



OPINION 6 HONOUR THE UNSUNG HEROES OF OPERATION PAWAN

WORLD 9 7 KILLED IN CONGO'S MUSIC CONCERT STAMPEDE

MONEY 10 REMOVAL OF ANGEL TAX FOR STARTUPS TO HELP ATTRACT INVESTORS: GOYAL

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SINDHU OPENS CAMPAIGN WITH DOMINANT WIN 11 SPORTS

WHY? WHY? WHY?

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Phones kept buzzing with messages on WhatsApp groups with helpless students trying to find where their friends — studying at the Rau's Coaching centre's library on Saturday evening — were following the death of three civil services aspirants due to rain-induced flooding in the basement of the coaching centre. While reports claimed only three lives were lost, students who were witness to the tragic incident unfolding before their eyes claimed a higher number. All the deceased had cleared their preliminary examination, the results of which was declared a few days ago and were burning midnight oil to prepare for the Mains examinations scheduled in October-November which is second stage of Civil Services Examinations to qualify to become an IAS, IPS or allied services officer. Thousands like the ones who fell prey to lackadaisical civic amenities make national Capital their karambhoomi for a few years to get into elite Government services. "We have WhatsApp groups of UPSC aspirants. Those groups are full with students asking about the whereabouts of their friends. I am sure that the numbers are much higher



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

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

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

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

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

Library running illegally in basement

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

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Two arrested

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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



The officer said the basement was eight-feet below the ground level and more than 18 students were present in it on Saturday evening when it got flooded after heavy rain. According to sources in the police department, the gate of the basement was closed, but due to high pressure of rain water, it got damaged and water gushed in. "We are checking CCTV footage from the area to ascertain the sequence of the events. After scanning the CCTV footage, we will identify the people who were standing close to the institute during the time of incident and will record their statements," said the officer.

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Govt clarifies on tax clearance certificate for going abroad

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

After social media outrage over a Budget proposal making it mandatory to get tax clearance certificates for going abroad, the Government on Sunday clarified that the proposed amendment is not for all, and only those accused of financial irregularities or having substantial tax arrears need such clearance. The Finance Ministry, in the Finance Bill, 2024, has proposed to add the reference of the Black Money Act, 2015, to the list of Acts, under which any person should clear his liabilities to obtain the tax clearance certificate. "The proposed amendment does not require all the residents to obtain the tax clearance certificate," the ministry said in a statement. As per section 230 of the Income-tax Act, 1961, every person is not required to obtain a tax clearance certificate. Only in the case of certain persons, in respect of whom circumstances exist, which make it necessary to obtain a tax clearance certificate will be required to obtain such a certificate.

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Manu first Indian shooter to win medal at Olympics

RISHABH MALIK/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/PARIS

A 22-year-old Haryana girl clinched the first medal for India. Manu Bhaker strikes the bronze medal in Women's 10m Air Pistol event in Paris Olympics in 2024. With her medal she becomes the first female shooter to win medal for India in Olympic games. On July 27 Manu Bhaker had qualified for the final of her event with a score of 580 points, finishing third out of 45 competitors with the top-eight going through to Sunday's final. Bhaker scored 221.7 in the final round in which she fought hard against Korea's Kim Yeji who bagged silver and Jin Ye Oh bagged the gold with a games record of 243.2. Bhaker stated, "I was fighting with all the energy I have. Really grateful that I could win the bronze. I read Bhagwat Gita and always tried to do what I am supposed to do, left everything else to god." "We can't fight destiny," said Bhaker who appeared in her second Olympic stint. Previously she couldn't make it to the final and registered a bronze in this 2024 Olympic ending a drought in Olympic event.



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

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

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

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

Major gubernatorial reshuffle

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

Row as students seek special space for namaz in Kerala college

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

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

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



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

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

Continued on Page 8

NTA announces CUET-UG results

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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BJP top brass, CMs deliberate on governance



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

Khadi creating jobs, says Modi

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said that Khadi Gramodyog's business has crossed ₹ 1.5 lakh crore for the first time and asserted that the rising sales of Khadi and handloom were creating new job opportunities in large numbers. In his Mann Ki Baat monthly radio broadcast, Modi said many people who would not be using Khadi products earlier now wear them with great pride.

