

OPINION 6

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BATTLING TOURISM WOES

WORLD 8

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\$264 MN IN SECOND QUARTER

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY SETTLE FLAT AFTER
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Over 100 feared dead in stampede at Hathras satsang

PREETAM SRIVATAVA ■
LUCKNOW

Over 100 people were feared dead and several others injured as tragedy struck Hathras when a stampede broke out among devotees attending a 'satsang' on Tuesday.

The deceased included mostly women and children. Though the district magistrate of Hathras officially reported around 60 casualties, sources claimed that over 100 devotees died in the accident.

Bereaved family members and local residents staged demonstrations in front of many hospitals, protesting delays in treatment.

Senior officers, along with police forces from all districts of the Aligarh range, were summoned to manage the demonstrators. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath expressed his condolences to the families of those killed in the stampede.

In a statement from the UP CM Office, Yogi also wished for the speedy recovery of the injured. He directed the district administration officials to ensure that the injured receive proper treatment and to expedite relief efforts on-site.

An investigation into the causes of the incident was



Relatives outside a hospital where victims of the Hathras' stampede are admitted, in Etah, on Tuesday. Many people were killed and several injured in the stampede, according to officials

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ordered, led by the Agra ADG and Aligarh Commissioner. The Chief Minister announced a compensation of ₹2 lakh for the families of those killed

and ₹50,000 for the injured. Chief Secretary Manoj Kumar Singh and Director General of Police Prashant Kumar were instructed to reach Hathras to gather

first-hand information about the incident and to check whether the necessary permissions for the sermon had been granted. The local administration

claimed they had permitted 5,000 devotees, but if they had known such a large crowd would attend, they would have either denied permission or implemented

necessary measures. UP Minister Sandeep Singh was also asked to visit the site and submit a report for further action. According to official

sources, a team led by the Agra ADG and Aligarh Commissioner has been formed to investigate the causes of the stampede.

Etah SSP Rajesh Kumar Singh said a religious programme in Mughalgarhi village of Hathras district resulted in the stampede. So far, 27 bodies, including those of 23 women, three children, and one man, had been brought to Etah hospital.

The injured are being treated at hospitals, and the deceased are being identified.

However, sources claimed that 95 bodies were queued up outside the Sikandrarao CHC. The Hathras DM confirmed the death toll to be between 50-60 and said they were still managing the situation and would provide exact figures later.

Senior Superintendent of Police Rajesh Kumar Singh stated that the accident occurred in Fullera village of Sikandrarao police station area of Hathras district during Bhole Baba's satsang. He mentioned that a religious event in

Mughalgarhi village in Ratibhanpur on the Etah-Hathras border led to the stampede, resulting in many deaths, including those of children. The exact cause of the stampede will be

determined after the enquiry is completed. A local resident confirmed that the stampede occurred after the completion of Bhole Baba's satsang due to terrible humidity and heat in the pandal.

More than one lakh devotees were present when the incident took place.

There was a significant delay in the arrival of police and ambulances. Local people sent the injured to nearby hospitals. Eyewitnesses claimed that the number of dead was higher than reported, as many injured were sent to different hospitals in nearby districts, including Hathras, Aligarh, and Etah.

Meanwhile, the real name of Bhole Baba, is said to be Narain Sarkar Hari, who belongs to the Bahadur hamlet of Patiyali Tehsil in Etah.

He was an employee in the Intelligence Bureau but left the job 26 years ago to turn towards spirituality. His followers hail from Western Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, Rajasthan, Delhi and Uttarakhand. The posters put up at the venue showed the names of organisers as Devprakash Madhukas (engineer), Mahesh Chandra, Anar Singh, Sanju Yadav, Chandradev, and Ramprakash.

Modi takes 'balak buddhi' jibe at Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said people have given his Government a mandate for stability and continuity for the third consecutive term after seeing its work of 10 years and accused the Congress of trying to build a narrative that it has defeated the BJP-led NDA in the Lok Sabha polls.

Replying to a two-day debate on the President's address to both Houses of Parliament, he also accused the Congress of working towards creating economic anarchy in the country. Modi also condoled the loss of lives in Hathras in between his speech.

Modi singled out Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, saying the House witnessed the wailing of a person with "balak buddhi" (childish behaviour) who tried to gain sympathy without disclosing the wrongs he had committed.

"Images of our Gods cannot be used for personal political interests. They coined phrases like 'Hindu terrorism', their ally likened this religion to dengue; country will never forgive them," Modi said taking a swipe on Rahul's



Prime Minister Narendra Modi reacts as he replies to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Parliament session, in New Delhi, on Tuesday

PTI

speech, the content of which was expunged early in the day. "This is the first time that the Congress has not crossed 100 seats for three consecutive times. Instead of conceding defeat, they are being arrogant. They are trying to build a narrative that they have beaten us," Modi said in the Lok Sabha amid vociferous protests by the Opposition. The Lok Sabha was adjourned sine die after two long hours PM's speech and a resolution accepted by the Speaker moved by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to

condemn the continuous disruption by Opposition when the PM spoke. Modi will reply to the similar debate on thanks to President's speech in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday. Before the Prime Minister's reply, Opposition members wanted Speaker Om Birla to allow the MPs from Manipur to speak in the House but he said a member from the northeastern State had already spoken on Monday. They then trooped into the Well of the House, drawing a sharp rebuke from Birla.

Modi said an attempt was made to mislead Parliament on the Agnipath scheme and minimum support price for farm produce.

The PM said the people of the country had seen the dedication with which his Government served them for 10 years.

"In our third term, we will work at triple the speed. Our third term means we will put in thrice the strength. In our third term, we will ensure three times the results," Modi said.

"The people of the country

have given us this mandate after testing us on every criterion. The people have seen our track record of 10 years. The people have seen that we have worked with dedication for the welfare of the poor, fulfilling the mantra of 'public service is God's service,' the PM said.

The Prime Minister said he can understand the pain of some, who despite spreading lies and misleading the people, had to face a massive defeat in the Lok Sabha elections.

"People have chosen us in this biggest election exercise. I can understand the pain of some people that despite running falsehoods, they were comprehensively defeated," he said, amid chants of "justice for Manipur" by Opposition members.

The Prime Minister said India's prestige has increased and the country is being looked up to by the world.

Modi said before 2014, people had lost self confidence. "When there is a lack of confidence, it becomes difficult for the person and the country to stand up. The common people used to say this country cannot achieve anything. Only news of scams prevailed," the PM said.

Rahul urges Speaker to restore expunged remarks

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The expunging on Tuesday of certain remarks laced with controversial religious references made by Leader of Opposition (LoP) Rahul Gandhi during his fiery speech in the Lok Sabha a day earlier, targeting BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, prompted Rahul to urge Speaker Om Birla to restore the expunged statements.

"This selective expunging defies logic, Rahul stated. Certain remarks the Congress leader made during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address in the Lok Sabha on Monday have been expunged. A defiant Rahul said truth can be expunged in the world of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, but not in reality, hours after significant parts of his Lok Sabha speech were deleted by the Chair.

"Whatever I had to say, I have said and that is the truth. They can expunge as much as they want, but the truth will prevail," Rahul told reporters in Parliament



Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's reply to the Motion of Thanks on the President's Address, in New Delhi on Tuesday

PTI

LoP for debate on NEET in House

New Delhi: In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi requested the Government to facilitate a debate on NEET in the House on Wednesday. "I believe it would be fitting if you were to lead a debate on NEET in students' interest," Rahul

said. He said the Opposition's request for a discussion on NEET was declined in both Houses of Parliament on June 28 as well as on Monday, and added that the Speaker had assured the Opposition that he would discuss the matter with the Government. PNS

complex. In a letter to Birla, Rahul has stated that removing his considered remarks from records goes against the very tenets of Parliamentary democracy and that they should be

restored. Rahul cited BJP MP Anurag Thakur's speech, saying it was full of allegations but surprisingly only one word was expunged from it. He said "this selective expunction defies logic".

Delhi LG smells rat in Lok Nayak Hospital project, orders probe

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has directed for a probe into alleged corruption in issuing a tender for construction of an additional block in Lok Nayak Hospital (LNH) in the national Capital.

In what points towards massive corruption and blatant violation of procedures, a tender worth ₹465 crore for construction of the additional block has increased surreptitiously to ₹1,135 crore, creating an unauthorised liability of approximately ₹670 crore on the Delhi Government, Raj Niwas officials said here on Tuesday.

Raj Niwas has asked the Vigilance Department to request the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) to constitute a special team to probe the irregularities. The huge cost escalation has happened with a

clear collusion of the Delhi Government's Health Department under Saurabh Bhardwaj and the Public Works Department headed by Atishi Marlena.

The L-G has also constituted a committee headed by retired IAS officer BK Prasad to examine the procedural violations that led to cost escalation to the tune of ₹670 crore and submit its report within two months.

The committee will also examine all such on-going projects in different Delhi Government hospitals. The case pertains to construction of a new building block in LNH Hospital. The scheduled start date was 04.11.2020, with a completion period of 30 months. However, even after three and a half years, the current progress of work is only 64 per cent, even as costs have risen by 243 per cent.



The Health & Family Welfare Department of GNCTD had assigned the project to the Public Works Department (PWD). However, the work originally tendered out for ₹465 crore, ran into re-estimates and expansion of scope of work amounting to a

whopping ₹1,135 crore. The PWD attributed the cost overruns to increase in the scope of work. But while the scope of work increased by 8.61 per cent only, the cost increased by a whopping 143 per cent.

Interestingly, such huge cost over

runs were done at the level of the Engineers of the Department itself, even though it should have had gone to the Finance Department and the Cabinet. However, after the L-G flagged the matter to Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on 22.06.2023, the AAP Government brought a Cabinet Note in March 2024, for approval of the cost over runs, which is yet pending.

"I have also noticed that during the execution of work, certain disputes arose between PWD and M/s Swadeshi Civil Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd and in order to reach to a solution, the claims of the contractor were forwarded to Dispute Redressal Committee (DRC). Further, since M/s Swadeshi Civil Infrastructure Pvt. Ltd was not satisfied with the decision of the DRC, an Arbitral Tribunal was constituted for the adjudication of claims/disputes,

which pronounced an award in favour of the contractor, amounting to ₹82.45 crore with 12 per cent interest plus GST. "However, the department chose not to challenge the award. The department's failure to challenge this award is beyond comprehension and has further exacerbated the financial burden. Additionally, the award was pronounced by the Arbitral Tribunal on 29.05.2023, however, the PWD did not get the mandatory concurrence from the Finance Department for the same," Saxena said in a note.

"The major reason for the increase in PE was attributed to an increase in the covered area of the building from 88040 sqm to 95620 sqm. Apparently, the covered area increased by 8.61 per cent only, whereas the revised PE was increased by 143 per cent, which

appears prima facie unjustifiable, incomprehensible and even malafide.

