was also unprepared. This time I



armed her not only with the caste, but the sub caste as well. Though, I am not sure if my ignorance was a reflection on inadequate feelings of belonging, or it was the grand sentiment of patriotism. I lived in a hostel in Japan for three months for a training. There were hundreds of men and women of different nationalities interacting with each other in the mess or during the entertainment programs over weekends. It was interesting to note people bonding with each other in a foreign land based on common language. We from the Indian subcontinent gravitated towards Hindi or Urdu speaking persons, irrespective of the nationalities.

Spanish speaking people from Europe to South America formed their own group. I also remember a train ride in Switzerland in 2005, when an advertisement caught my eye. An Indian movie star stared back at me, exhorting me to buy an expensive item. I did not have the money, but the pride of an Indian face on a Swiss train compensated for the lack of resources. During my professional life in the railways, there was a perennial debate about the utility of having different departments and officer level recruitment based on the same, which many thought led to a departmental bias. The Indian organization has now done away with the practice - it is now a unified management service. Efficacy of the change will be known only in future. I believe railway organisations across the world have department based cadres. It instills a sense of pride in belonging to the department, leading to more efficient working. I also remember our school days. Each of us were divided into Houses, which were usually named after different

colours or celebrity Indians. There was a healthy system of each House scoring points during the academic year, culminating into the grand finale - the annual sports. We would be cheering our House performers till our sore throats would permit. I never witnessed animosity or professional envy on the better performance of rivals. We tend to overlook a reality, probably because it is deeply ingrained in our psyche. Indian army has regiments based on communities. I have yet to come across any community biased incidents in the services. It might have something to do with the organization's resilience and strength of its leaders. Louie Schwartzberg, American director, producer, and cinematographer, aptly remarked, "I think we need to do some deep soul searching about what's important in our lives and renew our spirit and our spiritual thinking, whether it's through faith-based religion or just through loving nature or helping your fellow man." (The writer is an author; views are personal)

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FIRST COLUMN

THE GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

The intimate relation with God reflects in true peace; joy stem from a deep connection with the divine



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

God is omnipresent. Therefore, His company is available everywhere all the time. However, if someone is very keen on the company of God, He manifests in a 'murti' (idol). This is mostly true for temples, where God is worshipped routinely in a prescribed manner. But God even manifests in murtis kept in home or a photo of God, if He decides that someone deserves this favour. Many sadhus, genuine ones, carry their worshipable God in some form with them. I had the privilege of seeing a sadhu in a park take out His Lord's photo and he worshipped Him before eating his meal. Lord Krishna has stated, "For the conqueror of self, who is blissfully peaceful in cold and heat, in pleasure and pain as well as in honor and dishonor also, he is accompanied by God." (The Bhagavad-Geeta 6.7)

Before I go any further, let us understand our relationship with God. Lord Krishna states, "An eternal soul is my part only." (15.7) God is our Swami (Master) and we are His 'sevaks' (servants). God is prepared to give a lot to those who serve Him because He has so much to offer. But God is never attached to anyone. Lord Krishna says, "I am similarly inclined towards all beings, no one is hateful for Me; and no one is dear. However, those who worship Me with devotion, they are in Me, and I am also in them." (9.29)

God is not like a parent; we can only make a place in God's heart. Do you realize what this means? This is the only place where there is unmixed joy. What does a company of God feel like? God is watching us all the time. Obviously, His presence can be experienced subtly only, even though He may have manifested in a murti or a photo. Similarly, God communicates mainly in a subtle way except in a rarest or rare case like for a highly advanced devotee such as Sant Tulsidas. We get intuitions. How do we know that these are not our thoughts; the communication could only have come from God? For example, I pray for guidance and help in a medical matter. The answer comes, which could not have been known to me. My Lord has shown His 'kripa' (grace). Then, God uses mediums to communicate. These are people close to His devotees. They come forward and provide the needed information. In rare cases, God speaks



in dreams or when we are not in deep sleep, generally around 4 AM. The timing is a big indicator that it is God, who has spoken, not what we have imagined. Whatever God states will also be corroborated in a scripture like the Bhagavad-Geeta. All this happens because a devotee of God has taken the 'chintan' (meditation) option. What does God communicate or what benefits do we derive from such communications? First of all, we begin to become peaceful. Because without peace no enjoyment is possible. If our minds are disturbed, we cannot enjoy even in the most comfortable circumstances. As God is the only source of real peace, not freedom from noise, we become entitled to it. 'Sukha' or genuine happiness follows even in not-so-opulent surroundings. This feeling leads to unmixed joy as our connection with God is strengthened by sustained practice. Our prayers for guidance and help will be answered.

Progressively, God becomes the guiding light of our lives. Help, as needed, will become available, God finds mediums, who can provide such assistance. For example, a competent doctor will become available to treat us. It all sounds so easy; it is. Not only will we be healthy but the necessary energies of all kinds will be ours too. One will feel secure, comfortable, relaxed, good, etc. The best emotions like hope, satisfaction, patience and tolerance will become parts of our psyche. Our consciousness will become better, i.e. spiritual over some time. In short, life will become highly enjoyable. Worrying, sadness, depression and anxiety will be gradually replaced by superior emotions. It is up to us to choose between chintan about God or 'chinta' (worry) about material objects, goals, etc. God is the owner of whatever there is.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher and guide; views are personal)

Israel and Palestine seek solutions amid global strife



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

China's growing role as a mediator in international conflicts hints at a shifting power dynamic, challenging the traditional Western dominance in international diplomacy

He flew to Washington; they went to Beijing. While leaders soar through the skies, ordinary civilians are engulfed in the flames of war. Their children scream not for the luxury of education, but for the sheer will to survive amid the relentless rains of bombs. Famine devastates their lives, and in Gaza and beyond, people are not just yearning for food but for the basic necessity of drinking water. This grim reality highlights the stark polarization in the global order, as non-Western nations struggle with age-old problems made worse by those wielding power. Harvard-educated former combat soldier of Sayeret Matkal in the IDF, Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu, commonly known by his nom-de-guerre Bibi, flew to the United States to address Congress, followed by a meeting with President Joe Biden, who, battling COVID-19 for the third time, was expected to announce his inability to run for a second term officially. Amidst thousands of protesters and a boycott by dozens of Congress members, Netanyahu addressed Congress. Meanwhile, representatives from fourteen Palestinian organisations flew to Beijing to sign a peace agreement. The presence of fourteen organisations for a population of just over 5 million highlights the profound divisions within this land, once a nation-state ravaged by intricate schemes. Following the horrific October 7 attack, where thousands of Israelis were brutally killed and many more kidnapped by Hamas, the region's conflict landscape has been irrevocably altered.

This incident has significantly hampered Israel's efforts to normalise relationships with neighbouring countries. In response, China swiftly intervened, brokering an unprecedented rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran. This diplomatic achievement was monumental during Ebrahim Raisi's presidency, although tragically overshadowed by the helicopter crash that claimed the lives of Raisi and his dynamic Foreign Minister while returning from a joint irrigation project inauguration in Azerbaijan province. In his record-breaking address to Congress, Prime Minister Netanyahu outlined his vision for peace, affirming that he would not cease fire until victory was achieved—a notion that seems illusory given the ground realities.

Ironically, before the speech, his entourage hinted that he would present "a vision" for the future of Gaza and the region. Ultimately, that vision consisted of "a demilitarized and deradicalized" Gaza. Netanyahu, who struggles to convince his ultra-Orthodox partners to teach their children basic math, now claims to plan on educating "a new generation that must be taught not to hate Jews." This plan remains unclear, but he quickly shifted to slogans about an "Abraham Alliance" between Israel and "moderate" Arab nations, conveniently ignoring his coalition's refusal to even utter the words "two-state solution," the very foundation for this alliance. "Following our victory, with the help of regional partners, the demilitarisation and deradicalisation of Gaza can lead to a future of security, prosperity, and peace. That's my vision for Gaza," he proclaimed to Congress.

He continued, "A new generation of Palestinians must no longer be taught to hate Jews but to live in peace with us. Those



twin concepts, demilitarisation and deradicalisation, were applied to Germany and Japan after World War II, leading to decades of peace, prosperity, and security." Despite his lofty words, Netanyahu's visit was not about peace but about expanding the war towards Iran, a country he mentioned twenty-seven times in his 52-minute, record-breaking fourth address. Tragically, there was not even the slightest hint of how he plans to extricate Israel from the tragic impasse it is trapped in under his watch. Israeli analysts expose these hyperboles, stating, "The goal of Benjamin Netanyahu's trip to Washington, including his appearance before the U.S. Congress, is not and never was to advance a diplomatic agreement to bring home the Israeli hostages safely and to end the fighting and suffering. Rather, it is designed to enlist domestic American support to keep waging the war." Another analyst remarked, "Netanyahu may have won 52 standing ovations from the rapturous, majority-Republican audience, but his rhetoric, which so impressed Washington, offered nothing for Israelis watching back home." Meanwhile, in Beijing, 14 Palestinian groups, including Hamas and Fatah, signed the Beijing Declaration. This rare display of unity, facilitated by China, marks a significant shift towards reconciliation among Palestinian factions—a unity long deemed unattainable due to numerous internal and external challenges. The persistent disunity has exacerbated the Palestinians' suffering beyond Israeli oppression. Therefore, the recent declaration offers a glimmer of hope for a more cohesive and effective Palestinian political movement, provided the commitments are genuine and actionable. The Beijing Declaration signifies a remarkable step towards Palestinian unity and sovereignty. The declaration's commitment to post-war governance in Gaza and the establishment of a temporary national reconciliation government underscores a unified vision for Palestinian self-governance

and independence. The significance of the Beijing Declaration is profound, echoing ancient and contemporary sentiments on diplomacy and conflict resolution. Chinese scholar Zhu Weilie aptly noted, "The Beijing Declaration represents the mainstream opinions of various Palestinian factions," marking a critical step toward Palestinian statehood. Historical divisions between factions like Fatah and Hamas, ongoing since the late Yasser Arafat's era, have long impeded progress. The success of this meeting, which saw all factions in attendance for the first time, symbolizes a breakthrough in Palestinian unity and reflects the global south's emerging solidarity and cooperation. The strength of a nation derives from the integrity of the home. The impact of the Beijing Declaration extends beyond Palestinian internal politics. It poses significant implications for the protracted Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Palestine moves towards internal unity, Israel's political trajectory appears increasingly extreme and radical. The continuous violence and rising death toll highlight the urgent need for a ceasefire and renewed peace efforts. Yet, Israel's alignment with U.S. interests and electoral politics hinders progress. In contrast, Palestine's willingness to engage with China's diplomatic initiatives offers a hopeful pathway towards reconciliation and peace, reminiscent of Sun Tzu's assertion that "the supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting." China's role as a mediator and leader in global conflicts is likely to expand. The successful reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran under China's mediation last year, followed by the current Palestinian unity efforts, signals a shift in West Asian diplomacy. China's "active actions," characterized by leadership and initiative, have garnered widespread acceptance and support from various countries in the region. Concurrently, Ukraine's Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, during his visit to Beijing this week, informed China's Foreign Minister

that "Ukraine is ready and willing to engage in dialogue and negotiations with Russia" aimed at a permanent settlement. Kuleba is in China to secure their assistance in future negotiations with Russia. He emphasised that the negotiations should be rational and lead to lasting peace. There is no mention of NATO, the US, or the UK being involved, but they cannot be pleased with the prospect of peace in Europe being facilitated by China.

This could drive President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to rethink his approach to destructive promises he was given by his "masters" behind the screen. These developments indicate that Beijing is emerging as a new pivotal key player in global conflicts, advocating its strategic ambitions. As regional powerhouses in Asia, both India and China have the potential to elevate the Global South to new heights. Not only Beijing but also Delhi, with Prime Minister Modi's first foreign visit to Russia after his third election, shares this strategic vision. In this context, it is important to consider the words of Sergey Lavrov, Russia's Minister of Foreign Affairs: "It is also obvious that the United States is trying to drag India into its anti-China project. Both China and India are much more deeply involved in the Western system of globalisation in terms of the volume of financial, investment, and trade agreements and many other things. But the fact is that just like us (Russia), China and India are fully aware of the discriminatory nature of what the West is doing." Transcending political affiliations and beliefs, the most noble and imperative pursuit, as Albert Camus profoundly stated, is the fight for peace. Humanity prevails when, at such critical moments, we forge a united front against the relentless forces of conflict and injustice. Humanity triumphs when, at pivotal moments, we unite resolutely against manufactured conflicts and unyielding forces of injustice, setting aside political differences to stand together.