The Khadi Gramodyog's business has crossed ₹ 1.5 lakh crore for the first time. Do you know how much sales of Khadi have gone up '400 per cent'. The rising sales of Khadi and handloom are creating new job opportunities in large numbers," he said. Mostly women are associated with this industry so they are benefitting the most, he added. "You must be having different types of clothes and till now if you have not bought khadi clothes then start buying them," Modi said. With the start of the Paris Olympics, the prime minister said the games give our athletes a chance to hoist the national flag at the international level. He urged people to encourage them and 'Cheer for Bharat'. During the broadcast, he also interacted with Indian students who performed very well in the recently held Mathematics olympiad. "A few days ago, an Olympics took place in the world of mathematics also: the International Mathematics Olympiad. Indian students have performed very well in this Olympiad. Our team won four gold medals and one silver medal," Modi said. The prime minister also hailed the inclusion of the 'Moidams' in Assam in the UNESCO world heritage list and said it is a matter of immense joy for every Indian. He also recalled unveiling the tallest statue of the great Ahom warrior Lachit Borphukan, a symbol of indomitable courage and bravery.



Mann Ki Baat

Locals' efforts to save tigers lauded

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

From Rajasthan's 'Kulhadi Band Panchayat' in Ranthambore tiger reserve to Maharashtra's eco-tourism initiatives by tribals in Maharashtra's Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve and Andhra Pradesh's diligent 'Chenchu' tribe to 'Baagh Mitri Karyakram' in Pilibhit, various communities across India are playing crucial role in safeguarding India's big cats. India has 70 per cent of the global tiger population.

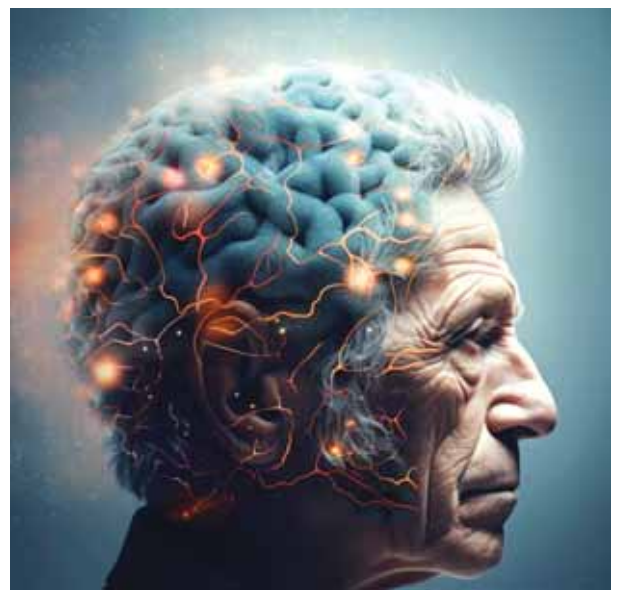
"In India, Tigers have been an integral part of our culture. We all have grown up listening to stories of incidents related to tigers. In the villages around forests, everyone knows how to live in harmony with the tiger. In our country, there are many villages where there is no conflict between humans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



On the eve of the World Tiger Day observed on Monday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday in his 'Mann Ki Baat' made special mention of these local initiatives, stating that "all of them play a crucial role in protecting the country's magnificent creatures." India is seeing positive impacts from these community-driven efforts, he said, adding that they are not only inspiring but also crucial for the preservation of our rich wildlife heritage. "Let us applaud and support these exemplary initiatives," the Prime Minister said.

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

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



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

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

With only four States complying despite repeated reminders, the Centre is contemplating making it mandatory for States to enact floodplain zoning legislation if they want to access central flood management funds, officials have said.

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



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

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

Cong accuses Centre of bias in flood relief funds allocation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



Pvt Bill in LS seeks official status for Bhojpuri

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

Conclave to advance development of world's largest museum

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Enough is enough

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

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



incident underscores a stark reality faced by many urban dwellers who are forced to live in substandard and unsafe accommodations due to high real estate costs and inadequate housing policies.