The loss to the exchequer and public money due to the procedural violations and unauthorised liability is a very grave matter that warrants immediate and thorough investigation," the L-G noted. Welcoming the order, the AAP Government sources said the L-G is himself saying cost escalation has happened at the level of officers without the knowledge of Government.

"We welcome any enquiry into this matter and strictest punishment if any illegality is found. These officers are directly under the control of the L-G. The Vigilance Department is directly under the L-G and he and his department should have been more proactive instead of coming into action after media reports," sources added.

Delhi LG, AAP Govt at loggerheads over removal of DDCD's non official members

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena and the AAP government are at loggerheads over the removal of three non official members of the Dialogue and Development Commission of Delhi (DDCD). Following the directions of the LG, the Delhi government's services department had rescinded the engagement of Aswathi Muralidharan, Vijaya Chandra Vupputuri, and Gopal Mohan and called their appointment a blatant and clear case of nepotism and favouritism in utter disregard of all rules. Taking a strong note, Delhi Planning Minister Atishi declared the order null and void. Atishi has also flagged this order to Principal Secretary (Planning), Principal Secretary (Services), and Special Secretary to the Chief Minister.

Last week, Saxena has dissolved the DDCD alleging that the body was created "only to extend financial benefits" and patronage to "certain favoured political persons" at the "whims and fancies" of AAP convener and chief minister Arvind Kejriwal, as only the CM approved its members till a mechanism was developed for "screening and selection of domain experts as its vice-chairman and members". According to services department, both Muralidharan and Mohan were engaged at the monthly salary of Rs 3,80,250 while Vupputuri was engaged at the monthly salary of Rs 3,00,600. The Services department said in an order passed by Special Secretary YVVJ Rajasekar, that these non official members were highly paid and perked position which only few officers of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) get after service of about 33 years. In her order, Atishi said the DDCD has been constituted by the elected Government of Delhi, i.e. the Council of Ministers, in exercise of power vested in it by Entry 20, List III of the VII Schedule of the Constitution which deals with Economic and Social Planning, and in terms of the Constitution Bench judgment dated 04.07.2018, it is clear that the LG does not have any independent decision-making power over transferred subjects. "In such matters, he is bound by the aid and advice of the elected Government, which exercises exclusive executive powers over transferred subjects, including issues pertaining to the Planning Department, which is the administrative department for GNCTD. This order is issued in reference to an order dated 27.06.2024 by the Special



Secretary of the Services Department, GNCTD, which has been presented to me ('Services Order'). In the Services Order, the Lieutenant Governor (LG) has rescinded the engagement of all non-official members of the Dialogue & Development Commission of Delhi (DDCD) - Ms. Aswathi Muralidharan, Mr. Vijay Chandra Vupputuri, and

Mr. Gopal Mohan - with immediate effect," reads the order. Officials said Muralidharan used to work with the Chief Minister, Vupputuri gave donations to the AAP and Mohan fought in Delhi elections on AAP ticket highlighting 'a clear case of favouritism only on political considerations.Regarding the appointment of Muralidharan,

it said, "The reason for her appointment as the non-official member was that she was working as a Joint Secretary (in the pay scale equivalent to the Under Secretary to the Govt. of India) in the Chief Minister office, which establishes a direct case of extending undue favouritism." Vijaya Chandra Vupputuri was initially appointed as a non-

official member of DDCD on November 5, 2018 and joined the next day. "He contributed Rs.3,00,600 rupees to the AAP during the financial year 2018-19, in the year of his engagement as a non-official member of the DDCD. His engagement as a non-official member in DDCD in the same year 2018-19 when he made payment of about Rs.3 lakh to AAP raises serious concerns in this regard," it said. Gopal Mohan has also filed the Affidavit for contesting Delhi Assembly Election 2013 from New Delhi Assembly Constituency as an AAP candidate. He was first made an Advisor (Anti-Corruption) to the Chief Minister on a co-terminus basis on one rupees remuneration. "On August 7, 2015, he was moved from the responsibility of Anti-Corruption Helpline In-charge to the position of Advisor (Public Grievances),

which post was vacated by another person who was drawing a salary of 1,15,881 rupees. By this sleight of hand, Gopal Mohan moved from an honorary position of Rs. 1/- to a salary of Rs. 1.15 lakhs per month without the approval of Lt.Governor," it stated, adding that the only criteria for his selection was that he was working as the Advisor to the Chief Minister, which establishes a direct case of extending undue favouritism. "CBI has registered an on March 14 in which Mohan is an accused in the matter of criminal conspiracy, dishonest misappropriation of property, criminal breach of trust by public servant, forgery for purpose of cheating, using as genuine a forged document, falsification of accounts and criminal misconduct by public servant, in the matter of Feed Back Unit, GNCTD," it stated.

Maliwal accuses AAP Ministers of working to weaken DCW

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi Commission for Women (DCW) chief Swati Maliwal has written to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, accusing his ministers of making the women's panel a "weak institution". Meanwhile, Delhi BJP attacked the Kejriwal government over the letter and called it 'evidence of insensitivity towards women'. Maliwal had resigned as the chairperson of the DCW following her nomination to the Rajya Sabha by the Aam Aadmi Party. In her letter to the chief minister, Maliwal alleged that the DCW staff has not been paid salary for the last six months, the panel's budget has been reduced by 28.5 per cent, 181 helpline has been withdrawn, and no efforts have been made to fill the vacant posts of chairman and two members. "Ever since I resigned from the post of chairperson of the Delhi Commission for Women, the ministers and officers of Delhi government have opened a front against the commission. None of the staff has been paid salary for the last six months,



the budget has been reduced by 28.5 per cent, 181 helpline has been withdrawn and no work has been done to fill the posts of chairman and two members," Maliwal said in a post in Hindi on X. Delhi Women and Child Development minister Kailash Gahlot on Monday said the women helpline 181 will now be run by his department and the number will remain inoperative for a few days for transition. He said the central government plans to make it mandatory for the women's helpline to be run by the Department of Women and Child Development rather than the DCW. In the same post, Maliwal said, "The post of a Dalit member is lying vacant for 1.5 years! As soon as I left, every possible effort was being made to make the Women's Commission a weak institution again. Why is the Delhi government showing hostility towards women? I

have written a letter to @ArvindKejriwal ji seeking his reply!" Later addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP MPs Kamaljeet Sehrawat and Bansuri Swaraj said that the poor condition of the DCW is evidence of Kejriwal's insensitivity towards women's safety. Sehrawat mentioned that when Kejriwal appointed Maliwal as the chairperson of the DCW, there were grand claims about the Commission's work. "However, today, the same Swati Maliwal is questioning the miserable state of the women's commission in her letter to Kejriwal," she said. The West Delhi MP accused Kejriwal of betraying colleagues like Kiran Bedi and Shazia Ilmi, calling it 'an old policy of Kejriwal'. Swaraj highlighted that for many years before appointing Atishi, there was no woman in Kejriwal's cabinet, 'clearly showing the lack of importance of women in Kejriwal's government'. She added that the High Court directed the Kejriwal government on May 9 and May 30 to immediately release salaries to all employees working in DCW but the government has not released the salaries.

Delhi Govt issues flood control order

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi government has issued the Flood Control Order for this year, days after Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena flagged that it had not been issued. After Delhi was hit by incessant rains on Friday, leading to waterlogging and loss of lives, Saxena had said it is shocking that the Flood Control Order and de-silting of drains that should have been issued and completed by June 15 were pending. "The Flood Control Order, normally issued after the Apex Committee meeting chaired by the Hon'ble chief minister, is pending with the Hon'ble minister," he had said. The government has issued the Flood Control Order, which says a Central Flood Control Room has been set up and it will continue to be functional till October 15 or till the withdrawal of monsoon, whichever comes later. The Flood Control Room will receive flood warnings and other related information and submit flood-situation reports to the LG, Chief Minister, Minister of Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC), Chief Secretary, Divisional Commissioner and Secretary (I&FC) every evening. It will also issue necessary flood warnings and directions for evacuation and arrange relief



Photo by Ranjan Dimri

supplies. A number of regional posts of the Flood Control Department will be set up at 16 important locations along the Yamuna river, the Najafgarh drain, the supplementary drain, the Jahangir Puri drain and the Chilla regulator on the Shahdara Outfall drain to monitor the flood situation or drainage congestion and handle any eventuality, the order said. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Development Authority (DDA) will also set up control rooms to receive complaints and take appropriate remedial action in case of drainage congestion on account of heavy rains, the order said, adding that these control rooms will remain in constant touch with the Central Flood Control Room. The order said each of the 11 revenue districts in Delhi will have a sector committee headed by a sector officer.

Couple injured as hotel shed collapses

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A Punjabi couple suffered injuries on Monday night when a portion of a shed near a swimming pool at Hyatt Regency Hotel in southwest Delhi collapsed and fell on them days after the roof of Delhi's Indira Gandhi International (IGI) airport collapsed, killing one person and injuring multiple others. According to an official statement by the police on Tuesday, a PCR call was received at around 8.56 pm on Monday in Police Station RK Puram about caving/falling of roof and injury to husband and wife, who were staying at Hyatt Regency. The couple, including 42 year old Amit Jain and his 32 year old wife Reva Jain, were standing near the swimming pool, located in the ground floor of the hotel, when a portion of a shed collapsed and fell on them, leaving them with minor head injuries. "Amit sustained head injuries, while his wife suffered minor injuries. No complaint has been filed by them," stated an officer. They later made a PCR call and informed the local police about the incident, a senior police officer said.

AAP targeting women after poll rout: Vijender

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Former Delhi BJP President and MLA Vijender Gupta stated that after BJP's resounding victory in the Lok Sabha, the Kejriwal government continues to harass the residents of Delhi. First, there was the drinking water crisis, then the issues of waterlogging and drainage after rains, followed by traffic jams, and now a conspiracy is underway to render the Delhi Commission for Women, which safeguards women's rights, ineffective. Gupta has demanded the Lieutenant Governor to intervene in this serious matter and take immediate action to prevent the injustice being meted out to the distressed women of Delhi. Gupta pointed out that it is horrifying that the 181 Women's Helpline has been shut down. Due to negligence by the DCW, the helpline has been non-operational for several days, symbolising the Delhi government's lack of empathy towards crimes against women and girls in the capital. For over 48 hours, survivors of rape and other crimes have been left without crucial support. The ministers and concerned officials of the Delhi government are accountable



for this. Gupta mentioned that the revelations made by former Delhi Commission for Women Chairperson Swati Maliwal in her letter to Kejriwal reflect the distorted thinking of the Aam Aadmi Party. He noted that the financial crisis created by the Delhi government in the Commission is a grave matter. The payment of the third installment of the fiscal year 2023-24 and the first installment of the fiscal year 2024-25 has not been made. The funding shortage over the past six months has crippled the Commission. Gupta added that the massive cut of 10 crores in the Commission's budget threatens the closure of significant programmes. The removal of employees and unfilled vacancies further endanger the Commission's existence. The Delhi Commission for Women plays a critical role in assisting countless women in Delhi.