(The writer is a journalist and author. Views are personal)



PALESTINE'S WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE WITH CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES OFFERS A HOPEFUL PATHWAY TOWARDS RECONCILIATION AND PEACE, REMINISCENT OF SUN TZU'S ASSERTION THAT 'THE SUPREME ART OF WAR IS TO SUBDUCE THE ENEMY WITHOUT FIGHTING'

Empowering India's youth: Skills as a compass for their future

Bridging the skills gap through targeted initiatives can not only enhance employability but also drive economic growth and social stability

Few would believe that 26-year-old Kevin Dahima - a young, successful entrepreneur from coastal Gujarat - was once unemployed. Today he himself employs his thriving niche. Kickstarting his business in 2021 and providing a 24-hour service, Kelvin brings home over Rs. 55,000 per month. Having trained as a Hospital Assistant.

It all began at a hospital where he saw patients discharged, but still in need of various forms of care - elderly patients who require dressings; ex-ICU patients who need oxygen daily; and cancer and post-surgery patients - what if he could provide nursing care to them, from the comfort of their own homes? Not only is he being productive in life, but



PEARL TIWARI

he is helping people in their hour of need, whilst building something for the future. And his journey to success all began when he signed up for skill training. One doesn't have to look too far to see the social impact of high levels of youth unemployment. In South Africa, where youth unemployment has hit a high of 59.7%, unemployment is considered to be the root cause of many problems the country faces today -

including crime, poverty and suicide. Closer to home, the epidemic of drug use in Punjab has been fuelled by social and economic factors including high unemployment, and underemployment, and pressing national issues like youth suicide are compounded by youth unemployment. Never has it been more important for our young people to have opportunities for bright and productive futures.

Around the world, youth unemployment and underemployment are significant problems in many societies, which can lead to feelings of hopelessness and frustration - which can often fuel social unrest. Over the next decade, the World Bank estimates one billion young people will try to

enter the job market, but less than half of them will find formal jobs. This will leave the majority of young people, many in minority and marginalized groups, unemployed or experiencing working poverty. With the largest youth population in the world (with 66% of the total population under the age of 35), and the latest data from CMIE (a think tank) claiming youth unemployment could be as high as 45.5% - among the highest in the world - it is important that India takes note here. There is a lot we can do to ensure we take a preventive approach to these issues to secure productive futures for our many young people. In a country with a gaping skills gap, this presents a major



opportunity - to invest in skills collaboratively to meet the needs of both youth and industry. According to recent studies, India's employable population is far too low to meet the demands of the skilled labour market.

Two-thirds of the country's workforce aren't qualified for current job openings. With such a shortage of qualified workers, businesses are struggling to fill positions creating a significant challenge. It's not just the quantity of skilled

labour that's lacking. The quality of available talent is also wanting. Recent research shows that only 33% of workers in India possess the skills employers seek most. The need of the hour to tackle issues at both ends of the spectrum lies in skill training. Whilst the India Skills Mission abandoned its goal of training 500 million youth by 2022, there is still a clear need for corporates, skill training providers and civil society to step into the breach.

Rural youth, in particular, need greater access to quality skill training providers who also support placement, whilst also requiring help to convince families that skills are indeed the way to go - a route often in conflict with the white-collar aspirations of both youth

and their families. Sadly, half of all graduates in India are unemployable due to a lack of industry-relevant skills. The world faces a multitude of challenges today, many of which affect our youth. Conflicts that disrupt education and stability, a polarized online environment that fosters negativity, and economic inequality that limits opportunities. These issues threaten not only individual futures but the overall stability of communities. It is therefore crucial to equip youth with the necessary skills to become productive citizens and create a more sustainable future for all.

(The writer is CEO, of Ambuja Foundation; views are personal)

Delhi Govt mulls concession for new vehicles registration post scrapping

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government is considering providing a concession in the Motor Vehicles Tax for the registration of new transport and non-transport vehicles, provided a certificate of deposit is submitted for an old vehicle handed over for scrapping at a Registered Vehicles Scrapping Facility (RVSF).

Delhi Transport Minister Kailash Gahlot on Friday said that the proposal in this regard has been sent to Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena for his approval. He announced that the Delhi government will provide such concessions in a bid to make it easier for vehicle owners to transition to more environmentally friendly options.

"This policy aims to encourage the scrapping of old, polluting



vehicles and promote the use of newer, cleaner vehicles. By offering tax concessions, we hope to make it easier for vehicle owners to transition to more environmentally friendly options," the AAP leader stated.

Further, for non-transport vehicles, the concession includes a 20 per cent reduction in the tax payable on the registration of new petrol, CNG, or LPG vehicles. It also includes a 15 per cent reduction for new diesel vehicles.

A statement stated that for transport vehicles, the concession includes a 15 per cent reduction in the tax payable on the registration of new petrol, CNG, or LPG vehicles, and a 10 per cent reduction for new diesel vehicles.

However, the total tax concessions shall not exceed 50 per cent of the scrap value in both cases. Additionally, the validity of the Certificate of Deposit is three years which can be electronically traded.

In 2018, the Supreme Court banned diesel and petrol vehicles older than 10 and 15 years, respectively, in Delhi. It had said that the vehicles plying in violation of the order would be impounded. A 2014 order of the National Green Tribunal bars vehicles older than 15 years to be parked in public places. The Delhi government has deregistered 5.5 million overage vehicles.

DJB, PWD, MCD fail to resolve waterlogging in Capital, says BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Friday accused the Delhi Jal Board (DJB), Public Works Department (PWD) and Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) in failing the residents of the national Capital in resolving the waterlogging crisis while accusing the AAP government of 'drain cleaning scam'.

Sachdeva said, "Every year before monsoon an exercise of cleaning of drains be it 18 major drains like Najafgarh Drain, East Delhi Drain, Barapullah Drain and Delhi Gate Drain happens along with other smaller drains which all total upto around 700 drains."

He claimed that while this exercise happens every year, it's shocking to see that this year most of the drains have



not been cleaned. "Delhi is facing worst ever water logging crisis during monsoon this year. Earlier water logging

happened at the start of monsoon and after one or two rains water logging became a limited affair in which water

got accumulated then cleared within hours but today water remained logged for 10 to 12 hours," Sachdeva alleged.

The Delhi BJP chief claimed that the residents faced worst ever water logging at different parts of the city including Kirari, Paharganj, Kalkaji, Munirka, Mehrauli Badar Road, Kotla Mubarkpur, Sangam Vihar, Devli, Saket, Minto Bridge, ITO, Rajghat, Jahangirpuri, Laxmi Nagar and Geeta Colony.

"It won't be an exaggeration to say that Arvind Kejriwal led government has defeated its own liquor scam with its 'Drains Non Cleaning Scam'. The Jal Board, PWD and MCD have totally failed Delhiites in resolving the waterlogging crisis," he said, appealing to Anti Corruption Bureau to take suo motto cognizance of the 'Drain Cleaning Scam' of the three departments.

SC raps MCD over 'sorry state' of solid waste management

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Over 3,000 tons of untreated solid waste per day in Delhi may lead to a "public health emergency," the Supreme Court said on Friday while voicing concern over poor implementation of the Solid Waste Management Rules in the national capital.

The apex court, which slammed the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) over the 'sorry state of affairs', observed that the national capital generates over 11,000 tons of solid waste per day, while the daily capacity of processing plants made available by the corporation was only 8,073 tons.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Augustine George Masih noted that as per MCD's affidavit, there is no possibility of creating treatment facilities even till 2027 to deal with 11,000 tons of solid waste generated daily.

Senior advocate Aparajita

Singh, assisting the top court as an amicus curiae in the matter related to solid waste management, told the bench that this may lead to public health emergency as there are data, both in Indian and foreign journals, that people are dying because of pollution in the country.

"We are worried about this. In the capital city, this is the state of affairs of the 2016 rules where we are generating untreated solid waste of above 3,000 tons per day, and with every day, it will increase," the bench said.

"We don't see light at the end of the tunnel as going by the affidavit (of MCD) and assuming that the timelines mentioned therein are abided by, there is no possibility of creating (additional treatment) facilities in Delhi even till 2027 which will have capacity to deal with 11,000 tons of solid waste every day," it said.

The bench said no guess work was required to say that generation of solid waste will multiply many times by that time.

LG hosts dinner for world heritage committee delegates at Purana Qila

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Thursday hosted a cultural evening cum dinner for the delegates of the 46th World Heritage Committee at the historic Purana Qila.

Union Minister for Culture and Tourism Gajendra Singh Shekhawat also attended the event. Speaking on the occasion, Saxena said that sustained efforts were being made to preserve and restore the heritage sites and monuments in Delhi so as to position it as a true Global Heritage City.

Stating that these efforts are aligned with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of 'vikas bhi, viksit bhi', he stated, "The Government is making many



efforts for preserving and maintaining the tangible and intangible heritage of Delhi. This will attract more tourists and open the portals of our heritage, for the knowledge of domestic as well as international audiences."

"To preserve our heritage, it is

essential that people – the community at large become a stakeholder in preserving and protecting it," Saxena added.

Ambassadors and High Commissioners from several countries, nearly 250 delegates from more than 160 countries, senior officials from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and senior officials from the Central and Delhi Government also attended the event.

The event included a unique fusion of traditional dance presented by nearly 100 artists from different Indian states which left the audience spellbound. The performance was choreographed by acclaimed artist Maitreyee Pahari.

"The cultural performance in the backdrop of an illuminated structure in the Purana Qila complex, manifested the intangible cultural heritage of India that transcends region, religion and language while also reflecting the rich heritage of Delhi," an official said.

Top court to hear Kerala...

From Page 1

West Bengal, in its plea, alleged the governor was withholding assent on eight bills. Senior advocate KK Venugopal, appearing for the Kerala government, said, "This is the most unfortunate situation."

The bench said, "We are issuing notices to the secretary to the governors and the Union in both cases." Venugopal further said, "The bills are pending for the last eight months. I am challenging the reference to

the president itself... This is a confusion among the governors. They keep the bills pending. This is against the Constitution."

Senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi, appearing for West Bengal, said he would make the Centre a party and file a written note to assist the court in deciding the plea.

He referred to instances of other states, including Tamil Nadu, and said the moment the top court fixed the cases for hearing, certain bills were either cleared or referred to the president.

Venugopal said there was a need for the top court to lay down guidelines on when the governors could return or refer the bills.

Cancer cases rising by 2.5% every year

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Cancer cases are escalating by 2.5 per cent each year, with over 1.55 million new diagnoses annually, the Government on Friday painted a troubling picture even as it asserted that all efforts are being taken to ensure affordable and accessible treatment for cancer patients.

Union Health Minister JP Nadda said on Friday that men face rising rates of oral and lung cancers, while women are increasingly affected by breast cancer. This growing trend underscores a critical need for enhanced cancer prevention and treatment strategies, he said.

Replying to supplementary questions during Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, Nadda said the government made all efforts to ensure that affordable and accessible treatment was available to the patients.

"There is a list of 131 essential cancer medicines, which are in Schedule 1, (that) are monitored and (their) pricing is decided by the government. These are the commonly used medicines," Nadda said. He said patients cumulatively saved around Rs 294 crore due to this price control. "There are 28 combinations, which are not in this list but the NPPA (National Pharmaceutical Pricing Authority) and the govern-



ment have controlled their pricing as well," he said. "We have tried to make cancer drugs affordable," he added.

Responding to another question on healthcare infrastructure, Nadda said the government was appraised of the matter and expansion of

medical colleges were happening so that there could be more doctors.

"There should be a balance in quality and quantity of medical education. We are trying to go as fast as we can but, at the same time, (we) do not want to compromise on the quality of medical doctors," he said. Nadda informed the House that the number of medical colleges had gone up from 387 in 2014 to 731 at present while the number of MBBS seats rose from 51,348 seats to 1,12,112 (1.12 lakh) during the same period. The number of postgraduate seats for medical students has gone up from 31,185 in 2014 to 72,627 at present, he added.