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

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PICTALK



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

Honour the unsung heroes of operation Pawan



R S SIDHU

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

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

As of now, against the backdrop of a sustained Chinese presence in Sri Lanka, India is struggling to adopt a coherent strategy to deal with the continued intransigence by the Sri Lanka Government to implement the political solution of devolution to the Tamils enshrined in the Indian Sri Lanka Agreement (ISLA) of 29th of July 1987. India is bound to invite hostility from the dominant geopolitical forces in its neighbourhood. This will mandate it to be prepared for Out-of-area military operations to secure its economic and geopolitical interests. India's



future path to greatness therefore shall be marked with supreme sacrifices by its warriors who if confined to the dustbin of state apathy, as reflected by the Government disinclination towards public commemoration of supreme sacrifice by 1171 Indian soldiers KIA in Sri Lanka, may adversely impact the national will during the inevitable future military confrontations. The Government is very vocal in pronouncing its nationalist credentials but sluggish in putting money into building deterrent capabilities. Last week's defence budget was a green signal for China to race even further ahead under the illusion there will be no war. Still, policy pronouncements are not enough unless backed by a revitalised and reorganised military competent to safeguard its economic interests, all aspirational talk is mere rhetoric. Building National War Memorials is one thing; honouring the fallen braves appropriately is quite another matter regardless of the outcome because victory or defeat on the battlefield is never complete unless it is surrendered as in 1971. This is where the IPKF comes into the picture because it was not permitted to complete its military mission. Its contribution to the preservation of Sri Lanka's territorial integrity is fully acknowledged; in Colombo especially. New Delhi must honour its sacrifices on 29 July as a tribute to



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

PM MODI'S WARNING TO PAKISTAN

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

EMPOWERING MINERAL RICH STATES

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

The historic rise of women leaders



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

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

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

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

MODI'S OLIVE BRANCH TO RSS

Madam — In the lead-up to its 100th year, Narendra Modi just gave a birthday gift to the RSS. Amidst speculations of a deepening rift between the RSS and the Modi-Shah-controlled BJP, the NDA government withdrew the order dated 1966 that prohibits government employees from participating in RSS activities. Is this an olive branch, considering the inexplicable statement made by J P Nadda, almost declaring independence from the RSS in the middle of the Lok Sabha elections? This comes on top of several grants and appointments going to people and organisations belonging to or close to the RSS. C K Ramanathan | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

How generative AI is transforming the workplace



ACHAL KHANNA

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

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



This continuous evolution is significantly impacting the workplace, redefining the nature of work, the role of workers, and the environment in which they operate. As we navigate this transformation, HR and business leaders must understand the implications of AI on the future of work. As I reflect on the developments in the field of AI and its impact on the future of work, I see the following 6 implications that every HR and Business leader must know: **Job Transformation Over Displacement:** There is a widespread concern that AI will lead to massive job loss-

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

are evolving rapidly. Organizations must look beyond conventional talent pools to find the right candidates. **Competitive Edge through Generative AI:** A growing number of organizations are already incorporating generative AI into their HR processes, and many are exploring its potential in other functions. Organizations have already introduced the use of Generative AI in their HR processes, and many organizations are exploring possible uses. **Human Creativity:** The Ultimate Differentiator As generative AI becomes more accessible, human creativity and ingenuity will become even more valuable. While AI can process data and provide insights, it is human attributes such as creativity, empathy, and strategic thinking that will set organizations apart. The ability to connect disparate ideas and develop innovative solutions beyond AI's capabilities will be crucial. Human ingenuity will be the key differentiator in a world where AI is a common tool. The case for Reverse

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



FIRST COLUMN

A PATH TO PERSONAL LIBERATION

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



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

What are we repeatedly doing, said Aristotle... If we have a look at the dictionary meaning of habit, then it says 'something that you do often and regularly, sometimes without knowing that you are doing it.' To define it simply, habits can be described as involuntary actions. They are a kind of 'automatic behaviour' as it were, for one does not do them after much thought. There is no doubt in it that almost everyone in this world has one or other bad habit. Don't we all have? Like, many people have the bad habit of smoking. But, if you tell them that it is a bad habit, some of them will bring in a little bit of philosophy and some would try to support it with medical opinion also. They will say, "Smoking is very exhilarating. It is good for my brain because it brings me concentration." Others will say, "Smoking keeps my bowels free." Others still will confess that it is a bad habit that they find hard to give up. Little do most people realise that it is a bad habit that pollutes their physical system and the atmosphere and causes diseases like cancer. Similarly, some people have the habit of talking too much. They just can't keep quiet even for a couple of minutes. Little do these people realise that much breath and energy is wasted on useless talk.