BJP leaders demand apology from Rahul

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva and three time Northeast BJP MP Manoj Tiwari on Tuesday accused the Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi for 'behaving indecently in Parliament and demanded an apology for insulting Hindus and Speaker of the Lok Sabha Om Birla. Sachdeva alleged that Gandhi abused Hindus on Monday in Parliament to appease the people of Wayanad and stated, "Rahul Gandhi has left the Wayanad seat and Priyanka Gandhi has to contest from there and perhaps that is why he tried to please the people of Wayanad by abusing Hindus." He added that despite being launched in politics three times, Raebareilly MP only speaks lies. "His speech on Monday was full of despair and baseless. It's surprising that instead of discussing the President's address, he kept lying, and it's sadder that senior leaders behind him kept laughing," Delhi BJP Chief alleged.

Tiwari said that Rahul Gandhi has been insulting Hindus and parliamentary traditions since 2004 and yesterday he kept pictures of Lord Shankar along with a glass of used water. "Rahul Gandhi is playing a dangerous game to create unrest in various parts of the country and cause damage to the nation," he said while mentioning that expecting decorum from the Congress leader is futile. Further, Sachdeva criticised Gandhi's speech and said it is insulting the Sanatan society, and sowing seeds of hatred. He challenged Rahul Gandhi to use the same language for another religion as he did for the Hindu community. He claimed, "Rahul Gandhi's language reflects his upbringing because no Indian can insult Hindus. It is not surprising that Rahul Gandhi's gang might try to justify his words today. But the reality is that Rahul Gandhi and his party leaders, using such language, prove they work for anti-national forces." Tiwari stated that Gandhi is shamelessly calling Hindus violent after winning 99 seats and he should remember that 87 per cent of voters in these 99 seats are Hindus.

1992-93 Mumbai riot accused re-arrested after being on run for 31 years

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Thirty one years after he went absconding in the wake of his arrest and subsequent grant of bail, the Mumbai police have tracked down and re-arrested a 1992-93 Mumbai riots case from Sewri in south-central Mumbai. Identifying the re-arrested accused as one Sayed Nadirshah Abbas Khan (65),

the police said that the absconding accused was taken into custody by a team of police officials from his Sewri home by the Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Marg police station during the weekend. Sayyed Khan - who had earlier been arrested by the police under Indian Penal Code sections 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 307 and 34 on charges of attempt to murder and other riot-related cases - had jumped the bail and absconded. He had not attended his trial proceedings. Sayyed Khan had been named as an accused in a case of attempted murder and unlawful assembly during the communal riots that erupted in the metropolis in the wake of the demolition of the Babri Masjid in December 1992. "After having been granted

bail from judicial custody, Sayyed Khan had disappeared. An arrest warrant had been issued against him way back in 1995. We were on the look-out for him for years. Subsequently, he was declared by a court as a proclaimed absconder. The court had even issued a non-bailable warrant against him," Station Senior Police Inspector Satish Pawar of the Rafi Ahmed Kidwai

Marg Police station said. The police had been tabs in the area where he lived. Recently, the police managed to lay hands on the mobile phone records of his relatives. The -investigators later learnt that he was planning to visit his Sewri home on Saturday. Accordingly, they laid a trap for him and re-arrested when he visited home.

BSES issues guidelines on safety during monsoon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

With monsoon setting in the national capital, BSES has everyone to follow simple safety guidelines and practice social distancing from electrical infrastructure to ensure safety. Issuing these instructions on Tuesday, BSES said monsoons often lead to water logging, strong winds, and falling branches, which can damage electrical installations and cause power outages. To protect both lives and equipment, BSES may need to temporarily switch off the electricity supply in affected areas as a precautionary measure. Together, by adhering to these safety protocols, BSES and its consumers can navigate the monsoon season safely and efficiently. "We are geared up to ensure reliable power supply to our over 50 lakh consumers and over 2 crore residents while

taking all safety measures that are required during rainy season. Consumers can play a very important role in ensuring an incident free monsoon by following simple safety guidelines," BSES officials said. In the event you notice any fallen cable, pole or exposed wiring or an emergency please inform us on 19123 / 011 49516707 (for South & West Delhi) and 19122 / 011 41999808 for (East & Central Delhi) areas. To ensure that our consumers and around Delhi residents enjoy an incident free power supply, BSES Rajdhani Power Limited (BRPL) and BSES Yamuna Power Limited (BYPL), are undertaking all possible measures. The discoms' monsoon action plan has an integrated and proactive approach, which is not only aimed at ensuring consumers' safety but is also aimed at minimizing the down time of power supply arising out of exigencies during monsoon.

Students marching to Parliament detained

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Over a dozen students were detained while attempting to march towards the Parliament on Tuesday to protest against alleged irregularities in several competitive exams. The students belonging to different outfits under the banner "India against NTA" gathered at the Patel Chowk metro station here and started raising "anti-NTA" slogans. Carrying posters and banners with slogans like "sack Union Education Minister" and "NTA must go" written over them, the students staged demonstration against the reported incidents of paper leak and corruption in the medical entrance exam, besides others.

Ruling MahaYuti, Opp MVA bag two seats each in Maha Council polls

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The ruling MahaYuti and the Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) bagged two seats each in the Maharashtra Legislative Council in the polls held in the run-up to the Maharashtra Assembly polls to be held in October this year. From the MahaYuti side, the BJP won the Konkarn seat, the Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena secured the Nashik seat. On its part, the Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena - which is a part of the Opposition MVA - walked away with both State Legislative Council seats. The four seats of the Maharashtra Legislative Council, for which elections were held during the weekend were: Mumbai Graduates' constituency, Mumbai Teachers' constituency, Konkarn Division Graduates' constituency, Nashik Division Teachers'

constituency. The elections had been necessitated by the vacancies caused by the retirement of Vilas Potnis of Sens (UBT) (Mumbai Graduates' constituency) Niranjan Davkhare of BJP(Konkarn Division Graduates' constituency, Kapil Patil of Lok Bharti (Mumbai Teachers' constituency) and Kishore Darade, an Independent) (Nashik Division Teachers' constituency). The four members had retired on June 7. The winners in the just-held elections are Anil Parab from Mumbai Graduates' constituency and Prof Jagannath Abhyankar from Mumbai Teachers' constituency, both from the Shiv Sena (UBT), while BJP's Niranjan Davkhare and Shiv Sena's Kishore Darade emerged victors from the Konkarn Division Graduates' constituency and the Nashik Division Teachers' constituency Davkhare is the

son of former Council Deputy Chairperson late Vasant Davkhare, who was a close aide of NCP founder Sharad Pawar, who now heads NCP (SP). Davkhare won the Konkarn Division Graduates' seat for fourth term after defeating Congress candidate Ramesh Keer. From the Nashik Division Teachers' constituency, Darade won the seat defeating Vivek Kolhe of BJP, who was contesting as an independent candidate, Sandeep Gulve of Shiv Sena (UBT) and Mahendra Bhavsar of Ajit Pawar-led NCP. In Mumbai Graduates' seat, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Prof Abhyankar trounced Subhash More of Shikshak Bharti, while Shivnath Darade of BJP defeated Shivaji Nalawade of NCP.

Special investment regions to make UP \$1-trillion economy

BISWAJEET BANERJEE ■ LUCKNOW

Dedicated to transforming Uttar Pradesh into a trillion-dollar economy, the Uttar Pradesh government approved the special investment region act during a Cabinet meeting chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at Lok Bhavan on Tuesday. The Nodal Investment Region for Manufacturing Act (NIRMAN) aims to attract major investors from both within India and around the world to invest in Uttar Pradesh. The government's move is likely to promote 'ease of doing business', boost economic development, and create new employment opportunities for the general public. Providing details about the decisions made by the UP Cabinet, Principal Secretary (Infrastructure and Industrial Development) Anil Kumar Sagar stated: "This Act has been created to develop special investment regions in the state. Similar acts are currently in place in three states: Gujarat, Rajasthan,

and Karnataka. With this, UP will become the fourth state to implement this Act." He explained that special investment regions are large investment areas where cluster development occurs, and the powers usually held by the state government or other departments are decentralised to the authority level. "This decentralisation has two main benefits: first, any changes needed in the master planning can be done there itself. Second, all the NOCs and clearances that usually require state-level approval are also decentralised. According to the 'ease of doing business' concept, the more decentralised the process, the better we can serve the investors," he added. Sagar stated that the purpose of the new Act is to establish large investment regions and provide them with legal protection. He emphasised that creating such significant investment areas is crucial for Uttar Pradesh to achieve its goal of becoming a one trillion dollar economy.

Chhattisgarh committed to boost industries: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Monday said his government is committed to boost industrial development and will make every possible effort to promote entrepreneurs investing in the state. Sai said this while launching a Single Window Portal 2.0 for industrialists in Raipur. Addressing the launch function, Sai said: "Our top priority is good governance and zero tolerance towards corruption. "In the same bid, the Single Window Portal was launched to expedite various clearances and approvals, ensuring convenience for investors and new industrialists," he said. Sai added: "The state has abundant resources and vast



opportunities for industrial development. With this new system from the Industries Department, all necessary facilities will be available at a single click." Industries Minister Lakhlan Dewangan congratulated traders, stating: "The platform will ensure timely resolution of applications, allowing applicants to track their status with a single click." Commerce and Industries Secretary Ankit Anand provided detailed information about the system and said the portal integrates more than 100 services across 16 departments. "There is no longer a need for offline office visits. Payment can be made through e-challan. Information regarding required permissions from various departments before establishing any industry is now accessible on the portal," he said.

Three C'garh hospitals now NQAS certified

STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

The Centre has provided National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) certificates to three hospitals in Chhattisgarh's Bilaspur district, an official communiqué said on Tuesday. The Primary Health Centre in Navagaon-Salka of Kota block, the Sub Health Centre in Majhwani village and the Sub Health Centre in Pendrava of Bilha block fulfilled the prescribed criteria for quality. The NQAS team evaluated the hospitals between May 28 and 31. The key points of evaluation



included compliance with patients' rights, support services, medical and diagnostic services, status of infection prevention and quality management.

Mishra takes over as Regional Executive Director NTPC



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Pradipta Kumar Mishra has taken over as the Regional Executive Director (WR-II & USSC) of the National Thermal Power Corp (NTPC) at Nava Raipur. A communiqué from NTPC on

Tuesday said Mishra was earlier the Executive Director, Fuel Management, NTPC Corporate Centre. An electrical engineer from VSSUT (UCE), Burla, Mishra joined NTPC in 1986 as an executive trainee. He has rich experience in the areas of electrical maintenance, technical services, maintenance, operation and

Mishra was earlier the Executive Director, Fuel Management, NTPC Corporate Centre.

maintenance and fuel management. He held several important positions in a career spanning around 38 years.