IN BRIEF

MINISTER LAUNCHES FEEDER MONITORING CENTRE AT REC
Gurugram: Manohar Lal, Minister of Power and Housing & Urban Affairs, inaugurated National Feeder Monitoring System (NFMS) Control Centre on REC Limited's 55th Foundation Day, at REC Headquarters, Gurugram in the presence of Shripad Yesso Naik, Minister of State for Power and New & Renewable Energy. NFMS, a flagship initiative of Ministry of Power, entails access to detailed information related to real time hours of power supply, power outages and overall health of Rs 2.5 lakh feeders (11 KV outgoing) across the country. This system will enable stakeholders to make informed and actionable decisions, thereby bringing in transparency, efficiency and accountability to distribution utilities (DISCOMS), ultimately improving the quality and reliability of power supply to the end consumers. The project involves integration of master as well as transactional data with 87 Discoms.

Upset over loneliness, teen kills self
STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A 16-year-old boy committed suicide by hanging himself in the dormitory of his school in Delhi's Dwarka area.

According to the police on Friday, an information regarding suicide by a student of Class 11 at Kalinga Institute of Social Science School was received on Thursday morning. Deputy Commissioner of Police (Dwarka) Ankit Singh said, "Upon reaching Kalinga Institute of Social Science School, a boy named Kunal Rai, son of Shiv Chand Rai, aged 16 year was found dead in a dormitory of the school."

He added that the classmates of the deceased reported that Kunal was upset and lonely because his friends had left the school after Class 10th to pursue a different stream not available in his current school. "His classmates informed that Kunal was upset as his friends had left his school and had taken science stream elsewhere as the stream was not available in this school," the DCP stated. According to a senior police official, the father had pressured him to continue in the School with Arts stream and not go out. "The child was feeling lonely and upset. On Thursday at about 6:00 am, he committed suicide by hanging himself with Iron bar of ceiling.

Modi condoles death of former MP Prabhat Jha
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday expressed deep grief over the demise of former Member of Parliament Prabhat Jha, 67.

The Prime Minister recalled his organizational acumen and also remembered his contribution in the field of journalism.

Former Rajya Sabha member and senior BJP leader Prabhat Jha passed away on Friday in a hospital in Gurugram after a prolonged illness, party leaders said. He is survived by his wife and two sons, they said.

Bihar-born Jha started his career as a journalist from Gwalior. He later joined the BJP and rose to become the party's Madhya Pradesh president in 2010. He was elected as a Rajya Sabha member from Madhya Pradesh in 2008 and remained in the Upper House of Parliament till 2020, serving two terms.

Jha was the BJP's national vice president in 2015. He also edited the BJP's mouthpiece Kamal Sandesh for several years since 2006 and his frank editorials, which were not always partisan, at times made national news.

Modi warns Pak...

From Page 1

On July 26, 1999, the Indian Army announced the successful culmination of "Operation Vijay", reclaiming the positions occupied by Pakistani infiltrators/army regulars on the Indian side of the LoC in the Kargil region after a nearly three-month-long battle in Ladakh.

Responding to the political muscle flexing over the Agnipath scheme, the Prime Minister responded by clearly saying the purpose of Agnipath is to keep forces young and continuously battle-ready."

Referring to the blatant politicization of this sensitive subject, the Prime Minister said, "The truth is that the Agnipath scheme will increase the strength of the country and the country will also get capable youth. Announcements have been made to give priority to Agniveers in the private sector and paramilitary forces as well," he said. Rejecting the propaganda about the intention of saving pension burden as the main reason behind the Agnipath Scheme, the Prime Minister reminded that the pension burden of the soldiers being recruited today will come up after 30 years,

therefore, this can not be the reason behind the scheme. "We have respected this decision taken by the armed forces because for us the security of the country is more important than politics," he added.

The Prime Minister pointed out that those misleading the youth of the nation today had no regard for the armed forces in the past. Recalling the false promises made by past governments on One Rank One Pension, the Prime Minister underlined that it was the present government that implemented the scheme where ex-servicemen were given more than Rs 1.25 lakh crores. He further pointed out the neglect of past governments and said, "These are the same people who did not build a war memorial for the martyrs even after 7 decades of independence, did not provide enough bulletproof jackets to our soldiers deployed on the border and kept ignoring Kargil Vijay Diwas."

The Prime Minister along with the LG of Ladakh, Brig (Dr) B D Sharma, Union Minister of State for Defence, Sanjay Seth, Chief of Defence Staff, Gen Anil Chauhan and the Chiefs of Army Staff of the three armed forces were present on the occasion.

Agniveers to be given weightage in UP Police

From Page 1

We are touching new heights of prosperity and we have to give equal importance to national security, he added.

"On one hand, we are touching new heights of prosperity, so we have to give equal importance to national security. Whether it is the steps taken for self-reliance in the Army and its equipment or the quick decisions taken for modernisation, today India has state-of-the-art fighter planes," he said.

The UP chief minister said the Defence Industrial Corridor was being developed in UP and Tamil Nadu. He said thousands of crores of rupees of investment had come in the six nodes of the UP Defence Industrial Corridor.

"Whether it is the work of Bharat Dynamics Limited or the progress towards making the BrahMos missile, we have taken a long leap. The Army is also moving ahead with this speed," he said.

"The Agniveer scheme has been taken forward in the Indian Army with this vision. There is enthusiasm among the youth about this. Ten lakh Agniveers are moving forward to serve as strong soldiers on the Agnipath of the Indian Army," he said.

It is unfortunate that for some political parties, their own politics has become bigger than the country. They want to do politics at the cost of the country, he added.

"They keep doing acts like interfering, misleading and making statements in every reform and progress work. The opposition is constantly misleading the youth on this issue," he said. The Central government introduced the Agnipath recruitment scheme in 2022 with an aim to bring down the age profile of the three services. The scheme provides for recruiting youngsters between the age group of 17-and-a-half and 21 years as Agniveers for a block period of four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for another 15 years.

Several opposition parties, including the Congress, have been targeting the government over the scheme, raising questions about the fate of the remaining 75 per cent of Agniveers after the end of their four-year tenure.

SC extends Kanwar...

From Page 1

The Bench asked the Madhya Pradesh and Uttarakhand Governments to file their response to the pleas challenging their respective directives. It allowed the petitioners to file their responses to the replies of the State Governments and post the matter on August 5. The Bench was hearing a batch of petitions challenging such a directive by the Uttar Pradesh Police in Muzaffarnagar.

Senior advocate Mukul Rohatgi, appearing for the Uttar Pradesh Government, said they have filed their reply and their stand is that the directive in question is the requirement under law. He urged the court to take up the matter next Monday otherwise the issue will become infructuous. There is huge rush of devotees at Shiva temples on Mondays, especially during the month of Shrawan. "We have suffered ex-parte order and without hearing the order was stayed," he submitted, adding that the interim order passed by the court is not in line with the central law.

The Bench said if there is any law governing eateries and shops, then the State should enforce it across areas under its jurisdiction."

Assam heritage site gets UNESCO tag

From Page 1

Reports say that there are actually over 150 moidams, but only 30 are protected by the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) and the Assam State Archaeology Department.

Ranjan K Baruah, Advisor to the Skill Employment and Entrepreneurship Department of the Bodoland Territorial Council and a Tourist guide trainer, lauded the inclusion of the Charaideo Moidams on UNESCO's World Heritage List as a moment of immense pride for the people of Assam and beyond. "These remarkable sites epitomize the grandeur of the Ahom dynasty's heritage and stand as an architectural marvel akin to the pyramids of Egypt," he remarked.

Baruah emphasised that further exploration by the Archaeological Survey of India or similar institutions could unveil additional insights into the rich legacy of the Ahom dynasty, enriching

our understanding of this historical treasure. The Tai-Ahoms migrated to present-day Assam in the 13th century and selected Charaideo as their first capital and location for the royal necropolis.

They established the first capital at the Patkai hills in eastern India and named it Charaideo, which means "a dazzling city above the mountain" in their language. Even though the clan moved across cities, the burial site they built was seen as the most sacred place for the departed souls of the royals.

According to the UNESCO website, the site has the largest concentration of these vaulted mound burials, and reflects the sculpted landscape of the surrounding hills. Moidams are characterized by vaulted chambers, often double-storied, accessed through arched passages. The chambers housed centrally raised platforms where the deceased were laid to rest along with their royal insignia, weapons, and

personal belongings. The construction of these mounds involved layers of bricks, earth, and vegetation, transforming the landscape into undulating hillocks reminiscent of celestial mountains.

Several objects used by the deceased during his/her life, like royal insignia, objects made of wood, ivory or iron, gold pendants, ceramic ware, weapons, clothes to the extent of human beings (only from the Luk-kha-khun clan) were buried with their king, according to the website.

Reacting to 'Moidams' receiving the UNESCO tag, Union Culture Minister Gajendra Singh Shekhawat said it is a day "etched in golden letters" and thanked UNESCO, the World Heritage Committee for understanding the outstanding universal value of 'Moidams'.

In the Northeastern State, the Kaziranga National Park and the Manas National Park fall in the natural and mixed heritage categories respectively.

Arson attacks paralyse high-speed rail networks in Paris

AP ■ PARIS

France's high-speed rail network was hit Friday with widespread and "criminal" acts of vandalism including arson attacks, paralyzing travel to Paris from across the rest of France and Europe, and thwarting Olympic athletes from traveling, only hours before the grand opening ceremony of the Games.

French officials condemned the attacks as "criminal actions," though they said there was no sign of a direct link to the Games. Prosecutors in Paris opened a national investigation saying the crimes could carry sentences of 10 to 20 years. "It's a hell of a way to start the Olympics," said Sarah Moseley, a 42-year-old traveler waiting at the Gare du Nord station in Paris as she learned that her train to London was delayed by the rail chaos.

As Paris authorities geared up for a spectacular parade on and along the Seine River, three fires were reported near the tracks on the high-speed lines of Atlantique, Nord and Est, causing disruptions that affect-

ed hundreds of thousands of travelers. Among them were Olympic athletes themselves. Two out of four trains carrying Olympic athletes to Paris on the western Atlantique high-speed line were stopped hours before the opening ceremony, affected by the coordinated sabotage on the tracks, an official from the French railway operator SNCF said on Friday.

Also, two German athletes in showjumping who were on a train to Paris to take part in the opening ceremony but had to turn back in Belgium because of the closures, and will now miss the ceremony, German news agency dpa reported.

"There was no longer a chance of making it on time," rider Philipp Weishaupt, who was traveling with teammate Christian Kukuk, told dpa. There were no known reports of injuries from the attacks. French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said France's intelligence services have been mobilized to find the perpetrators of the "acts of sabotage" which he described as "prepared and coordinated."

Attal said that the actions on

the eve of the Olympics had "a clear objective: blocking the high-speed train network."

He said the vandals strategically targeted the axes from the north, east and west toward Paris hours before the Olympics opening ceremony. It was "a premeditated, calculated, coordinated attack" that indicates "a desire to seriously harm" the French people, the CEO of the national railway company SNCF, Jean-Pierre Farandou, said.

"The places were especially chosen to have the most serious impact, since each fire cut off two lines," Farandou said. Farandou said railway maintenance workers managed to thwart a suspected sabotage attempt along tracks heading south-east of Paris.

Workers on the night shift spotted intruders and alerted police, Farandou said.

"These people left, of course, very quickly when they realized they were spotted. So, thank you to the railway workers," Farandou said. "Unfortunately, we couldn't do it everywhere." Farandou said repairs were being made as police conduct-



Passengers arrive by train at the Eurostar terminal at St Pancras station in central London, on Friday July 26

AP/PTI

ed forensic examinations and searched for the perpetrators. France's Transport Minister Patrice Vergriete said train traffic was beginning to resume in the afternoon, especially on the Atlantique line, which had been completely halted. "At Montparnasse station and Bordeaux station, which were

the most affected, we should find one in three trains running this afternoon. Things are already improving," he said. The attack occurred against a backdrop of global tensions and heightened security measures as the city prepared for the 2024 Olympic Games. Many travelers were planning

to converge on the capital for the opening ceremony, and many vacationers were also in transit. Earlier this week, France's interior minister said about 1,000 people suspected of possibly meddling for a foreign power have been blocked from attending the games. Although he has repeatedly

pointed to suspicions of Russia-backed interference, Gerald Darmanin added that such threats have also come from other countries that he did not name. Among those blocked were people suspected of Islamic radicalization or left- or right-wing political extremism, or who had significant criminal records, Darmanin said. The coordinated train line attacks targeted remote locations far from the capital as 35,000 police officers are being deployed in Paris each day for the Olympics, with a peak of 45,000 for the opening ceremony. French authorities have foiled several plots to disrupt the Olympics, including arresting a Russian man on suspicion of planning to destabilize the games. Paris has been the target of deadly terror attacks in the past decade, and some French officials saw hosting the Olympic Games as a chance for the nation to heal from years of trauma. The Paris police prefecture "concentrated its personnel in Parisian train stations" after the "massive attack" that paralyzed the TGV high-speed network, Laurent Nunez,

the Paris police chief, told France Info television.