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

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



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

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

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

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

Budget is pro-growth but stability concern remains



UTTAM GUPTA

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



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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

cerning EPFO in the first 4 years of employment.

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

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

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

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

The global aviation industry is undeniably a significant contributor to carbon emissions, accounting for about 2.5 - 3.0% of the world's carbon output. Recognising this impact, initiatives like IATA's "Fly Net Zero" are crucial steps towards achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. Airlines are actively pursuing various strategies to reduce their environmental footprint, with fleet modernization being a cornerstone. One key pillar of the industry's sustainability strategy is investment in a modern, fuel-efficient fleet. Jazeera Airways, for instance, has invested in the Airbus A320neo aircraft, known for its 20% reduction in fuel consumption and emissions. The



ROMANA PARVI

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

impact of their air travel by investing in projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere. Jazeera Airways' carbon offsetting initiatives specifically support projects in renewable energy and reforestation, allowing passengers to contribute to environmental conservation efforts directly linked to their flights. Technological innovation also plays a pivotal role in enhancing operational efficiency and passenger experience. Airlines are increasingly adopting digital solutions such as paperless ticketing, digital baggage tracking, and personalized sustainable travel options. These technologies not only streamline operations but also minimize waste and carbon emissions associ-

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

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



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

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

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

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

that can inspire broader global initiatives beyond aviation.

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

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

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

Strike in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights kills at least 12

AP ■ TEL AVIV

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



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

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

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

still have sympathies for Syria and rejected Israeli annexation, but their ties with Israeli society have grown over the years. Video showed paramedics rushing stretchers off the soccer field toward waiting ambulances. Ha'il Mahmoud, a resident, told Channel 12 that children were playing soccer when the rocket hit the field. He said a siren was heard seconds before the rocket hit, but there was no time to take shelter. Jihan Sfadi, the principal of an elementary school, told Channel 12 that five students were among the dead. "The situation here is very difficult. Parents are crying, people are screaming outside. No one can digest what has happened." Israel's military said its analysis showed that the rocket was launched from an area north of the village of Chebaa in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military said early Sunday that it struck targets deep inside Lebanon as well as in southern Lebanon. There were no reports of casualties and the strikes were no more intense than what has become routine over the past 10 months. The strike at the soccer field, just before sunset, followed earlier cross-border violence on Saturday, when Hezbollah said three of its fighters were killed, without specifying where. Israel's military said its air force targeted a Hezbollah arms depot in the border village of Kfar Kila, adding that militants were inside at the time. Hezbollah said its fighters carried out 10 different attacks using rockets and explosive drones against Israeli military posts, the last of which targeted the army command of the Haramoun Brigade in Maaleh Golan with Katyusha rockets. In a separate statement, Hezbollah said it hit the same army post with a short-range Falqah rocket. It said the attacks were in response to Israeli airstrikes on villages in southern Lebanon.

Landslide in China kills 15, injures 6

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

US-Japan security talks focus on bolstering military cooperation

AP ■ TOKYO

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

UK is 'broke and broken', new govt says

AP ■ LONDON

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



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

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

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

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

Cooler weather aids firefighters in battling blaze larger than LA

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

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

7 killed in Congo's music concert stampede

AP ■ KINSHASA

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ LONDON

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ PARIS

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

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



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

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

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

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



PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE)

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

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

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

Sindhu opens campaign with dominant win over Fathimath

PTI ■ PARIS

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



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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ PARIS

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



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

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

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

AP ■ PARIS

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



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

Australian cyclist undergoes abdominal surgery after fall during Olympic time trial

AP ■ PARIS

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ CHATEAUROUX (FRANCE),

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

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



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

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

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