War of words over 'True Hindu' in C'garh

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

A war of words erupted in Chhattisgarh on Tuesday with the Congress claiming that the saffron brigade does not represent the entire Hindu community. Thee BJP accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of insulting Hindus. Former Chief Minister Bhupesh Baghel told reporters that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the BJP and RSS cannot speak for the Hindu community and "we" too are Hindus. Firing a fresh salvo, the Congress leader said the BJP's nationalism was imported. Their nationalism is that of Mussolini and Hitler, he said. The Congress leader said those who resort to violence, hatred and lies could not be true religious persons. Reiterating the statement of Rahul Gandhi, Baghel said: "This is not a country of fear. All of our



founding fathers talked about peace and eradicating fear. But those who claim to be Hindu practice violence, hatred and lies. "It is written in Hindu religion that we should stand with truth and non-violence and the similar thing is said in all religions."

Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao on the other hand said that terming the entire Hindu community as violent was a grave issue. "The statement of Rahul Gandhi in parliament was completely false and baseless, and was not as per the parliamentary tradition," he said.

The Congress leader said those who resort to violence, hatred and lies could not be true religious persons.

"Not only the Congress leader leveled baseless allegations on Hindus but also misled (the nation) on schemes like Agniveer and schemes for farmers."



The National Students Union of India (NSUI) on Tuesday burnt the effigy of Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai and Home Minister Vijay Sharma and sought their resignation over the killing of a tribal youth in the state.

Govt steps up efforts to curb malnutrition

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Women and Child Development Minister Laxmi Rajwade on Tuesday called for regular admission of malnourished children to Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres up to the full capacity. While reviewing departmental works in Raipur, she also favoured surprise inspections of Anganwadi centres and said they must maintain quality of nutrition, diet and other facilities. She asked officials to conduct a timely health check-up, vaccination and weighing of pregnant women, lactating mothers, children and adolescent girls and also provide them ready-to-eat meals. Rajwade took stock of the progress of Ready-to-Eat, Noni Suraksha Yojana, Shuchita Yojana, Bal Sandarbh Yojana and other welfare programmes.



GOVERNMENT OF CHHATTISGARH, WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER E/M
LIGHT MACHINERY TUBEWELL & GATE DIVISION
SHAVA BILAVAN PARISAR CIVIL LINE WRD RAIPUR (C.G.)

CORRIGENDUM No-01

IN NIT No. 03/SAC/2023-24 Raipur Dated 07/03/2024 System Tender No. 153715 Revised Renovation of Sluice gate under Kodar project in block Mahasamund, District Mahasamund. Amount of Contract Rs. 99.12 Lakh following amendments are made -

S. No.	Particulars	Previous Published	Amendment As
1	Bid start date & time	28-06-2024, 7:31 Hours	04-07-2024, 17:31 1 Hours
2	Bid Due date & time	12-07-2024, 17:31 Hours	18-07-2024, 17:31 Hours
3	Bid Open start date & time	15-07-2024, 17:31 Hours	19-07-2024, 17:31 Hours

All other terms and conditions of NIT will remain unchanged. G.No. 08429 Dated 11/03/2024

EXECUTIVE ENGINEER
E/M LIGHT MACHINERY TUBEWELL & GATE DIVISION WRD RAIPUR (C.G.)
G-242500741/3

Two Maoists with Rs 10 lakhs bounty surrendered in Sukma

STAFF REPORTER ■ SUKMA

Two Maoists, carrying a cumulative reward of Rs 10 lakhs on their heads, on Tuesday surrendered in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh. Sodhi Gajendra alias Hadma (23) and Sodhi Manjula alias Madkam (32) turned themselves in, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said. Hadma, who carried a bounty of Rs 5 lakhs, was a



Konta Area Committee member, carried a reward of Rs 5 lakhs on her head too. Both were involved in violent incidents for many years. Madkam, also a Konta Area Committee member,

CM praises PNB's contribution to devpt

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Tuesday praised the Punjab National Bank's contribution to development and efforts towards welfare of societies in the state. Sai said this during a meeting with PNB's Zonal Manager for Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand, Ashish Chaturvedi, in Raipur. Chaturvedi briefed Sai about the schemes being run by the bank and the 182 branches across the state. Sai asked him to establish more branches.



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Modi urges NDA MPs to follow parliamentary rules, conduct

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime BJP Narendra Modi on Tuesday asked NDA MPs to follow parliamentary rules and conduct, and learn from senior members about the best practices, comments that came a day after the ruling alliance accused Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi of making a "most irresponsible" speech.

Addressing a meeting of NDA MPs, Modi said the Opposition is upset as for the first time a non-Congress leader, that too a "chai-wala", has become Prime BJP for a third straight term, sources said.

Highlighting his humble origins, he took an apparent jibe at the Nehru-Gandhi family saying that its members used to be Prime BJP and gave little recognition to those from outside their fold, the sources said. Briefing reporters, Parliamentary Affairs BJP Kiren Rijiju said Modi asked MPs to study parliamentary issues, attend Parliament regularly and raise the matters related to their constituency effectively. Asked if Modi referred to Gandhi's Monday speech in Lok Sabha, Rijiju said he made no such mention but added that when the country's Prime BJP speaks, the message is for everyone. Union BJP and



Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan told reporters that NDA members were concerned over Gandhi's "personal attacks" on Modi and Speaker Om Birla and his remarks which hurt the feelings of the followers of different religions. "In this context, the Prime BJP guided the newly-elected MPs on how to conduct themselves. He brings vast experiences and inspires us," Paswan said. Gandhi had launched a fierce attack on the BJP in Lok Sabha on Monday, accusing it of

practising violence and spreading hate, drawing massive protests from the treasury benches, including Modi. The Congress leader had cited religious tenets to attack the BJP. However, many of his comments were later expunged by the Chair. At the alliance meeting, Modi was felicitated by NDA leaders for his "historic" third term, Rijiju added. Sources said the Prime BJP asked MPs to study any issue before making comments on it before the media, and said they should stay in touch with

their constituencies and thank voters for supporting them. Modi also asked MPs to visit the Prime BJP Museum, noting that it documents the life journey of all Prime BJPs, something which was not done by earlier governments. The contribution of Prime BJP who came from outside the Congress's most prominent family used to be neglected, he said, adding that he, as Prime BJP, ensured that all of them are recognised as each one made contribution to the country in one way or another.

Arrogance of BJP leaders led to decline in Modi's magic: Opp

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Opposition members in both the Houses of Parliament on Tuesday said the "arrogance" and "vindictiveness" of BJP leaders during elections downgraded the popularity of Prime BJP Narendra Modi, who now has to depend on alliance partners to provide a stable Government.

Participating in the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Trinamool Congress member Kalyan Banerjee said the recent Lok Sabha elections had ushered in a change in the country which now has "an unstable government and a strong opposition". Banerjee said the prime BJP now has to use two crutches — Chandrababu Naidu's TDP and Nitish Kumar's JD (U) — to run the government. Congress leader KC Venugopal said the BJP leaders were not believers in Hinduism, but only used religion to polarise the electorate and win elections. He said the BJP projected the Prime BJP as bigger than God, which was the biggest anti-Hindu statement. "Nobody is bigger than God as per the Hindu tradition. That is why God punished you in this election," Venugopal said. Samajwadi Party Chief Akhilesh Yadav said the 2024 Lok Sabha polls marked the



end of communal politics in India, and were a moral victory for the INDIA Bloc. Yadav called June 4, the day the election results were declared, as the day of independence from communal politics for India. He also said that the BJP's defeat in Faizabad seat of Ayodhya, where the Ram temple has been built, shows the wisdom of voters. Questioning the authenticity of Electronic Voting Machine (EVM), Yadav said, "When the Model Code of Conduct was imposed, the government and the Commission were favouring some people. I do not want to go into details". Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla later said it would be better if questions were not raised on the impartiality of the Election Commission. Senior Congress leader Pramod Tiwari accused the Narendra Modi Government on Tuesday of betraying people during its 10-year rule, saying it failed to deliver on promises, whether on bringing back black money, stopping corruption or controlling price rise.

Fireworks in Rajya Sabha

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Rajya Sabha once again witnessed a war of words on Tuesday when chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar sarcastically said Jairam Ramesh should take the seat of Leader of Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge, in an effort to discipline the Congress MP. Kharge, who is also the President of the Congress, retorted by saying the chairman was trying to bring in the "Varna" (caste) system. The acrimony started when Dhankhar asked Pramod Tiwari of the Congress not to state unverified facts. To this, Ramesh said it would be authenticated.

"The senior leadership (Kharge) is here. I think you (Ramesh) should replace (Kharge)... You are so intelligent, so gifted, so talented, you should immediately come and take the seat in place of Mr Kharge because, by and large, you are doing his job," the Chairman said. At this point, Kharge retorted by saying "do not bring in the Varna system... That is why you are calling Ramesh very intelligent... And I am dull". An agitated Dhankhar accused Kharge of "twisting" his remark and said he never meant it. "Never in the history of parliamentary democracy and Rajya Sabha proceedings there has been such a disregard of the Chair," he said.

Participating in discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks for the President's address to a joint sitting of Parliament, Congress leader Pramod Tiwari said the prices of several commodities have touched a multi-decade high, but the issue found no reference in President Droupadi Murmu's speech. DMK Rajya Sabha member P Wilson urged the Central Government to either abolish medical entrance exam NEET or approve Tamil Nadu's NEET

exemption bill to exclude the state from the competitive exam. During the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha, he said the State Legislative Assembly had passed the Tamil Nadu Admission to Medical Courses Bill in 2021 and subsequently passed a resolution unanimously against the exam and to address the "NEET menace".

SCO leaders to discuss multilateral cooperation

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Astana, Kazakhstan, India on Tuesday said the leaders of the grouping are expected to review its activities over the past two decades and discuss prospects of multilateral cooperation. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent India at the Annual Summit of the SCO on July 4.

The situation in Afghanistan, the Ukraine conflict and boosting overall security cooperation among the SCO member countries are expected to figure in the summit.

India's priorities in SCO are shaped by the Prime Minister's vision of a 'SECURE' SCO, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. SECURE stands for Security, Economic Cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity and Environmental protection. Jaishankar will lead the Indian delegation to Astana for the summit, the MEA said. "At the summit, the leaders are expected to review the organisation's activities over the past two decades and discuss the state and prospects of multi-



lateral cooperation," it said. "Topical issues of regional and international importance are also expected to be discussed at the meeting," it said in a statement. The SCO comprising India, China, Russia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is an influential economic and security bloc that has emerged as one of the largest trans-regional international organisations. Kazakhstan is hosting the summit in its capacity as the current chair of the grouping. India was the chair of the SCO last year. It hosted the SCO Summit in the virtual format in July last year.