Also on Friday, the French airport of Basel-Mulhouse on the border with Germany and Switzerland was evacuated in the morning and shut down briefly "for safety reasons," the airport said. It wasn't clear whether there was a connection to the rail attacks.

The disruptions hit Paris' Montparnasse station particularly hard. In the station's crowded hall, Maiwenn Labbé-Sorin said she spent hours stranded on a train before it doubled back to Paris.

"We stayed two hours without water, without toilets, without electricity," she said. "Then we could go out on the track for a bit and then the train returned. Now I'm not sure what's going to happen."

Many passengers at the Gare du Nord, one of Europe's busiest train stations, were looking for answers and solutions on Friday morning. All eyes were on the central message boards as most services to northern France, Belgium and the United Kingdom were delayed.

Harris urges Netanyahu to end war

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

US Vice President Kamala Harris has urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to quickly conclude a ceasefire deal with Hamas and reach a "durable end" to the devastating war in Gaza, amidst mounting civilian casualties and the humanitarian crisis in the Palestinian enclave. "Israel has a right to defend itself and how it does so matters. What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating," Harris, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, told reporters after her meeting with Netanyahu at the White House on Thursday.

"The images of dead children and desperate hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time. We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering and I will not be silent," she said. Harris also stressed the need for a path to a two-state solu-

tion, while calling on Americans to be aware of the "nuance" on the conflict.

Earlier on Thursday, Netanyahu met President Joe Biden, who stepped down from his re-election campaign on Sunday.

Netanyahu's meetings at the White House came a day after he gave a fiery speech to Congress, vowing "total victory" against Hamas, as thousands of pro-Palestinian protesters demonstrated outside. The Israeli prime minister faces pressure both at home and abroad to bring an end to the Israel-Gaza war, now in its ninth month.

"I've said it many times, but it bears repeating. Israel has a right to defend itself, and how it does so matters. Hamas is a brutal terrorist organisation. On October 7, Hamas triggered this war when it massacred 1,200 innocent people, including 44 Americans, Harris said. Hamas has committed horrific acts of sexual violence and took 250 hostages. There are American citizens who remain captive in Gaza," Harris said.

During her meeting with Netanyahu, Harris said that she voiced her serious concern to Netanyahu about the scale of human suffering in Gaza, including the death of far too many innocent civilians.

"I made clear my serious concern about the dire humanitarian situation there. With over two million people facing high levels of food insecurity, and half a million people facing catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity. What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating," she said.

Harris said there is a US-proposed deal on the table for a ceasefire and a hostage deal. The first phase of the deal would bring about a full ceasefire, including a withdrawal of the Israeli military from population centers in Gaza. In the second phase, the Israeli military would withdraw from Gaza entirely and it would lead to a permanent end to the hostilities.

"It is time for this war to end, and end in a way where Israel is secure, all the hostages are

released, the suffering of Palestinians in Gaza ends, and the Palestinian people can exercise their right to freedom, dignity, and self-determination. There has been hopeful movement in the talks to secure an agreement on this deal," she said.

"I just told Prime Minister Netanyahu, it is time to get this deal done. So to everyone who has been calling for a ceasefire and to everyone who yearns for peace, I see you and I hear you. Let's get the deal done so we can get a ceasefire to end the war. Let's bring the hostages home and let's provide much-needed relief to the Palestinian people," Harris said.

Harris also told reporters that "it is important for the American people to remember, the war in Gaza is not a binary issue." "Let us all condemn terrorism and violence. Let us all do what we can to prevent the suffering of innocent civilians. And let us condemn antisemitism, islamophobia and hate of any kind. And let us work to unite our country," she said.

West Bank Hamas leader dies in Israeli custody

Ramallah (West Bank): A Hamas leader in the occupied West Bank died in Israeli custody Thursday evening after a deterioration in his health, according to a Palestinian prisoners rights group.

Sheikh Mustafa Abu Arra, 63, was arrested in October and was recently transferred from Ramon Prison to Soroka hospital where he died, the Palestinian Prisoners Club said. The rights group said Abu Ara was subjected to "torture and starvation" during his detention, and did not receive adequate medical treatment. The group did not elaborate further. Israel's prison authorities have not commented on the circumstances of Abu Ara's death, and could not immediately be reached. Abu Ara was arrested shortly after the start of the latest Israel-Hamas war under a process known as administrative detention, the group said, whereby detainees can be held indefinitely for security reasons without trial and charge. AP

Obama vows to do everything to make Kamala Harris win

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Kamala Harris will be a "fantastic President of the United States," former president Barack Obama said on Friday, as he and his wife Michelle endorsed her and vowed to do "everything we can" to enable her to win the high-stakes elections against Donald Trump in November.

Harris, 59, launched her presidential campaign hours after President Joe Biden said he would be forgoing his bid for a second term. The decision came after Biden faced weeks of mounting pressure to step aside following his startling debate performance against rival and former president Trump last month, which raised concerns about his fitness for a second term and ability to defeat his Republican opponent in November. Obama, who didn't immediately endorse Harris following President Biden's announce-

ment on Sunday, released a video to support the Vice President. "Earlier this week, Michelle and I called our friend @KamalaHarris. We told her we think she'll make a fantastic President of the United States, and that she has our full support. At this critical moment for our country, we're going to do everything we can to make sure she wins in November. We hope you'll join us," Obama said in a post on X. "Michelle and I couldn't be prouder to endorse you and to do everything we can to get you through this election and into the Oval Office," the 62-year-old former president told Harris on a phone call joined by his wife. Harris thanked the Obamas for their support and expressed gratitude for their decades-long friendship. "I'm looking forward to doing this with the two of you, Doug (Douglas Emhoff) and I both. And getting out there, being on the road," Harris, 59, said. "But most of all, I just want to

tell you the words you have spoken and the friendship that you have given over all these years mean more than I can express, so much you both. It means so much. And we're gonna have some fun with this too, aren't we?" she added. Michelle, the former first lady, said she is proud of Harris and expects the upcoming election to be historic.

"I can't have this phone call without saying to my girl, Kamala, I am proud of you. This is going to be historic," she told Harris in the approximately one-minute video. In a joint statement announcing the endorsement, the Obamas praised Harris. "But Kamala has more than a resume. She has the vision, the character, and the strength that this critical moment demands. There is no doubt in our mind that Kamala Harris has exactly what it takes to win this election and deliver for the American people," the statement said.

Canada, Australia, New Zealand, call for truce in Gaza

Canberra (AP): Canada, Australia and New Zealand issued a joint statement Friday on the need for an urgent ceasefire in Gaza and the risk of expanded conflict between Hezbollah and Israel. "The situation in Gaza is catastrophic. The human suffering is unacceptable. It cannot continue," the statement from the three prime ministers said.

"Israel must listen to the concerns of the international community. The protection of civilians is paramount and a requirement under international humanitarian law. Palestinian civilians cannot be made to pay the price of defeating Hamas. It must end," the statement said. The PMs said they were "gravely concerned" about the prospect of further escalation across the region and condemned Iran's mid-April attack on Israel. They also called on Iran to refrain from further destabilizing actions in the Middle East and demanded that Iran and its affiliated groups, including Hezbollah, cease their attacks.

Netanyahu to meet Trump at Mar-a-Lago

AP ■ WASHINGTON

As president, Donald Trump went well beyond his predecessors in fulfilling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's top wishes from the United States. Yet by the time Trump left the White House, relations between the two had broken down after Netanyahu rapidly congratulated Joe Biden on his 2020 presidential victory. On Friday, the two men will meet face-to-face for the first time in nearly four years in a test of whether the relationship can be mended. Both have an interest in getting past their differences.

For Trump, now the Republican presidential nominee, the meeting could cast him as an ally and statesman, as well as sharpen efforts by Republicans to portray themselves as the party most loyal to Israel. That's as divisions among Americans over US support for Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza open cracks in what has been decades of strong bipar-

tisan backing for Israel, the biggest recipient of US aid. For Netanyahu, who was in the United States to address Congress and meet with Biden, repairing relations with Trump is imperative given the prospect that he may once again become president of the United States, Israel's main arms supplier and protector. For both men, Friday's meeting at Mar-a-Lago will highlight for their home audiences their depiction of themselves as strong leaders who have gotten big things done on the world stage, and can again. One political gamble for Netanyahu is whether he could get more of the terms he wants in any deal on a Gaza cease-fire and hostage release, and in his much hoped-for closing of a normalisation deal with Saudi Arabia, if he waits out the Biden administration in hopes that Trump wins. "Benjamin Netanyahu has spent much of his career in the last two decades in tethering himself to the Republican Party," said Aaron David Miller, a former US diplomat for Arab-



Israeli negotiations, now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. For the next six months, that means "mending ties with an irascible, angry president," Miller said, meaning Trump. Trump broke off with Netanyahu in early 2021. That was after the Israeli prime minister became one of the first world leaders to congratulate Biden for his presidential election victory, disregarding Trump's false claim he had

won. "Bibi could have stayed quiet," Trump said in an interview with an Israeli newspaper back then. "He made a terrible mistake." Netanyahu and Trump last met at a September 2020 White House signing ceremony for the signature diplomatic achievement of both men's political careers. It was an accord brokered by the Trump administration in which the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel.

For Israel, it amounted to the two countries formally recognizing it for the first time. It was a major step in what Israel hopes will be an easing of tensions and a broadening of economic ties with its Arab neighbors.

In public postings and statements after his break with Netanyahu, Trump portrayed himself as having stuck his neck out for Israel as president, and Netanyahu paying him back with disloyalty.

He also has criticised Netanyahu on other points, faulting him as "not prepared" for the October 7 Hamas attacks that started the war in Gaza, for example. In his high-profile speech to Congress on Wednesday, Netanyahu gave recognition to Biden, who has kept up military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive in Gaza despite opposition from within his Democratic Party. But Netanyahu poured praise on Trump, calling the regional accords Trump helped broker historic and thanking him "for all the things he did for Israel."

China shows influence with Palestinian deal, Ukrainian FM visit

AP ■ BEIJING

In consecutive days this week, China brokered a deal between rival Palestinian factions and hosted Ukraine's foreign minister at a moment when pressure is mounting on the country to negotiate an end to the grinding war there. While it's unclear if the agreement between Hamas and Fatah will succeed where others have failed and there is little concrete progress towards peace in Ukraine, China emerged a winner, further cementing its role as a diplomatic force on the global stage, not just an economic powerhouse.

As Beijing and Washington vie for influence around the world, China is increasingly playing a role that had previously been the domain of world powers like the US and Russia. Earlier this month, Western countries called some of China's activities worrying and labelled Beijing a troublemaker. But the events of this week — and the China-brokered deal last year to reestablish relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia — show that international players are seeking Beijing's help, an acknowledgment that it is a diplomatic force to be reckoned with.

"China is now offering itself as a broker on the global stage, and countries are responding," said Carla Freeman, a senior expert for China at the United States Institute of Peace. "It's a recognition — one much sought after by Beijing — that China has international influence and could play a role in improving the outcomes of a diplomatic process." On Tuesday, Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah agreed in principle to form a government, the latest attempt at resolving a longstanding rivalry that looms over Gaza's future after the war with Israel. Previous similar declarations

have failed, but even just getting the parties together in a room was an achievement, said Jon Alterman, senior vice president and director of the Middle East programme at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

"They say, we did what nobody else could do, nobody saw was possible, and that, by itself, represents a victory," he said. While Beijing did not publicly offer any concrete steps such as a timeline for implementation or money for rebuilding, the deal was another sign that China has influence in the Middle East — and even perhaps room to maneuver that the US might not have, said Danny Russel, vice president for international security and diplomacy at the Asia Society Policy Institute.