India's association with the SCO began in 2005 as an observer country. It became a full member state of SCO at the Astana summit in 2017. India has shown a keen interest in deepening its security-related cooperation with the SCO and its Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS), which specifically deals with issues relating to security and defence. The SCO was founded at a summit in Shanghai in 2001 by the Presidents of Russia, China, the Kyrgyz Republic, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Pakistan became its permanent member along with India in 2017.

Bihar Govt challenges Patna HC order on amended quota rule in SC

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Bihar government has moved the Supreme Court challenging a Patna High Court verdict that has set aside the amended reservation laws in the state, which enabled the Nitish Kumar government to increase the quotas for Dalits, tribals and backward classes from 50 per cent to 65 per cent. In its June 20 verdict, the High Court declared that the amendments, passed unanimously by the State's bicameral legislature in November last year, were "ultra vires" of the Constitution, "bad in law" and "violative of the equality clause". The state's plea has been filed in the apex court through Advocate Manish Kumar. A division bench of the High Court had allowed a bunch of petitions challenging the Bihar Reservation of Vacancies in Posts and Services (for Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes) (Amendment) Act, 2023 and the Bihar (In Admission in Educational



Institutions) Reservation (Amendment) Act, 2023, while "leaving the parties to suffer their respective costs". In a detailed order running into 87 pages, the high court made it clear that it saw "no extenuating circumstance enabling the state to breach" the 50-per cent cap on reservations laid down by the Supreme Court in the Indra Sawhney case. "The state proceeded on the mere proportion of population of different categories as against their numerical representation in governmental services and educational institutions," the

high court pointed out. The amendments had followed a caste survey, which put the percentage of Other Backward Classes (OBC) and Extremely Backward Classes (EBC) at a staggering 63 per cent of the state's total population, while the SCs and STs were stated to have accounted for more than 21 per cent. The exercise was undertaken by the Bihar government after the Centre expressed its inability to carry out a fresh headcount of castes other than the SCs and STs, which was last held as part of the 1931 Census. Accordingly,

the reservation for the reserved category was increased to 65 per cent. The decision reduced the space for those from open merit category to 35 per cent. In its judgment, the High Court had reasoned that the caste survey report relied upon by the State itself revealed that backward communities were adequately represented in public employment, by virtue of reservation and also merit. It had opined that the same was an indication of one or other caste or community having reaped the benefits of reservation and the various beneficial welfare schemes implemented by the State in achieving an element of social capital. The High Court had added that the State should introspect on the reservation percentage within the 50 per cent limit, and exclude the 'creamy layer' from the benefits. This has now been challenged before the apex court. The Bihar government's appeal before the top court has been filed through advocate Manish Kumar.

India, Thailand commence joint military exercise



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further enhance defence bilateral cooperation between the two countries, India and Thailand have commenced a joint military exercise Maitree at Fort Vachiraprakan in Tak province of Thailand. The drill is from July 1-15 and the Indian contingent left for Thailand on Monday, officials said here on Tuesday. It is the 13th edition of Maitree, they said. The last edition was conducted at Umroi, Meghalaya in September 2019. The Indian Army contingent comprising 76 personnel is being represented mainly by a battalion of the Ladakh Scouts along with personnel from other arms and services. The Royal Thai Army contingent also comprises 76 personnel mainly from 1 Battalion, 14 Infantry Regiment of 4 Division. Aim of the exercise is to foster military cooperation between India and Thailand. The Exercise will enhance combined capabilities in executing Joint Counter Insurgency/ Terrorist Operations in Jungle and Urban Environment under Chapter VII of United Nations Charter.

The Exercise will focus on high degree of physical fitness, joint planning and joint tactical drills. Tactical Drills to be practiced during the exercise will include creation of a Joint Operation Centre, establishing an Intelligence and Surveillance Centre, employment of drones and counter drone systems, securing of a landing site, small team insertion and extraction, special airborne operations, cordon and search operations, room intervention drills and demolition of illegal structures. Exercise Maitree will enable the two sides to share their best practices in tactics, techniques and procedures for conduct of joint operations. The exercise will facilitate developing interoperability, bonhomie and camaraderie between soldiers of both the countries.

IAF chief inaugurates weapon systems school at Hyderabad

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Weapon Systems School (WSS), which aims at recalibrating and transforming the Indian Air Force as a future-oriented force, was inaugurated in Hyderabad by IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari on Monday, officials said here on Tuesday. The formation of this new training establishment is a "gigantic leap" for the armed forces in general and the IAF in particular, IAF said in a statement.

A new chapter has been introduced in the history of the IAF with the inauguration of the Weapon Systems School (WSS) at Air Force Station Begumpet in Hyderabad on July 1. This follows the approval of the Weapon System (WS) branch, a new branch of officers in the IAF, in 2022. Aimed at recalibrating and transforming the Indian Air Force as a future-oriented force, the formation of this new training establishment is a gigantic leap for the Armed Forces in general, and Indian Air Force in particular," the statement said.

The WSS will impart effect-based training that is contemporary in nature and prepare officers of the newly formed branch in line with the requirements of the IAF, the officials said. "With the inauguration of the WSS, flight cadets of the WS Branch will undergo their second semester of training at this institute.

The new branch will have four streams; flying stream to operate the weapons and systems in airborne platforms like the Sukhoi-30 MKI and C-130J; remote stream to operate remotely piloted aircraft; mission commanders and operators for surface to air and surface-to-surface weapon systems, and intelligence stream for handling



space-based intelligence and imagery," the statement said. During the interaction, the IAF Chief highlighted that with the creation of WS branch, operators of ground based and specialist weapon systems will come under one umbrella, enhancing war fighting capabilities of the IAF significantly. He exhorted the instructors that being pioneers in a newly formed branch, they are the pillars on which the entire edifice of the envisioned training regime will stand firmly and deliver decisive air power.

While complimenting the founding members of the WSS, Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari urged all personnel to establish the School as a nodal centre for weapon systems training in the country. The creation of the WS branch was announced by the IAF chief during the Air Force Day Parade celebrations on October 8, 2022.

CBI seizes ₹1.59 cr cash in Mumbai's Passport Seva Kendras corruption case

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) seized Rs 1.59 crore cash and crucial digital evidence during its three-day search operation after busting a corruption racket in Mumbai's Passport Seva Kendras, officials said on Tuesday. After registering 12 cases on June 28 against 14 officials of Passport Seva Kendras (PSKs) of Lower Parel and Malad and 18 touts and middlemen, the CBI began a massive search operation in Mumbai and Nashik, which continued until Monday.

Besides the cash, the CBI stumbled upon five diaries containing alleged details of transactions and crucial information about the bribery ring, they said. The agency has alleged that the accused officials and middlemen indulged in "collusive corruption" allowing passports to be issued based on incomplete documents or manipulating the particulars of passport applicants. The alleged activities of the officials and the middlemen were detected during a joint surprise check at the PSKs conducted by the vigilance wing of the External Affairs Ministry and the CBI. The office desks and mobile phones of the suspect officers were analysed.



"The analysis of documents, social media chats and Unified Payments Interface (UPI) ID activities of suspect public servants had revealed various suspicious transactions by some officials of PSKs indicating demand and acceptance of undue advantage through the passport facilitation agents for issuance of passports as well as to get passports issued based on inadequate/fake/forged documents," a CBI spokesperson said after the registration of the FIR. The agency alleged that the PSK officials, in connivance with touts, were allegedly receiving huge monetary undue advantages directly in their own bank accounts or in the bank accounts of their family members to the tune of several lakhs of rupees, he said.

SC to hear NEET UGC pleas on July 8

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear on July 8 a batch of pleas related to the controversy-ridden NEET-UG, including those alleging irregularities in the examination held on May 5 and seeking a direction that it be held afresh. According to the cause list for July 8 uploaded on the apex court's website, the batch of 26 petitions would come up for hearing before a bench comprising Chief Justice DY Chandrachud and Justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra. The National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) is conducted by the National Testing Agency (NTA) for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses in government and private institutions across the country.

The NEET-UG, 2024 was held across 4,750 centres on May 5 and around 24 lakh candidates appeared in it. Initially expected on June 14, the results were announced on June 4 due to an early completion of answer-sheet evaluation. Allegations of irregularities, including paper leaks, have led to protests in several cities and sparring between rival political parties. On June 11, hearing a plea seeking that the exam be held afresh on the grounds of alleged question paper leak and other malpractices, the top court observed that the sanctity of the NEET-



UG has been affected and sought responses from the Centre and the NTA on the petition. It, however, refused to stay the counselling of the successful candidates for admissions to MBBS, BDS and other courses. On June 20, the top court sought the responses of the Centre, the NTA and others on a slew of petitions, including those seeking the scrapping of the NEET-UG and a court-monitored probe amid a mounting outrage over the alleged irregularities in the conduct of the all-India medical entrance test. Hearing separate pleas on the exam on June 18, the apex court said even if there was "0.001 per cent negligence" on the part of anyone in the conduct of the examination, it should be thoroughly dealt with. The Centre and the NTA had, on June 13, told the court that they had cancelled the grace marks awarded to 1,563 candidates. They were given the option to either take a re-test or forgo the compensatory marks awarded for loss of time. The NTA announced the revised rank list on Monday after issuing the results of the re-test held on June 23.

Kerala Govt faces Opposition ire over spread of epidemics

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The opposition Congress-led UDF on Tuesday accused the Left government in Kerala of failing to contain the spread of epidemics in the state as several communicable diseases were reportedly on the rise and staged a walkout in the Assembly demanding a discussion over the issue. A large number of viral hepatitis cases reported in various parts of the state, especially in northern Malappuram district, prompted the opposition to come up with a demand for discussion over the matter during the zero hour. They alleged that the southern state was fast becoming a hub of all epidemics, but Health Minister Veena George rejected the charges and gave a detailed reply on various measures being taken by the government to contain the spread of diseases. Later, Speaker A N Shamsheer rejected the leave for the motion based on the minister's reply that the situation was under control, prompting the UDF to stage a protest walkout in the House. Earlier, George cited various reasons, including incessant rains throughout the year,



climate changes, and density of population that turned Kerala into an "epidemiologically vulnerable hub." But the health department has been taking year-long precautionary measures for the prevention of the disease and creating awareness about it, she said. Such steps are being taken with the participation of local self-government institutions and the general public. A rapid response team was formed to contain the spread of monsoon-related diseases and epidemics, and a ministerial level meeting was being conducted to review the situation monthly, she added. As part of the initiatives, over 21,000 cleanliness drives were

conducted across the state under the aegis of the Local Self Government Department. The minister claimed that the effective interventions by the Health department have helped the state contain the dengue outbreak in Kerala during 2023-24, when many countries witnessed spread of the disease. Quoting health experts, she also said that despite intense rains last month, the possible leptospirosis outbreak could also be contained so far in the State. Referring to the viral hepatitis cases in Malappuram, the Health Minister said a special medical team has been deployed to contain their spread. "The disease is completely under control in the places where it was reported." At present, no one is admitted to the hospital for treatment in Vallikkunnu in Malappuram where a large number of hepatitis cases were reported recently. If the figures from the past 10-15 years were taken into account, there seems to be no major rise in the fever cases in Kerala now, she added. However, Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan rejected the claims of the Health Minister and said the state has become an area prone to epidemics, which was unheard of so far. Though climate change can be a common cause, the phenomenon is everywhere in the world, he pointed out. Many diseases, including hepatitis, dengue fever, rat fever, shigella, and so on, are now reported in Kerala. According to the government's Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme (SDP), 12 lakh people have been affected by fever so far in the state in the present year, and of them, seven have died, Satheesan said. He also alleged that the failure of the government to carry out the pre-monsoon cleanliness drive aggravated the situation.

30 villages in Gujarat's Junagadh cut off as heavy rain submerges roads

PTI ■ JUNAGADH

Around 30 villages in Junagadh district of Gujarat were cut off as roads leading to them got submerged following heavy rains, with Vanthali in the district recording 361 mm rains in the 24-hour period ending Tuesday morning, officials said. Ten talukas in the Saurashtra and southern region of the state received more than 200 mm rainfall in the 24-hour period resulting in waterlogging in low-lying areas, they said. The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) said in a statement that it has sent one team to Keshod in Junagadh district to help the people who were left stranded as a result of disconnected roads. "Nearly 30 villages in Junagadh



district were cut off as roads connecting them have gone under water following heavy rains," a senior official said. The affected talukas in the district are Keshod, Manavadar and Vanthali, the official added. As per the data shared by the State Emergency Operations Centre (SEOC), Vanthali taluka in Junagadh received 361 mm rainfall in the 24-

hour period ending 6 am. It was followed by Visavadar taluka (336 mm), Junagadh taluka (297 mm), Jungadh city (297 mm) and Keshod taluka, where 248 mm of rainfall was recorded in 24 hours. Other places where heavy downpour was recorded in the last 24 hours include Bardoli taluka of Surat (239 mm), Khambhalia taluka of Devbhumi Dwarka

(229 mm), Manavadar of Junagadh (224 mm) Navsari taluka of Navsari district (214 mm) and Kalyanpur taluka of Devbhumi Dwarka (200 mm). In all, 10 talukas of Saurashtra and south Gujarat regions received over 200 mm of rainfall in 24 hours. Several parts of the state have been receiving good amount of rainfall since the last three days. The NDRF said it has deployed 10 teams in different parts of Saurashtra, Kutch and south Gujarat in view of the heavy rainfall and resultant waterlogging. Notably, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Monday issued a 'red alert' for several districts, including Junagadh and Surat, forecasting extremely heavy rainfall till Tuesday morning.

Confident of win of all 3 MVA candidates in Maharashtra Council polls: Uddhav

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said the opposition MVA would not have fielded a third candidate in the upcoming polls to the Maharashtra legislative council had it not been confident of victory. Talking to reporters here, Thackeray asserted that all three candidates of the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), which comprises the Sena (UBT), Congress and the Sharad Pawar-led NCP (SP) and some smaller parties, will emerge victorious. The biennial elections for 11 seats of the Upper House of the state legislature will be held on July 12. The six-year term of the 11 MLCs is due to end on July 27. After a meeting with the



MVA leaders to discuss the poll preparations, Thackeray said the opposition bloc has fielded Pradnya Satav (of Congress), Jayant Patil (Peasants and Workers Party) and Milind Narvekar (Shiv Sena UBT). With the opposition's current strength in the 288-member legislative assembly, the electoral college for the polls,

only two of its candidates can win the council polls. The current strength of the state assembly is 274, while 14 seats are vacant. The quota for the winning candidate is 23. "All our three candidates are going to win," Thackeray said. Asked if the opposition bloc does not have numbers for

the victory of its third candidate, the former state chief minister said, "We would not be doing it had we not been confident." The NCP led by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar has fielded Rajesh Vitekar and Shivajirao Garje. The Shiv Sena headed by CM Eknath Shinde has fielded former MPs Krupal Tumane and Bhawana Gawali. The BJP has announced the candidatures of Pankaja Munde, Amit Gorkhe, Sadabhau Khot, Yogesh Tilekar and renominated Parinay Phuke. The last date for withdrawal of nomination is July 5. The Ajit Pawar-led NCP has 41 MLCs, the Eknath Shinde-led Sena has 40, and the BJP has 103. The Congress has 37 MLCs, Shiv Sena (UBT) has 13 and NCP (SP) has 15.

Four animals dead in flooded Kaziranga National Park, 24 rescued



PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Four hog deer drowned while 24 other animals were rescued from flood water following inundation of the Kaziranga National Park on Tuesday, an official said. Forest department officials moved the rescued animals, mostly deer, to a dry and safe area. Out of the total 233 camps in the Eastern Assam Wildlife Division, 167 have been inundated so far by the gushing flood waters, the official said. Forest department employees including security personnel stay in camps inside the

national park to conduct patrolling for the protection of flora and fauna. Altogether eight camps have been vacated by the forest personnel so far in various divisions. Meanwhile, the Golaghat district administration has issued prohibitory orders under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) restricting the speed of vehicular traffic on NH-37 (New NH-715) passing through the national park between 20 to 40 km/hour. Experts point out that floods are essential for the preservation and rejuvenation of the ecosystem

of the Park as the Brahmaputra river's overflowing water not only revitalises the grasslands but also flushes out the aquatic weeds and unwanted plants. The excess water flow also adds mineral-rich alluvial soil essential for the growth of grass and shrubs essential for the feeding of the herbivores. Kaziranga National Park, a world heritage site, is famous for the Great Indian one-horned rhinoceros. The landscape of Kaziranga is of sheer forest, tall elephant grass, rugged reeds, marshes & shallow pools. It was declared as a national park in 1974.

Two booked for duping loan agency

PTI ■ THANE

Police have registered a case against two men for allegedly defrauding a loan agency and a leading private sector bank to the tune of Rs 3.26 crore, an official said on Tuesday. The accused have been identified as Sagar Suresh Sonawane and Rajesh Shette, he said. "It was between October 2021 and December 2023, Sonawane, an employee of a loan providing agency, manipulated the loan application process and together with Shette and their accomplices, he allegedly submitted false information to secure loan from the bank. After getting the money, he did not repay the loan, that resulted in a loss of Rs 3.26 crore to the loan agency as well as the bank," he said. The authorities are conducting a thorough investigation to apprehend all involved parties and recover the misappropriated funds. An FIR was registered at the Naupada police station on June 30 and they are booked on the charge of criminal breach of trust, cheating, forgery, and others.

Renovated heritage hut opened in Kargil ahead of Vijay Diwas

PTI ■ KARGI

A recently renovated 'heritage hut' was inaugurated here on Tuesday on the sidelines of a bike rally ahead of 25th 'Vijay Diwas' commemoration to mark India's victory over Pakistan in the 1999 war, officials said. The Vijay Diwas celebrations are scheduled to be conducted at Drass in Kargil from July 24 to 26. The Kargil 'heritage hut', opened for tourists by the Army in June last year, now features vintage mine-protected vehicles such as 'Rakshak' and 'Cassiper', the officials said. It also has an "I Love India" selfie point with the iconic backdrop of Randhawa top, standing at an elevation of 13,620 feet, symbolising the strength and resilience of the armed forces, they added. Randhawa Top, also known as 'point 13620', holds significant strategic and historical importance in the Kargil region. This peak has been a focal point in the Indo-Pak conflicts, witnessing battles in all four wars between India and Pakistan in the past over seven decades. Senior Army officer Brigadier Jaideep Chanda inaugurated the heritage hut after participating in a solemn wreath-laying ceremony at the old Kargil memorial in honour of the brave soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the nation while defending Kargil since 1947.

The memorial features plaques and inscriptions that detail the heroic deeds of the soldiers in all four battles fought with Pakistan during 1947-99. In a tribute to the valour and sacrifice of the Indian Army, a commemorative bike rally was organised on the occasion from old Kargil Memorial to Randhawa Top, an official said, adding that the rally was organised by the Army in collaboration with a private company and an NGO. The bike rally, spanning approximately 35 kilometres, was flagged off by Brigadier Chanda to Randhawa Top which is now home to a memorial where wreath-laying ceremonies are held to honour the fallen soldiers, the official said. He said it also features a selfie point, offering visitors a chance to capture memories with the iconic peak in the background. Participants of the bike rally included officers and men from the 'forever in operations' division, dignitaries from the civil administration, including the Deputy Commissioner and Senior Superintendent of Police, ex-servicemen, and enthusiastic bikers from the local community, the official said. Upon reaching Randhawa Top, the participants engaged in another wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial, followed by the inauguration of a selfie point, he said.

ASI seeks 4 weeks from HC to submit survey report on Bhojshala

PTI ■ INDORE

The Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) on Tuesday filed an application in the Madhya Pradesh High Court seeking four weeks' time to submit its survey report on the Bhojshala-Kamal Maulla mosque complex, a medieval-era structure in Dhar district locked in a long-running dispute. The plea contended that the National Geophysical Research Institute (NGRI), Hyderabad, has sought three

weeks' time from the ASI to study the huge data collected during the Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR)-Geographic Information System (GIS) survey of the complex and submit a final report. The Hindu community considers Bhojshala as a temple of Vagdevi (Goddess Saraswati), while the Muslim side calls the 11th century monument as Kamal Maulla Mosque, and the ASI is conducting a "scientific survey" of the complex on the



HC's direction. As per an order of the HC's Indore bench, the ASI was required to submit the complete report

of the survey of the complex by July 2 (Tuesday). The ASI's fresh application is likely to come up for hearing in the high court on Thursday. In the application, the court was told that the ASI has completed the survey of the Bhojshala premises without taking any break despite intermittent rains in the area. According to the plea, the NGRI has also completed GPR-GIS survey of the disputed site and the Hyderabad-based institute

has sought three weeks' time from the ASI to submit a final report after conducting detailed study, analysis and interpretation of data of over 600 profiles of the survey. On March 11, the HC had ordered the ASI to conduct a scientific survey of the complex on an application by an organisation called "Hindu Front for Justice". The ASI, which protects the complex, started its survey on March 22 and recently completed the exercise. The central government agency

had issued an order on April 7, 2003, after a controversy erupted about the nature of the complex with both Hindus and Muslims laying claim to the site. According to the order which is in force for the last 21 years, Hindus are allowed to worship in Bhojshala every Tuesday, while Muslims are permitted to offer 'namaz' at the site every Friday. The Hindu Front for Justice has challenged this ASI-ordered arrangement in its petition.