Hamas officials have said that they see China as a potential counterweight to the US, which is a staunch ally of their foe, Israel. "It's a influence with key Middle East issues remains substantial, but there is a new player in the game who is entirely comfortable dealing with Iran and Hamas," Russel said, referring to the 2023 rapprochement between archrivals Iran and Saudi Arabia, widely seen as a breakthrough.

Washington, meanwhile, is grappling with discontent at home over its position on the war in Gaza and its hosting of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu this week, and even its allies have doubts about US foreign policy commitments as a presidential race draws closer. Beijing, on the other hand, celebrated. Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi exuded confidence in a photo with top representatives of Hamas and Fatah on Tuesday. The Chinese state media tabloid Global Times hailed the Palestinian deal as having "transcendent significance."

Vietnam Communist Party chief funeral draws thousands

AP ■ HANOI

Thousands of mourners gathered in Hanoi on Friday for the second day of the funeral of the man who dominated Vietnamese politics for over a decade, Communist Party general secretary Nguyen Phu Trong. His death, at 80, last week in Hanoi marked the start of a succession struggle within the party that will likely to continue until the all-important National Party Congress of Vietnam's Communist Party in 2026.

Trong's coffin, draped in the red and yellow of Vietnam's flag, was laid beneath his smiling portrait and dozens of medals at the National Funeral House in Hanoi on Thursday. All flags in the southeast Asian nation flew at half mast during

the two-day period of national mourning, while all sports and entertainment were suspended. He will be buried at Mai Dich cemetery, the final resting place for military heroes and senior party officials, later on Friday.

Top Communist Party officials paid tribute, including President To Lam, who took over as caretaker general secretary a day before Trong's death was announced. Thousands of people, many of whom had travelled from far-flung provinces, queued up in Hanoi late into Thursday to light incense and pay their respects.

Politburo member Luong Cuong said Thursday that his death was "an extremely huge, irreparable loss to the Party, the state, the people and his family." South Korean Prime



Minister Han Duck-soo; Wang Huning, the fourth-ranked leader in the Chinese Communist Party; former Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga; Cuban National Assembly President Esteban Lazo Hernandez; and Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval were among those in attendance on

Thursday. US president Joe Biden had said earlier that Trong was a "champion of the deep ties" between Americans and the Vietnamese. Russian President Vladimir Putin said in a statement on Telegram that Trong would be remembered as a "true friend" of Russia who made a "great

personal contribution" to the improvement of ties between the two nations.

Trong, who studied in the Soviet Union from 1981 to 1983, was the first Vietnamese Communist Party chief to visit the White House. He advocated a pragmatic foreign policy of "bamboo diplomacy," a phrase he coined that refers to the plant's flexibility, bending but not breaking in the shifting headwinds of geopolitics. Vietnam is unlikely to abandon that approach, under which it has pursued pragmatic cooperation with its much larger and more powerful neighbour China while maintaining good ties with other countries like the US, Japan and India, said Gregory B. Poling, who heads the Southeast Asia Program at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies.

Trong, a Marxist-Leninist ideologue, viewed corruption as the single gravest threat to the party's legitimacy. He launched a sweeping anti-corruption campaign known as "blazing furnace," which has singled both business and political elites.

Since 2016, thousands of party officials have been disciplined. They included former presidents Nguyen Xuan Phuc and Vo Van Thuong and the former head of parliament, Vuong Dinh Hue. In all, eight members of the powerful Politburo were ousted on corruption allegations, compared to none between 1986 and 2016.

The anti-graft campaign was led by then-top security official To Lam until he was made president in May after his predecessor resigned amid corruption allegations.

India to get 12 new industrial cities to boost manufacturing

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The country will have 12 new industrial cities in different states like the ones developed in Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh and Dholera in Gujarat to further boost domestic manufacturing, a top government official said. Out of this, two are coming up in Andhra Pradesh and one in Bihar.

The Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said that eight such cities are already under different stages of implementation.

Trunk infrastructure has been created in four cities - Dholera (Gujarat), Auric (Maharashtra), Vikram Udyogpuri (Madhya Pradesh) and Krishnapatnam (Andhra Pradesh) and allotment of land plots is underway for the industry.

Similarly in the other four, the government's special purpose vehicle is in the



process of construction of the basic infrastructure like road connectivity, water and power supply.

With eight already under the development stage and the announcement of 12 new in the Budget, the total count of these cities in the country to 20, Singh told PTI.

"These are industrial smart cities. These 12 new cities will make the count to 20. We built the trunk infrastructure and then gave

the plots. We take environmental clearance for the entire city, so the company gets the 'plug and play' kind of things," he said, adding the department will approach the Union cabinet for the new ones.

The plans are ready and the land is with the state governments and "We just have to approve the equity to the SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle)," he added.

The move will help in

increasing the share of manufacturing in the country's GDP and creating jobs.

Commenting on these smart cities announcements, Ashoo Gupta, Partner, Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co, said that this innovative reform, in collaboration with states and the private sector, can significantly boost industrial growth and city planning.

"These projects will become dynamic economic centres that drive development and innovation, creating a lasting impact. Usually, the government constructs essential infrastructure and provides land to industries, attracting investments by offering high-quality, dependable, eco-friendly, and robust infrastructure," Gupta added.

In the Budget 2024-25, the government has also announced other measures such as customs duty rationalisation to promote manufacturing and boost exports.

Gold, silver prices bounce back on global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rebounded on Friday after falling for three past sessions, rising Rs 50 to Rs 70,700 per 10 grams in the local market due to strong trend in the global markets.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 70,650 per 10 grams in the previous session on Thursday.

According to All India Sarafa Association, gold of 99.9 per cent and 99.5 per cent purity edged up Rs 50 each to Rs 70,700 and Rs 70,350 per 10 grams, respectively.

Silver also jumped Rs 400 to Rs 84,400 per kg. It had settled at Rs 84,000 per kg in the previous close.

Traders attributed the rise in gold prices to a pick-up in demand by jewellers in the domestic market and a strong trend in the overseas markets.

On Thursday, the yellow metal rates fell sharply by Rs 1,000 to finish at Rs 70,650 per 10 grams while silver tumbled Rs 3,500 to settle at Rs 84,000 per kg.

The government on Tuesday



announced that it has slashed basic customs duties on a range of products, including gold and silver from 15 per cent to 6 per cent.

Following the announcement, gold prices crashed Rs 3,350 to Rs 72,300 per 10 grams and silver declined Rs 3,500 to close at Rs 87,500 per kg in the national capital.

Meanwhile, on the Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX), gold futures jumped Rs 294, or 0.44 per cent, to trade at Rs 67,756 per 10 grams. The most-traded August contract hit an intraday high of Rs 528 to Rs 67,990 per 10 grams.

Further, silver contracts for September delivery were quoted higher by Rs 59, or 0.07 per cent, to Rs 81,390 per kg on the exchange.

In the overseas markets, comex gold was trading higher at USD 2,416.40 per ounce.

"Gold prices opened higher, with Comex Gold finding support around USD 2,350. Prices have taken a hit recently due to the yen rising with safe-haven buying seen in the currency.

"However, with the Fed policy meeting next week, all eyes are set on any updates regarding a potential interest

rate cut in September," Jateen Trivedi, VP Research Analyst — Commodity and Currency at LKP Securities, said.

However, silver was marginally down at USD 27.89 per ounce in New York.

"Traders are awaiting for the US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) price inflation data to be released later on Friday that is likely to reveal easing pricing pressures, prompt traders to increase their bets on rate cuts, and potentially provide support for gold," Saumil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.

According to Pranav Mer, Vice President, EBG — Commodity & Currency Research, JM Financial Services, gold is seen consolidating in a range after falling sharply earlier in the week.

Besides, prices are holding above crucial support levels at USD 2,348-2,350 in the international market and facing upside resistance at USD 2,405/2,433 per ounce, he said.

Govt to buy all masur, urad and tur dal produced by farmers: Agriculture Minister

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government will procure the entire production of tur, urad, and masur dal from farmers, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said in Rajya Sabha on Friday. Through e-Samridhi platform, on which farmers have to get themselves registered, the government will make the procurement, he said.

"The government will procure all tur, urad and masur dal produced by farmers," Chouhan said, while replying to a supplementary question in the Rajya Sabha.

The minister further said under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the government had the highest purchase under MSP from farmers.

Referring to data of the previous UPA government, Chouhan said between 2003-2004 and 2013-14, only 45 crore metric tonnes were purchased under the Minimum Support Price (MSP). While the present NDA government has procured a total of 69.18 crore metric tonnes between 2014-15 and 2023-24.

He alleged that the opposition was doing politics and said the Swaminathan committee

recommended 50 per cent profit to farmers on their cost, but it was the UPA government that ignored it. Placing a cabinet note of previous Manmohan Singh's government, Chouhan said it refused to accept suggestions of the Swaminathan Commission saying that mechanical linkage between MSP and cost of production would distort the market.

M Shanmugam of the DMK demanded that tea and coffee growers be brought under the MSP as they, too, are facing difficulties.

"It is a long-pending demand that tea and coffee should be added in the essential commodity because there is no MSP for them. The planters are demanding this," he said.

On this, Chouhan said MSP is granted on 23 crops and tea and coffee are handled by the commerce & industry minister, which is handled by his colleague Piyush Goyal.

Appreciating the issue raised by the DMK member, Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar said after the allocation of portfolios, Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities Ltd, said, Bharti Airtel emerged as the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, climbing 4.51 per cent. Adani Ports, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Infosys, Sun Pharma,

Markets' sharp rebound makes investors richer by ₹7.10 lakh cr

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Investors' wealth soared Rs 7.10 lakh crore on Friday following a sharp rally in the equity market where the BSE Sensex jumped 1,292.92 points.

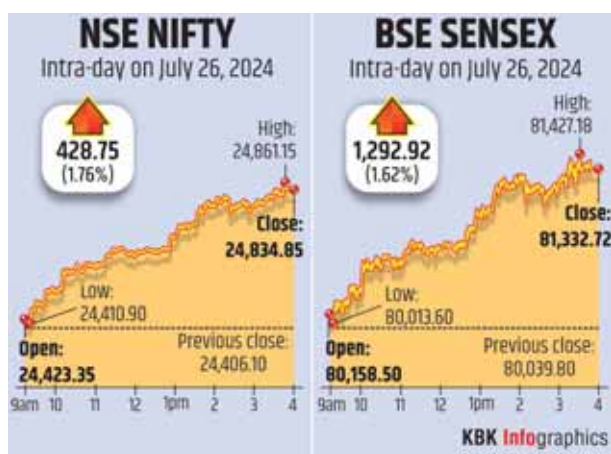
The 30-share BSE Sensex rallied 1,292.92 points or 1.62 per cent to 81,332.72. During the day, it soared 1,387.38 points or 1.73 per cent to 81,427.18.

Thanks to the optimistic trend, the market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms rallied by Rs 7,10,235.45 crore to hit an all-time high of Rs 4,56,92,671.33 crore (USD 5.46 trillion).

"Indian markets outperformed its global peers on the back of a strong across-the-board buying support after languishing in negative territory for the past five trading sessions.

"The sharp rebound signifies that India remains a good long-term bet and the economy continues to show strong resilience in spite of global uncertainty and geopolitical tensions," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research) at Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Bharti Airtel emerged as the biggest gainer in the Sensex pack, climbing 4.51 per cent. Adani Ports, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, Infosys, Sun Pharma,



HCL Technologies and Mahindra & Mahindra were other big gainers. Nestle was the only laggard from the pack.

"The domestic market experienced a substantial rebound on the start of the next month's expiry, recovering from the recent losses incurred following the Union Budget. This upturn was driven by positive reactions to the better-than-expected US GDP, which augurs well for global demand. Investors are adopting buy-on-dip strategy, refocusing on quarterly earnings and stock-specific trends," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial

Services, said. Benchmark indices were on the back foot for the past five straight sessions. In five days, the BSE benchmark Sensex tumbled 1,303.66 points or 1.60 per cent.

In the broader market, the BSE midcap gauge soared 2.12 per cent and smallcap index rallied 1 per cent.

All the indices ended higher, with telecommunication jumping 3.36 per cent, metal (3.19 per cent), teck (2.76 per cent), auto (2.35 per cent), commodities (2.26 per cent) and healthcare (2.10 per cent). As many as 2,652 stocks advanced while 1,286 declined and 102 remained unchanged on the BSE.