Udhayanidhi launches TN RISE Women Start-up Council, says it will liberate women economically

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Youth Welfare and Sports Development Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin, who launched the TN RISE - Women Start Up Council here on Tuesday said the initiative will help liberate women economically and culturally. The main focus of TN RISE, the special platform of the Tamil Nadu Corporation for Development of Women, is to bring more women entrepreneurship from the rural areas of the state, he said. "This reflects our progressive tradition of our Dravidian movement, which is represented in the current government of Tamil Nadu. We refer to it as the Dravidian model government," Udhayanidhi Stalin said at the event.



He claimed that women were enslaved in two domains - economic and culture. Organisations like the World Bank were extending financial assistance to liberate women economically. "Likewise, our Dravidian movement strives hard to liberate women from enslavement in the cultural domain. Now, our Dravidian Model

government is proud to join hands with the World Bank in empowering women in the economic domain as well," the Minister said. He said women entrepreneurs faced numerous challenges in advancing their business ideas, as well as in accessing finance, credit, and marketing opportunities. The TN RISE was aimed to eliminate such obstacles by offering customised market linkages, financing, and operational advice. Also, it will provide high-end business incubation services to women-led rural enterprises, he said and added "I am proud to say that TN-RISE has signed MoUs with various multinational companies like Flipkart and HP to provide guidance and training for our budding women entrepreneurs." Udhayanidhi invited entrepreneurs to join hands with the state government to create more women entrepreneurs from Tamil Nadu. The state government had announced in the Budget in March last year to establish an exclusive Women Start Up Council. Accordingly it was launched today.

Unite for quota cause in Assembly polls: Jarange tells Maratha leaders

PTI ■ JALNA

Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange on Tuesday urged MLAs and MPs from his community to unite in the fight for reservation under the OBC category or face consequences in the forthcoming Maharashtra assembly elections. Speaking to reporters, Jarange outlined plans to hold peaceful rallies in every district of Maharashtra from July 6 to 13, advocating for the quota demand. "Leaders of the Maratha community should attend these rallies in solidarity for Maratha reservation. They should demand the implementation of the draft notification of 'Sage Soyare' (blood relatives) and the old Hyderabad and Satara gazettes

which have proved that Marathas are Kunbis," he said. Jarange has been at the forefront of protests demanding the implementation of a draft notification that recognises Kunbis as "sage soyare" (blood relatives) of Maratha community members. He is also pushing for a law that identifies Kunbis as Marathas, making them eligible for quota under the OBC grouping. "Those Maratha leaders who fail to support the reservation cause will face consequences in the upcoming Assembly elections," he added. The polarisation of Maratha votes is believed to have benefited the opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) in recent Lok Sabha elections, to the detriment of the BJP.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Brace for a deluge

As India transitions from the scorching summer heat to the monsoon season, a dramatic shift in weather is on the horizon

As the rumbling in clouds becomes louder and the humidity rises, it is time for monsoon. It is welcome as it brings much relief from the scorching heat and a lot of discomfort that comes with it but as the monsoon progresses it also becomes a challenge, exposing our inadequacies and unpreparedness to meet this annual phenomenon. The monsoon season, while a welcome relief from the summer heat, brings with it significant challenges. The Indian Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert for heavy rainfall in seven states: Maharashtra, Gujarat, Kerala, Karnataka, Uttarakhand, Goa, and Madhya Pradesh. Residents of these areas are advised to brace for severe weather conditions, including the potential for flash floods, particularly in Uttarakhand, Goa, and Karnataka. This year's monsoon is expected to be more severe than usual. The IMD has warned of extremely heavy rainfall over the next few days, which could lead to significant disruptions and pose serious risks to life and property. It is just a matter of days before Delhi will wear a Venice look as water logging is a norm that repeats every year. The people living on the banks of Yamuna would be rendered homeless as if it were their destiny. And after the waters recede it would be life as usual for the people and the Government alike. But a lot of misery is in store for Uttarakhand where flash floods are predicted. Uttarakhand faces an elevated risk of flash floods. The steep slopes and narrow valleys can quickly channel rainwater, leading to sudden and severe flooding. Goa is also vulnerable to heavy rains and flash floods during the monsoon. The state's infrastructure can become quickly overwhelmed, leading to waterlogging and disruption of services. Karnataka is expected to experience torrential downpours. The Western Ghats, which run along the western edge of the state, can intensify the rainfall, increasing the risk of floods and landslides.



It is not just the monsoon, but its aftermath is equally challenging. The waterborne diseases and spectre of epidemics loom large while authorities watch it happening as mute spectators. Indeed it is high time authorities in the affected states take proactive measures to mitigate the impact of the heavy rains and prepare for the possible evacuation of vulnerable populations to safer areas. Issuing regular updates and warnings to keep the public informed and safe. Ensuring that critical infrastructure, such as dams and drainage systems, are prepared to handle the increased water levels. Many bridges in Bihar have collapsed even before the monsoon, airport Terminal T1 in Delhi collapsed and several highways have caved in, if these are not warning signals then what is? Blaming the monsoon is certainly lame. It is not sudden or unexpected. It happens every year yet we are ill-prepared for it. Besides, we so much depend upon it for irrigating our fields and providing drinking water. One can find so many pains when the rain is falling but then Without the rain, there would be no rainbow!

Without the rain, there would be no rainbow!

Without the rain, there would be no rainbow!

PICTALK



Villagers use a boat to travel across a flood affected area after heavy rainfall, in Morigaon district

Reclaiming Dehradun: Battling tourism woes



SIDHARTH MISHRA

Once an idyllic retreat and educational hub, Dehradun is now grappling with unchecked tourism, threatening its serene character

In the pantheon of the leaders belonging to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the name of the late Manohar Parrikar would always be taken with a lot of respect. A Goan and an IITan, Parrikar was never happy with the stereotypical image of his state being a tourist destination for cheap alcohol, drugs and also sex. While Goa attracted tourists for its natural beauty and cultural magnetism, since the 1990s, there has been a noticeable increase in visitors drawn to the state for its permissive environment regarding alcohol, drugs, and sex tourism. Manohar Parrikar was vocal about his reservations concerning this shift in the tourist profile. He believed that such trends would tarnish Goa's image and disrupt the social fabric of the state once and for all. A leaf could be taken out from the books of Parrikar by the current Chief Minister of Uttarakhand, Pushkar Singh Dhama regarding a similar crisis being faced by the Himalayan state.

Take a drive from Clock Tower in Dehradun on the legendary Rajpur Road to Mussoorie, you will realise that all the cars parked on the roadside are doubling up as bars. This 'car-o-bar' would often be a vehicle with a Haryana, UP and Punjab number plate. The two days that one was in the Doon Valley recently, as these bars roared in the costly model cars, one could not find a single soul in the police uniform to check them. Somewhere it seemed that the absence of the cops on this road was deliberate to let these bars prosper. Dehradun was once known as the bakery capital of India. These bakery shops lining Rajpur Road have been overtaken by wine shops with glitzy lights announcing prominently what they sell. Well, one cannot protest about the shops but buying bottles and drinking outside on the roads have to be surely protested. Author Ratna Manucha, whose family has stayed in the valley for ages, calls these 'car-o-baris' the Aliens from the other states. "Each year the crowds coming into my



town swell. These aliens from outer states come in obscenely big cars, they drive nasty, trying to edge us locals in our sensible little cars off the road, showing the finger on occasions and mouthing expletives, throwing rubbish out of their windows, drinking on unlit highways, and then crashing their cars into unsuspecting locals," says Manucha. Things get worse during the weekends as the Rajpur road gets clogged. The 'tourists' really don't mind spending hours in the serpentine queues.

However, the residents of Doon living either on the arterial road or the smaller roads prefer staying at home lest their plan to visit somebody gets wasted in the jam. Dehradun till about 10 years back was not like this. It was still an idyllic town preferred by people to live a retired life. In broadening the roads to accommodate ever-increasing traffic flow, trees have been cut. Given the winter pollution in Delhi-NCR, a large number of people have bought apartments in Doon Valley to spend the winter months. This demand has given rise to the building of multi-storeyed apartments. In turn, these apartments have been built clearing the lychee orchards, which once kept the valley



DEHRADUN TILL ABOUT 10 YEARS BACK WAS NOT LIKE THIS. IT WAS STILL AN IDYLIC TOWN PREFERRED BY PEOPLE TO LIVE A RETIRED LIFE. IN BROADENING THE ROADS TO ACCOMMODATE EVER-INCREASING TRAFFIC FLOW, TREES HAVE BEEN CUT

green. Dehradun till some years back did not need the use of air-conditioners. The hotels with the ACs largely used them during the winter months for room heating purposes. But you can now see the topography of the valley with houses having air-conditioners jutting out of their windows. This 'horrorscape' is not just limited to the summer tourist season. Dehradun in the past two decades has evolved into a major centre for higher education.

The large number of the colleges, both professional and general, have mushroomed along the ridges and the plains. They are not exactly home to centres for great knowledge earning but certainly, give a graduate degree for a handsome fee. Given the high fee structure, there is always a dearth of students and vacant seats. The marketing teams of these institutions scout far and wide specially looking for the youth wanting some fun with a degree as a bonus. These 'students' prefer staying in the apartments outside the campus, as it can accommodate their costly cars, as there are no restrictions on their timing to return home and none really bothered if their vehicle fell into a gorge as they drove in a drunken state. Uttarakhand

too has liberal liquor laws like Goa. Excise duty earned from liquor sales is the mainstay of the state revenue. But shouldn't Dhama be concerned about the image of Uttarakhand like Parrikar was for Goa? The late leader streamlined things in Goa without really tinkling with the existing laws. Parrikar emphasized the need for a robust law enforcement framework to tackle alcohol and drug tourism.

He increased police patrolling in tourist hotspots and enhanced coordination with central agencies. Second Parrikar pushed for regulations to control the sale and consumption of liquor in tourist areas. This included measures such as restricting liquor outlets and promoting responsible drinking through awareness campaigns. Dhama government in Uttarakhand too needs to make the presence of the cops more effective and control the misery that the residents of the city are being made to face. It's also depressing for those who regularly visit Doon to spend some time in peace who are now ending up being shooed by the blaring horns of speeding vehicles.