RBI issues prompt corrective action framework for UCBs

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Friday issued a prompt corrective action framework for urban cooperative banks with an aim to enabling supervisory intervention at an appropriate time.

The provisions of the Prompt Corrective Action (PCA) Framework for Primary (Urban) Co-operative Banks (UCBs) will be effective from April 1, 2025.

The objective of the PCA Framework is to enable supervisory intervention at an appropriate time and require the UCBs to initiate and implement remedial measures in a timely manner, to restore their financial health.

The Reserve Bank had issued a Supervisory Action Framework (SAF) as an early intervention tool for bringing about desired improvements in weak UCBs and UCBs which are experiencing financial stress. The SAF was last revised in January 2020.

"This PCA framework shall replace the SAF," the RBI said in a statement.

The revised framework seeks to provide flexibility to design entity specific supervisory action plans based on the assessment of risks on a case-by-case basis.

Rising Chinese imports affecting domestic steel makers' margins, says Sajjan Jindal

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Increased Chinese steel imports are having an adverse impact on the margins of the domestic players, JSW Steel Chairman Sajjan Jindal said Friday.

Addressing the company's Annual General Meeting (AGM) Jindal said several countries have already raised barriers against steel imports. The Indian steel industry is also engaged with the government to ensure a level playing field.

The domestic steel demand increased 13.6 per cent in FY24, outpacing economic growth. This was driven by infrastructure development and robust demand from all major steel-consuming sectors, he said.

"However, global steel demand remains weak, leading to rising imports into India and affecting domestic steelmakers' margins. This is mainly because of elevated Chinese production and exports, pressuring global steel markets," he said addressing the shareholders of JSW Steel.

Moreover, healthy demand for steel in the country also makes the domestic market vulnerable to imports amid weak global demand.

Sharing business updates for JSW Steel in FY24, Jindal said the company achieved its highest-ever crude steel



production with a capacity utilization of 92 per cent during the year.

JSW Steel met 100 per cent of its production and sales guidance for FY24. Its revenue from operations reached Rs 1,75,006 crore, with an earnings before interest, taxes, depreciation, and amortization (EBITDA) of Rs 28,236 crore and a profit after tax of Rs 8,973 crore.

The Board has recommended a dividend of Rs 7.30 per share for FY24, subject to shareholders approval.

Further, the company plans to expand its capacity to 50 million tonnes per annum in India by FY31. The Board recently approved a 5 million tonnes expansion at Dolvi, in Maharashtra increasing the company's domestic capacity to 42 million tonnes and total capacity to 43.5 million tonnes by September 2027.

"We also plan to establish a green steel manufacturing facility, initially at 2 million tonnes per annum and expandable to 4 million tonnes," Jindal added.

FY25 Budget confirms new Govt's commitment to reducing fiscal deficit: Fitch

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fitch Ratings on Friday said India's post-election budget confirms that the new administration remains committed to reducing the fiscal deficit for FY25 and FY26, despite demands of the coalition government.

In the FY25 budget, the government has lowered the Centre's fiscal deficit target for the year ending March 2025 to 4.9 per cent of GDP, from 5.1 per cent in February's interim budget.

The government's fiscal deficit target for FY25 is significantly below the 5.4 per cent that the ratings agency anticipated when it affirmed India's 'BBB-' rating, with a stable outlook, in January 2024.

"India's post-election budget confirms that the new administration remains committed to reducing the fiscal deficit this and next year, despite the demands of the coalition government," Fitch Ratings said in a statement.

The sustained focus on supporting economic growth through high public capex also points to continuity in key areas, it added.

"We believe that it should be achievable as the government's assumption of 10.5 per cent nominal GDP growth in FY25 is modestly



strengthening manufacturing. "We believe the proposals hold some potential to address India's skills gap, particularly in manufacturing, but their effect will ultimately depend on implementation," Fitch said.

In addition to support for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, the budget included measures to review customs duties over the next six months and reduce foreign firms' corporation tax rate to 35 per cent from 40 per cent.

"We believe these measures should be positive for manufacturing investment, as should public capex-led improvements to transportation infrastructure," Fitch added.

However, land and labour regulations remain significant constraints. The budget highlighted that these will stay largely under the state government's purview, though the central government will incentivise reforms.

"This is broadly in line with our earlier expectations, as advancing such reforms is usually difficult, especially at the national level, and has likely become more politically challenging following the return to coalition government," Fitch said.

below our current forecast. We think the government should also be able to achieve its goal of reducing the deficit below 4.5 per cent of GDP in FY26," Fitch said.

The government's record in recent years of achieving or outperforming its budget deficit targets has improved its fiscal credibility - the deficit in FY24, at 5.6 per cent of GDP, was well below the original target of 5.9 per cent. Furthermore, the government's use of the RBI dividend reinforces our perception of a preference for fiscal consolidation over additional spending.

The budget did not provide much clarity on medium-term targets but did highlight a desire to manage deficits to keep debt on a declining path. The long-term deficit target of 3 per cent of GDP under the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act,

Standard Glass Lining Technology files papers with Sebi to raise funds through an IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Standard Glass Lining Technology Ltd, which manufactures specialised engineering equipment for pharmaceutical and chemical sectors, has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an Initial Public Offering (IPO).

The Telangana-based company's IPO is a combination of fresh issuance of shares worth Rs 250 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 1.84 crore equity shares by promoters and other selling shareholders, according to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP).

Those selling shares in the OFS include -- S2 Engineering Services, Standard Holdings, Kandula Ramakrishna, Kandula Krishna Veni, Nageswara Rao Kandula, Katragadda Venkata Ramani and Venkata Siva Prasad Katragadda.

The company may consider raising up to Rs 50 crore in the pre-IPO placement. If such placement is completed, the fresh issue size will be reduced.

Proceeds from the fresh to the extent of Rs 130 crore will be used for payment of a debt, Rs 30 crore for investment in a wholly-owned subsidiary, S2 Engineering Industry, Rs 20 crore for funding inorganic growth through strategic



investments or acquisitions Rs 10 crore for purchase of machinery and equipment and a portion will also be used for general corporate purpose.

Standard Glass Lining Technology offers comprehensive solutions that encompass design, engineering, manufacturing, assembly, installation, and commissioning, as well as establishing standard operating procedures for pharmaceutical and chemical manufacturers on a turnkey basis.

The company's product portfolio includes essential equipment used in the production of pharmaceutical and chemical products. It has 443 customers, including end-users in the pharmaceutical, chemical, paint, biotechnology, and food and beverage sectors.

Some of its pharma clients

ITC to invest ₹20,000 crore in medium term: Chairman Puri

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

ITC Chairman Sanjiv Puri on Friday said the multi-conglomerate will invest Rs 20,000 crore in the medium term to enhance structural competitiveness and build an enterprise for the future.

"Our confidence in India is unwavering and is reflected in your company's investment outlay of about Rs 20,000 crore in the medium term," Puri said while addressing the shareholders during the annual general meeting.

Despite the headwinds, ITC has invested across all businesses to enhance structural competitiveness and build an enterprise for the future, he added.

India has a "standout performance" as the world's fastest-growing major economy, which has not only evoked global respect but also points to its future promise, Puri said.

Over the past 4 years, overall revenues grew at a CAGR of 10.8 per cent to about Rs 79,000 crore.

ITC's non-cigarette revenues grew at a CAGR of 11.6 per cent and now account for about 65 per cent of net revenue.

include the likes of Aurobindo Pharma Ltd, Cadila Pharmaceutical Ltd, Deccan Fine Chemicals (India) Private Limited, Laurus Labs Ltd, Granules India Ltd, Macleods Pharmaceuticals Ltd, Natco Pharma Ltd, Piramal Pharma Ltd, Suvon Pharmaceuticals Ltd, and Tagros Chemicals India.

In terms of financial, Standard Glass Lining Technology's revenue from operations increased by 9.26 per cent to Rs 543.67 crore in fiscal 2024 from Rs 497.59 crore in fiscal 2023. Further, profit after tax rose by 12.33 per cent to Rs 60 crore in fiscal 2024 from Rs 53.42 crore in fiscal 2023.

IIFL Securities and Motilal Oswal Investment Advisors are the book-running lead managers to the proposed public issue. The equity shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE.

World champions India look to maintain dominance in new era of SKY, Gambhir

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

India's newly-forged coach-captain combination of Gautam Gambhir and Suryakumar Yadav will look to make instant impact against a Sri Lankan team in disarray when the familiar South Asian rivals face off in a limited-overs series, starting with three T20Is, here on Saturday. Two-time World Cup winner Gambhir is now at the helm of the ship as India's head coach while the T20I reigns have been handed over to one of the best batters in the format, Suryakumar. Gambhir, who has built his coaching reputation in the corridors of IPL with three title wins for Kolkata Knight Riders - twice as captain and once as mentor - succeeds the immensely popular Rahul Dravid. The new coach has his task cut out given that the team under his predecessor reached the final in each of the ICC events in their respective last editions. Gambhir's tenacity as well as his intense approach will make him a different coach to work along for the players, who will also have to learn the ways of the new T20I skipper Suryakumar. Suryakumar's elevation came as a slight surprise given he leapfrogged Hardik Pandya

for the job. The selectors also ignored his comparative lack of experience as captain. Ajit Agarkar and Co. Made it clear that they wanted a captain who was on the park "more often than not" and went by "dressing room feedback" while hitting the reset button on the T20I side. The next T20 World Cup, to be co-hosted by India and Sri Lanka in 2026, gives the selectors plenty of time to rebuild the side which has also suffered a severe talent drain. The overhaul follows the World Cup triumph last month and T20I retirements of seasoned campaigners Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli and Ravindra Jadeja. With the side in transition, young batting gun and vice-captain in the white-ball formats, Shubman Gill sees this as an opportunity to cement his place and others like Yashasvi Jaiswal, Rinku Singh and even Riyan Parag will look to do the same. While the like-for-like replacement Axar Patel fits in perfectly for Jadeja in the eleven, India also has riches in the all-round department given Pandya, Shivam Dube and an in-form Washington Sundar are also available. While the like-for-like replacement Axar Patel fits in perfectly for Jadeja in the eleven, India also has riches in the all-round department given Pandya, Shivam Dube and an in-form Washington Sundar are also available. Jasprit Bumrah has been deservingly rested from this tour which gives the pair of Arshdeep Singh and



Mohammed Siraj to make the most of favourable conditions at the Pallekele International Stadium, where the surface tends to assist pace and bounce. On the same metric, Sri Lanka will feel depleted since two of their experienced bowlers

Dushmantha Chameera (bronchitis and respiratory infection) and slinky Nuwan Thushara (broken finger) have been ruled out. The hosts have added Asitha Fernando and Dilshan Madushanka, who took a five-for the last time India and Sri

Lanka played in the ODI World Cup, as replacements. The 2014 T20 World Cup winners, Sri Lanka are wading through turbulent times following their first-round exit from the last edition. Skipper Wanindu Hasaranga, coach Chris Silverwood and

consultant coach Mahela Jayawardene tendered their resignations after the debacle in the Americas. Sri Lanka have appointed 'Matara Marauder' Sanath Jayasuriya as interim coach and he has urged his side to make the most of India's lack

of experienced stars, but knows well that his team is desperately short on solid performances. The Sri Lankan team of the current does not inspire confidence given their frailties across departments despite Jayasuriya's assessment that

this group will turn around the fortunes in the next two years. Enterprising batter Charith Asalanka has been handed over the captaincy as Sri Lanka, like India, foray in uncharted waters looking to brighten their fortunes. Playing at home, Sri Lanka should feel confident about turning the tide given the richness of talent in the ranks, which includes a combative former skipper Dasun Shanaka, Kusal Perera, Kusal Mendis and the experienced Dinesh Chandimal.

TEAMS (FROM):

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



Gambhir's key task will be man-management with Indian team, reckons Patil

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gautam Gambhir's key task as India head coach will be man-management and not coaching a bunch of talented players in their respective skills, said former player and ex-chief selector Sandeep Patil on Friday. Gambhir is set to start his tenure with a limited-overs tour of Sri Lanka comprising three T20Is and as many ODIs, with the first game in the shortest format set to be played on Saturday. "I don't think his job is to coach the Indian team. His job is to help the Indian team," Patil told PTI Videos in an exclusive interview here. "That's how it works at the top level. You need player management. That will be the challenge for Gambhir." "He has done it and I am sure he will continue to do the same with the Indian cricket team," said Patil on the sidelines of an event organised by Shrachi Rajasthan Tigers. Patil, a member of India's World Cup winning team in 1983, hoped Gambhir will continue to have success at international level after excelling in the IPL. "Gambhir had done an exceptional job as a coach for Kolkata Knight Riders in IPL. I hope that he continues to help the Indian team in the same way," he added.

Patil backed senior India players Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, who retired from the T20 internationals after winning the World Cup last month, to continue featuring in the other formats for a long run. "Virat Kohli and Rohit Sharma are still doing extremely well and there is no question of an Indian team without them. I wish the Indian team all the best wherever they are playing and whatever tournament they are playing, they are bound to do exceedingly well," he said. "Surya comes from Mumbai and is a very dear friend of mine. He has been given the captaincy and he deserved it. I wish him all the best," he said about India's newest T20I captain. Patil said cricket has made significant progress in India since the country's maiden title triumph in 1983. "Like every Indian, I wish the Indian cricket team good luck. I am happy that I am part of 1983 and the progress the Indian team has made over the years has been commendable," he said. Patil said it is important for India to be a contender in all sports. "Cricket has changed over time, so has coaching and the approach to sports. We need to ensure India can become a contender in all sports and all avenues of sports," he added.

India a win away from Women's Asia Cup title

PTI ■ DAMBULLA

Pacer Renuka Singh's three-wicket burst followed by Smriti Mandhana's brisk unbeaten fifty underlined India's ruthless performance as the defending champions walloped Bangladesh by 10 wickets and marched into their record-extending ninth women's Asia Cup final, here on Friday. India will face the winner of the second semifinal between Pakistan and Sri Lanka, in the title clash on Sunday. Shafali (26 not out, 28b, 2x4) and Mandhana (55 not out, 39b, 9x4, 1x6) were on song from the word go, as India overhauled the target of 81 without breaking a sweat. India ended up at 83 for no loss in 11 overs. Mandhana and Shafali's knocks were filled with trademark shots around the ground as India motored to 46 for no loss in the Power Play. Shafali, who was dropped on

21 off Rabeya Khan, played those powerful heaves across the line to find the fence. Mandhana, at the other end, unfurled those exquisite drives on the off-side, such as the one the left-hander played through the covers against pacer Marufa Akter. Mandhana also displayed her power while pulling pacer Jahannara Alam for a six over deep square leg as India trotted to a victory that was a long-forgone conclusion once Bangladesh were limited 80 for eight. Renuka (3/10) upfront and left-arm spinner Radha Yadav in the middle overs (3/14) rattled Bangladesh with excellent spells. In fact, Bangladesh hardly recovered from the deep wounds inflicted by Renuka in the first six overs. Renuka, who bowled four overs on the trot during her 3/10 spell, received ample support from left-arm spinner Radha Yadav (3/14

after Bangladesh elected to bat first. Renuka struck in the first over itself, dismissing Dilara Akter, whose slog sweep did not have enough power in it to clear Uma Chetry at deep mid-wicket. In her next over, Renuka got the better of Ishma Tanjim with a delivery that stayed close to her body and a mistimed whip across the line was grabbed by Tanuja Kanwar at short third. Renuka bagged her third wicket in as many overs with a slightly short of length delivery that Murshida Khatun slapped straight to Shafali at midwicket. At 25 for three inside the Power Play segment, Bangladesh were falling apart fast and their real hope for a revival was the presence of skipper Nigar Sultana (32, 51b, 2x4), the third highest run-getter in the tournament. Sultana hung around resolutely but even she could

not offer a meaningful fight to the Indian bowlers, who gave away just seven runs across overs seven and 10 while losing Rumana Ahmed to Radha's quick arm ball. There was also hardly any backing for Sultana and the excellent line of Indian spinners on the day meant that the right-hander could rarely play her preferred sweep shot. The Indians, on their part, fielded vastly better compared to the previous games and Shafali was particularly impressive. Her forward-diving catch to oust Rabeya off pacer Pooja Vastrakar was from the top draw. There was a good little partnership of 36 runs for the seventh wicket between Sultana, who was dismissed for the first time in this tournament, and Shorna Akter (19 not out, 18b, 2x4) but it came way too late to have any match-course altering effect.



Olympic tennis schedule has Djokovic, Nadal and Alcaraz in action today

AP ■ PARIS

Novak Djokovic, Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz all are on the Paris Olympics' tennis schedule on Saturday, the first day of action at Roland Garros. Serbia's Djokovic will compete in singles only, Nadal in doubles only and Alcaraz in both. Nadal and Alcaraz are teammates in doubles for Spain and will face Maximo Gonzalez and Andres Molteni of Argentina at Court Philippe Chatrier during the night session. Nadal's singles debut will come on Sunday against Marton Fucsovics of Hungary. If he wins, and Djokovic wins his first-round match against Matthew Ebden on Saturday, the two rivals will face each other in the second round of what could be the final event of the 38-year-old Nadal's career. Djokovic owns 24 Grand Slam titles. Nadal has 22, plus two Olympic golds - one in singles in 2008 and in doubles in 2016. When Djokovic played in the French Open, he tore the meniscus in his right knee and needed surgery in Paris on June 5. He recovered in time to compete at Wimbledon, where he made it to the final before

losing to Alcaraz. "Expectations for the Olympics are high, and I can't and don't want to change that. It creates a personal motivation for me to approach it in the best possible way for the best possible result," said Djokovic, who took home a bronze in 2008. The first match in Chatrier will involve top-ranked Iga Swiatek of Poland, who has won four of the past five championships in that stadium at the French Open, against Irina-Camelia Begu of Romania. That will be followed by Djokovic vs Ebden. After Nadal and Alcaraz start the night session, the day's program concludes with a pair of former No. 1 players who own multiple major titles: Naomi Osaka of Japan vs Angelique Kerber of Germany, Jasmine Paolini of Italy, the runner-up to Swiatek at the French Open in June and to Barbara Krejickova at Wimbledon this month, opens play at Court Suzanne Lenglen against Ana Bogdan on Romania. That will be followed by Alcaraz, who is coming off trophies at the French Open and Wimbledon, against Hady Habib of Lebanon.

Canada women's soccer coach removed by Canadian Olympic Committee over drone controversy

AP ■ PARIS

The Canadian Olympic Committee removed women's national soccer head coach Bev Priestman for the remainder of the Paris Games following an alleged drone spying scandal. The COC said in a statement released early on Friday that assistant coach Andy Spence would lead the defending gold medalists for the remainder of the tournament. Canada's camp was thrown into disarray this week after two team staffers were sent home for allegedly using a drone to spy on a New Zealand practice. Priestman denied any involvement, but did not



attend Thursday's 2-1 victory over New Zealand as FIFA - soccer's world governing body - and the International Olympic Committee investigate. Canada Soccer CEO and

general secretary Kevin Blue said in the COC release "additional information has come to our attention regarding previous drone use against opponents, predating the Paris 2024 Olympic

Games." He added Priestman was suspended from her duties until the end of the tournament and the completion of the organization's independent external review. The COC said on Wednesday that assistant coach Jasmine Mander and analyst Joseph Lombardi were "sent home immediately," and that it had accepted Priestman's decision to remove herself from coaching the opening match. Priestman held a brief media availability on Wednesday after guiding her team through a one-hour practice. "My reaction was you feel like this program has let the country down," the 38-year-old Priestman said.

Unbeaten Fiji on track for third successive Olympic rugby sevens gold by reaching semis

AP ■ PARIS

Fiji stayed on track for a third successive Olympic gold medal in rugby sevens by reaching the semifinals at the Stade de France. The Tokyo Games silver and bronze medalists - New Zealand and Argentina - were knocked out, however. Host side France and Australia reached the semifinals for the first time, while South Africa, the 12th and last team to qualify only a month ago, was back in the semis for the first time since the inaugural Olympic sevens in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro. In the quarterfinals on Thursday, Fiji came from behind against Ireland to win 19-15. New Zealand was stunned by South Africa 14-7, Argentina lost to France 26-14, and Australia shut out the United States 18-0. In the semifinals on Saturday, Fiji

plays Australia, and France meets South Africa. South Africa lost to New Zealand 17-5 in pool play on Wednesday, but shot to a 14-0 lead in their quarterfinal. Captain Selwyn Davids scored the opening try and, late in the half, countered from a dropped New Zealand pass in front of the South Africa tryline. Davids hacked and dribbled and popped up for Tristan Leyds to score. Leyds converted both. But deep in added time, New Zealand kept the ball alive and Moses Leo slipped Rosko Specman to cross for a converted try. New Zealand continued to attack in waves in the second half but the South Africa defense was incredible. Davids and Ryan Oosthuizen stood firm on their tryline, Shilton van Wyk made another try-saving tackle on a tearaway Akuila Rokolisoa, and

Ronald Brown's last-ditch tackle ended a gripping match. France enjoyed an almost perfect first half, much to the delight of the 69,000-strong crowd. Andy Timo cut inside his marker and scored, then Aaron Grandidier Nkanang scored twice in three minutes; the first from a ruck turnover, and the second from Jefferson-Lee Joseph's offload. Rayan Rebbadj converted all three for 21-0. Unlike the world series grand final, which France controlled in Madrid, Argentina made a comeback through its two best players, Rodrigo Isgro and Marcos Moneta, to close to 21-14. But with more than two minutes to go, and one of them with a man advantage while Jordan Sepho was in the sin-bin, Argentina couldn't get the ball back. Instead, France ground out the meters, and in the last seconds



replacement Antoine Dupont quick-tapped to himself and scooted 25 meters untouched to put the result to bed. Fiji crushed its pool and looked to be doing the same in the quarters when Iosefo Baleiwairiki bullrushed from inside his half and scored after just 30 seconds. But Ireland played a patient game, and Chay Mullins barged over for two tries to give them a 10-7 halftime lead. In the new half, Zac Ward reached out to the left corner flag for Ireland's third try and 15-7 but, crucially, they could not add any extras. Fiji's rally started from its own tryline. Selesitino Ravutaumada broke out from his 22, and was at the other end to offload for Joji Nasova to score and for Fiji to trail by three. At the restart, Ireland missed the catch, Baleiwairiki slapped the Fiji back and Waisea Nacuqu put Fiji back in front with a try converted by

Terio Tamani Veilawa. Ireland had two minutes of regulation time, and more than three minutes of added time, but its last attack died on a grounded pass on halfway that Fiji claimed. Nathan Lawson's break and offload gave James Turner the opening try in the fifth minute as Australia comfortably handled the misfiring Americans. From a ruck turnover on its 22, Australia countered and Henry Hutchinson's break led to a walk-in try by Corey Toole and a 10-0 lead at halftime. In the second half, Toole was denied a second try when Malacchi Esdale tackled him into touch but the US couldn't get into synch to sustain an attack. In the last minute of regulation, Australia replacement Maurice Longbottom kicked a penalty. The Americans tried to finish on a high, but Australia's defense pinned them and Longbottom stole a try.

RECORD SHOOTING CONTINGENT OUT TO END INDIA'S 12-YEAR MEDAL DROUGHT

PTI ■ CHATEAUX (FRANCE)

A squad full of debutants free from past baggage will aim to ace the ultimate test of their lives when the shooting competition of the Paris Olympics begins in the sleepy French town of Chateaux on Saturday. India has won four Olympic medals in shooting out of its overall tally of 35 but none in the last two editions of the Summer Games, putting the additional pressure of expectations on the record 21-member Indian contingent based in central France.

The national shooting federation NRAI chose current form over pedigree to pick the squad for the mega event and it will be hoping they hit the bullseye at the National Shooting Centre here. Even the quota winners were made to battle out in the trials with the inexperienced Sandeep Singh pipping 2022 world champion Rudranksh Patil, who had secured India's quota in the 10m air rifle. Patil wrote to NRAI proposing his selection in the team despite finishing behind Sandeep in the trials but the federation stuck to its guns.

The athletes have been training away from the hustle and bustle of Paris and that could work in their favour come competition day. Barring Manu Bhaker, Aishwary

Pratap Singh Tomar, Anjum Moudgil and Elavenil Valarivan, all will experience the biggest sporting stage for the first time. India will have representation in all 15 shooting events. It is not just peak performance on the day that matters in the Olympics, luck too plays a major part.

The 22-year-old Bhaker, who has won a bagful of medals in world events, had a stroke of bad luck at the Tokyo Games where her weapon malfunctioned in 10m air pistol qualification and she could not recover from that setback. She will be taking part in three disciplines - 10m air pistol, 25m pistol and 10m pistol mixed team. India's main challenge will come from China who are also fielding 21 shooters across disciplines. Another women shooter to watch out for will be Sift Kaur Samra, who won the 50m rifle three positions gold at the Asian Games. Moudgil, one of the seasoned pros in the squad, is making a comeback and will lineup alongside Sift in the women's 50m rifle three positions.

Twenty-year-old Rhythm Sangwan will be participating in two events, women's 10m air pistol alongside Bhaker and the 10m air pistol mixed team. "The preparation has been going good. The range is beautiful. I was a little upset staying away from



main village in Paris. It is not as I expected but I am here for the competition and win and not pass any comments on the Games Village. Olympics is the biggest stage out here," said Sangwan. Among the male participants, only

Tomar has been part of the Olympics before. Tomar, member of the gold winning team at the 2023 World Championships, will be seen in the men's 50m rifle three positions alongside Swapnil Kusale.

The male debutants who have a decent international experience include Anish Bhanwala, Sarabjot Singh, Arjun Babuta, Arjun Singh Cheema and Vijayveer Singh. Gagan Narang, the 2012 Olympic bronze medallist who is here as

India's chef de mission, is backing the shooters to end the medal drought in this edition. "My first Olympic experience was in 2004 and I remember at that time, we were not as confident as we are today. There is genuine

belief that we are at par with the best in the world," said Narang. The biggest test of the shooters' lives awaits.

FULL SQUAD

- RIFLE: Men's 10m air rifle:** Sandeep Singh, Arjun Babuta
- Women's 10m air rifle:** Elavenil Valarivan, Ramita Jindal
- Women's 50m rifle 3 positions:** Sift Kaur Samra, Anjum Moudgil
- Men's 50m rifle 3 positions:** Aishwary Pratap Singh Tomar, Swapnil Kusale
- 10m air rifle mixed team:** Sandeep Singh/Elavenil Valarivan, Arjun Babuta/Ramita Jindal
- PISTOL: Men's 10m air pistol:** Sarabjot Singh, Arjun Cheema
- Women's 10m air pistol:** Manu Bhaker, Rhythm Sangwan
- Men's 25m rapid fire pistol:** Anish Bhanwala, Vijayveer Sidhu
- Women's 25m pistol:** Manu Bhaker, Esha Singh
- 10m air pistol mixed team:** Sarabjot Singh/Manu Bhaker, Arjun Singh Cheema/Rhythm Sangwan
- SHOTGUN: Men's trap:** Prithviraj Tondaiman
- Women's trap:** Rajeshwari Kumari, Shreyasi Singh
- Men's skeet:** Anantjeet Singh Naruka
- Women's skeet:** Maheshwari Chauhan, Raiza Dhillon
- Skeet mixed team:** Anantjeet Singh Naruka/Maheshwari Chauhan.

We need to create more heroes to make India a sports superpower: Vijender

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Boxer-turned-politician Vijender Singh feels India needs more heroes beyond cricket to inspire the future generations if the country wants to become a sports superpower by 2047.

These heroes, he believes, will also drive a cultural change, encouraging more young Indians to pursue sports as a profession.

"We have to create heroes to change the culture," the former Olympic and world championships bronze medal-winning boxer, who is now a BJP leader, told PTI editors at his headquarters in an interaction here. His comments were in response to a query on whether the government's stated goal of making India a sports superpower by 2047 was realistic. "Over the years, the hunger to do well has kept increasing among our youth, especially those from the rural belt. So, when they see a Neeraj Chopra, they want to be like him. They want to have all that he has, and that drives them to excel," Vijender pointed out referring to the javelin throw gold-medallist from the Tokyo Olympics.

"When kids see his picture on a peanut butter container, it makes an impact. When I started out, I merely wanted a government job, that's all but today, athletes want more," he added. The Bhiwani-man also said that improvement in the country's sports infrastructure is crucial to ensure the overall progress.

"We don't have good infrastructure or good stadiums. If we are serious, we need to improve that. You can't just make one cricket stadium and leave it at that.

"You need to have training centres for other sports as well. Otherwise someone (in Delhi) who wants to learn boxing has no option but to go to Sonapat and train there," he said. Vijender said the change has to start at the basic level, in schools, where kids are allowed just one devoted sports or physical education period.

"We aren't taught sports in school. There is only one PT period but eight periods for academics. For us, sports



is time pass, not a career." Drawing a parallel with cricket, Vijender, the first boxer from the country to stand on the Olympic podium, said that even the legendary Kapil Dev was relatively unknown to the masses before he brought home the 1983 World Cup. "...How many people knew about Kapil Dev? Not many knew him before he won that World Cup." "Now, (we are at a point) where if a cricketer's finger gets hurt, you will read about it but you won't hear the same noise when a boxer's jaw is broken, that doesn't make news. Vijender said Olympic medallists should also receive a welcome at par

with the victory parade that was arranged for the T20 World Cup winning Indian cricket team earlier this month.

"We (other athletes) do feel bad because we also win medals for the country. We also have the right to a reception similar to the one in Mumbai," he said.

"An Olympic medallist should get a similar welcome but that won't happen. The medallist will be welcomed at the airport with garlands, shown on TV for one day and then they are back to competition."

IF I COULD, I'D GIVE MORE POWER TO SAI: Vijender, who joined BJP from Congress before the

Lok Sabha elections this year, would like to use his experience as an athlete in making effective changes if he is entrusted with the Sports Ministry in future.

"(If I become sports minister) I will make Sports Authority of India (SAI) stronger," he said, while talking about the nodal body of sports management in the country, entrusted with the job of handling logistics of national camps, appointment of coaches and financing the international exposure of athletes.

"I have got a lot of support from SAI, so I want to make it really strong. I want to reduce the power of the federations and give them to SAI. The SAI should directly handle the sportsperson," he added. **HOSTING OLYMPICS IN 2036 WILL INSPIRE YOUNGSTERS:** India are planning to bid for the hosting rights of the 2036 Olympic Games and Vijender feels it is a step in the right direction which will inspire the youth to take up sports.

"We should host the Olympics as people will get an opportunity to watch the Olympics (for free). Youngsters will get inspired. When they look at the podium and people standing on the first, second and third step...That's the moment they feel inspired."

Vijender, who was also the first boxer from the country to become world number one in his weight category, is confident that the country will be ready to host the biggest sporting event when the time comes.

"We will be ready by then. Even in 2010, it was difficult (to host) the Commonwealth Games but it was one of the best CWGs," he recalled.

The 38-year-old drew comparison between the 2010 CWG held in New Delhi and the 2014 Glasgow edition.

"There was a lot of controversy but those Games were really good," he asserted.

"After that we went to Scotland and there we had to pay for our food sometimes, as there was a limit on how much you could take. And when I compared the two, 2010 was great," he added.

PTI ■ PARIS

The soft-spoken N Sriram Balaji always wants to behave perfectly. He does not want to hurt anyone by his words or deeds and he is determined not to disappoint his senior tennis partner, Rohan Bopanna at the Olympics.

After all, the 44-year-old Coorgi has shown immense faith in Balaji's ability and picked him as his partner for the Paris Olympics ahead of others.

It's important for Balaji to give his best and not feel the pressure of the big stage. He needs to be comfortable in his skin and play his natural game.

Not playing at the Umag ATP event, one of the two tournaments they were scheduled to play in tune-up, has also helped Bopanna and Balaji know each other's game, and strengths better as the duo utilised that time to practice at Roland Garros, the venue for the tennis events at the Paris Games.

"The last few days have been about learning about each other," the Indian tennis team's travelling coach Balachandran told PTI, summing up what has been happening in the run-up to the Games.

"Balaji is a shy person. At this level, Bopanna does not need coaching from me. But we need to ensure that Balaji remains comfortable and confident. If he freezes at the big moment, then what?," Balachandran, who has worked with Balaji in the last two years, said.

"He wants to do everything perfectly, and Rohan is a great mentor. Even if Balaji makes a mistake, or if he does not do well in practice sets, Rohan would not say much to Bala.



Even if he is annoyed, he won't show.

"He would keep encouraging and guiding Balaji. That's a great sign of a leader."

Balaji has toiled for years on the brutal ATP tour and had to wait until the age of 34 for his chance to represent India in the Davis Cup earlier this year.

He did compete at the South Asian Games back in 2019 but never made the Asian Games squad. Playing for India at a big stage could have remained a dream, if Bopanna had not picked him.

Now that the biggest opportunity is before him and it matters a lot to the Coimbatore player.

"More than a player, I would like to be the best person on the court and off the court as well. I never thought about (playing) the Olympics," Balaji said. "As soon as I got a chance to be part of the team, my dad was the happiest person. He immediately applied for the visa. He wants to watch me play the Olympics for the first time."

"My father has been telling everyone, we are not coming back without a medal. But, no

pressure. I'm going to focus on my game."

It's going to be a big challenge to negotiate a star studded field that features the Spanish combine of Rafael Nadal and Carlos Alcaraz and several other top singles players entering as pairs.

Balachandran says how the Indian team, which has combined age of 78, handles the opening match will be crucial.

"For me, the first match is the key. After that, every team is beatable. I will keep my fingers crossed for them to get through the first match, then I will put my money on them."

They open their campaign against the French duo of Fabien Reboul and Edouard Roger-Vasselin.

The coach also hoped that the prevailing hot conditions would work in their favour.

"Compared to the usual clay court tournament, here right now the conditions with the ball and the weather are a little faster. The ball is also travelling faster, which for our boys is the best condition.

"We wouldn't want very wet (conditions), I think it's more difficult."

Indian hockey team has all qualities to finish on podium again: Harendra

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former coach Harendra Singh believes the Indian men's hockey team, led by the inspirational Harmanpreet Singh, has all the ingredients to win consecutive Olympic medals when it starts its campaign at the Paris Games against New Zealand here on Saturday.

But Harendra, who is now the head coach of the Indian women's team, has just one piece of advice for the men's side, "just play your normal game".

"My advice to them would be just play your normal game. India has all the qualities to finish on the podium. I am not predicting the colour of the medal but they can win a medal for sure. This team has

everything," Harendra told PTI Bhasha. "The team has a good forward line, great midfielders and of course the wall of Indian hockey PR Sreejesh, a cool captain like Harmanpreet Singh.

"Craig (Fulton) is a great coach. He knows what it needs to be a champion team. He knows how to deal with crunch situations. He has good experience of European and Indian style of hockey," added the former coach of USA men's team.

Harendra has served in various coaching and managerial capacities for senior and junior national teams, across prestigious events like the 2000 Sydney Olympics, 2005 men's junior World Cup, 2006 men's World

Cup, 2006 Asian Games, 2009 men's Asia Cup, and 2010 men's World Cup.

He took over the head coach's position of the national men's junior team in 2014 and then guided India to the junior World Cup title two years later in Lucknow.

Harmanpreet was part of that junior World Cup-winning team and Harendra had predicted back then that the dragflicker will scale greater heights in his career.

"Harmanpreet is a great captain. I want to disclose that in October 2015 before junior team's departure for Johor Cup, I told him (Harmanpreet) in front of the entire team that if you keep your head down and keep improving, not going too hard, one day you will lead the Indian team," said



Harendra, who was the coach of 2017 Asia Cup-winning Indian women's team.

"The best thing about him is he remains cool in every situation. He never lets pressure affect him in any situation. This is his strength and being a defender he is leading the team the way it should be. He can make good decisions because of his calmness and that is why he is one of the best dragflickers in the world at this moment."

"I think he is one of the best captains Indian hockey has produced in recent years. He has the capability to execute plans," he said.

"He is also one of the main goal scorers for India and inspires others by his own performance. Harmanpreet can single handedly turn a

match in India's favour," said the 55-year-old, a member of India's 1990 Asian Games silver medal-winning side.

Harendra said a medal will be fitting farewell gift for long-serving goalkeeper PR Sreejesh, who will quit the sport after the Paris Games.

"Wo mera Jangoo (Sreejesh is affectionately called) hai and a medal will be a good salute to him. We started our journey almost together and today he is going to play his fourth Olympics," he said.

"Modern day hockey is very demanding. Since his (Sreejesh's) debut India has played more than 1000 matches and to keep himself fit physically and mentally and perform at optimum level is truly incredible. A big salute to him."

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