(The writer is the author and president, of the Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

INDIA'S PHOENIX MOMENT:

Madam — India's Phoenix Moment: A T20 World Cup Triumph India's cricket team exhibited remarkable determination and resilience, clinching the T20 World Cup 2024 title with a breathtaking comeback in the final five overs. Rising like a phoenix from the ashes, India soared to victory, proving their mettle on the grandest stage. In the thrilling conclusion, Hardik Pandya's final over was nothing short of brilliant, and a spectacular catch by Suryakumar Yadav (SKY)—who went beyond the boundary and timed his leap perfectly to secure the catch on his second attempt—played a crucial role in sealing India's victory. Earlier in the match, King Virat Kohli's solid 76 runs and Akshar Patel's crucial 47 provided stability to the Indian innings, setting a record-high T20 Cup final total of 176. Despite this, the South African team, the Proteas, responded with a strong performance, reaching a respectable score and losing just four wickets. However, with only 30 runs needed from the last 30 balls and six wickets in hand, the Proteas faltered under immense pressure. Boundaries that were expected to seal the win for them turned into catches or mere singles, proving that "luck did not favor them" in those decisive final overs. Yes, indeed, a blend of luck and daring spirit won the game for India. Team India deserves all the praise for its fantastic performance.

PVM Nivriti | Secunderabad

SELECTIVE OUTRAGE

Madam — Apropos the report titled "Flogging of couple: BJP seeks resignation of Didi" (July 2); if the TMC leader Tajemul Islam has indeed beaten up a youth and a woman with sticks, he must be awarded exemplary punishment according to law. But by which temerity can the leaders of BJP dare to act as "moral guardians" of the country and atrociously demand the resignation of Mamata Banerjee? When Dalit youths

Unjustified opposition to new criminal laws



The recent introduction of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), and the Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam (BSA) has sparked mixed reactions from experts. Some members of the legal community suggest continuing with the old laws for another 20 years, a recommendation that is both impractical and counterproductive. It's unreasonable to speculate on future circumstances even one or two years ahead, let alone 20 years. This suggestion essentially advocates for delay-

ing the implementation of the new laws indefinitely. As is often the case, opposition parties have unitedly opposed these new laws, not on their merits or demerits, but because they were discussed during the previous Lok Sabha in their absence. This argument holds no water. Their absence during the discussions and debates in the previous session was not justified, and they missed an opportunity to contribute meaningfully. No one prevented them from participating; they chose not to, and that cannot be a valid reason to stall the implementation of these new laws. The custodians of the law, who are highly educated and capable individuals, can certainly understand and implement these new legal frameworks. Union Home Minister Amit Shah aptly stated that these laws are created by Indians, for Indians, and by the Indian Parliament, marking the end of colonial criminal justice laws.

KV Setharamaiah | Bengaluru

were publicly flogged in Una Gujarat in 2016, the BJP leaders asked Anandiben Patel to resign! When spine-chilling gangrape/murder /forced cremation took place in Hathras Unnao Budaun; did the BJP leaders demand the resignation of Yogi Adityanath? When Kuki women got paraded naked in Manipur before gang rape, why didn't the BJP leaders demand the resignation of N Biren Singh immediately? Why didn't the resignation of Pushkar Singh Dhama get demanded after a lady receptionist was murdered in Uttarakhand? When Bengali migrant labourer Afrazul Khan was burnt alive to death in Rajsamund in 2017, did the BJP leaders ask Vasundhara Raje to resign?

Hardly two weeks ago, street vendor Aurangzeb had been brutally lynched to death in full view of the Aligarh public! Did the "conscientious" leaders of the BJP act honestly enough to demand the resignation of Yogi Adityanath? Indeed, two wrongs do not make a right, but the greater truth remains that the

leaders of the hypocrite BJP simply hold no moral right to deliver unsolicited sermons about human rights.

Kajal Chatterjee | Kolkata

MONSOON IS A CHALLENGE

Madam — In the past few days, the number of rain-related deaths in the nation's capital has reached 11, with six deaths reported on Saturday alone. The heavy rainfall on Friday caused widespread waterlogging in Delhi. In response, the New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has expanded its staff to address waterlogging issues.

To effectively tackle urban waterlogging, a holistic approach is needed, incorporating infrastructure improvements, sustainable urban design, and active community engagement. By implementing these strategies, cities can mitigate the impacts of heavy rains and enhance their resilience for the future.

Neha Tomar | Ujjain

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

The need for music and life skills in modern education



RAVI SONAD

To ensure holistic development and equal opportunities for all children, music must become an integral part of the school curriculum

Driven on one side by developments in technology and on the other by changes to the global social order, we face tectonic shifts in the future of the workforce and challenges such as climate change and conflict. With this as a backdrop in mind, there is an urgent need to ensure that we can equip today's youth with the skills and mindsets to thrive in this dynamic environment. Education for the last 200 years has largely been based on imparting knowledge.

With increasing levels of specialization through the Industrial Revolution, knowledge became more valuable; however, today, soft skills, also known as Life Skills, have become much more needed. Without these skills, it is difficult to survive and succeed. More importantly, character building becomes imperative if we are to be prepared to tackle the global challenges facing us. We must define leadership not by position but as "Strength of Character" and "Sense of Community." There is plen-



ty of research and evidence showing that skills such as collaboration and communication, critical and creative thinking, and character traits such as self-confidence, grit, and resilience, as well as having a growth mindset, can be effectively developed through experiential learning that uses mediums such as team sports, the arts, and free play.

Music is one of the most powerful art forms that supports the development of these skills in multiple, effective ways. Learning music requires practice and self-discipline to improve. It

requires the student to set goals, like mastering a piece of music or preparing for a performance, and then implement a plan to achieve these goals.

Performing in a group teaches students the importance of working together, listening to each other, and supporting one another. Students who learn different types and forms of music develop empathy and a deeper understanding of different perspectives. Most music programs encourage composition and improvisation, allowing students to develop their creative thinking skills. Performing

in front of an audience helps build self-confidence while learning from mistakes during a performance helps build resilience and a growth mindset. Today, a well-rounded music curriculum is available in higher-end private schools, but all children must get the same opportunity. We need to ensure that music education becomes a core part of the school curriculum and is not treated as an extracurricular activity. Only then can we ensure equal access, regardless of background or skill level. If we can make teaching music in schools the norm, it will ensure the holistic development of all children. Building character and life skills will mean that we will not only support children in their journey towards personal and professional success, but we will also help develop a generation of leaders capable of taking care of themselves and the world around them.

(The writer is CEO and founder, Enabling Leadership; views are personal)

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True peace and creativity flourish when we fully engage with the present



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJ JI

Most of us might have heard the proverb 'You only know what you've got when it's gone' many times in our lives. But, in spite of that, many of us realize the fortune we had, only when we lose it. The stream of life flows on and every second the water in the stream is changing. At any given moment the water at the same spot in the stream is different. What is present now will move on to the next moment, so every moment life is unfolding and something new is being presented. Life unfolds in the present. But so often, we let it slip away, allowing time to rush past unobserved and unseized, and squandering the precious seconds of our lives as we are lost in the past or caught up in the future.

It's very common for most of us to fantasize about things like shopping or going to a movie while we are at work. And while we are actually in a movie theatre, we worry about the work piling up on our desks, isn't it ironic? We are trapped by intrusive memories of the past or fret about what may or may not happen in the future and in this whole struggle, we don't appreciate the Present because we identify ourselves with our thoughts, beliefs and emotions strongly. We forget the fact that we need to live in the Present i.e. the NOW, and for that, we need to be very still inside but we are constantly distracted by our thoughts linked to the past and future. Most of us think in a conditioned, addictive way.

We are addicted to the patterns and beliefs we created in the past which keep driving our thoughts in the present. Instead of thinking consciously and with full awareness, we are controlled by our thoughts of the past. To change this pattern we need first to pause and observe what's going on in our mind. We need to step back and watch and then steer our thoughts towards the present moment and creative goals. We need to focus on being before thinking, judging, analysing and doing. Living in the present is a state of active, open, intentional attention to the present. When we become aware of what's going on inside our mind, we realize that we are not our thoughts; we are the observer of our thoughts from moment to moment and stop judging them. It is like watching waves rising and falling on the surface of the ocean. Spiritual wisdom makes



us aware and realise that we are souls — sentient points of light and purity, peace, joy and love are our original state of being. As the noise and chatter of the mind slow down, we can experience our true nature and just relax in our state of being. Then we are connected to the now not influenced by the past, future or anything out there. We are in a highly creative state when our pure awareness creates pure energy of love, joy and peace in every moment and shapes our destiny. Under such a stage, we are flowing with life without grasping, chasing, wanting, needing or holding on to anything. We are in a truly liberated state and truly powerful and creative. There is fresh energy in every thought and action. Living in the present reduces impulsive and reactive behaviour. Those who live in the moment can hear negative feedback without feeling threatened.

They are more accepting, accommodating and flexible, as a result of which they have easy and satisfying relationships. It is very important for all of us to realize that we are now in the most important and beneficial age when the Almighty Himself is bestowing His treasures of wisdom, love and powers upon humanity. Hence, by becoming soul conscious we can live in the present and make the best out of each second of this valuable period. Being aware of the self as a soul and of being connected to the Supreme liberates us in a second and we are able to flow with life with ease and lightness. So, don't look back because you are not going that way.

(Writer is a spiritual educator and popular columnist; views are personal)

Modi Govt's imperative for employment growth

Despite the country's emerge as a major manufacturing hub, the sector has seen limited progress, contributing to a rising unemployment rate among the youth



AS MITTAL

There has been a long-standing vision to make India a global manufacturing hub to create millions of jobs. However, considering India's size and status as one of the world's fastest-growing economies, it's perplexing how the potential for job creation and growth in the manufacturing sector has been overlooked for so long. The new government must implement a new industrial policy having decisive measures to address current structural constraints and reshape India's manufacturing sector in response to global supply chain shifts. This is crucial for achieving a GDP of \$5 trillion and making India the world's third-largest economy by 2027. It's alarming that unemployment among young people with graduate degrees is at an all-time high of 29 per cent as India moves towards becoming the third-largest economy. In 2019, manufacturing was the second-largest employer in India after agriculture, but it has now fallen to fourth place behind the construction sector, trade, and hospitality.

The National Sample Survey Organisation (NSO) data shows that 45.5% of the workforce is employed in agriculture, 12.4% in construction, and only 11.6% in manufacturing, despite its potential to create a multitude of job opportunities. Manufacturing still employs around 60 million people in India, effective action is needed to unlock its full potential for job creation at large. India's impressive growth is hindered by the lacklustre performance of the manufacturing sector, which has shown limited expansion over the past 25 years. Unlike other countries, India's production structure has shifted directly from agriculture to services-driven growth, resulting in a stagnant contribution of manufacturing to India's GDP at 15-17%, significantly lower than in East and South-East Asian countries. China has a 31.63% share of global manufacturing, the US has 15.87%, Japan 6.52%, Germany 4.78%, and India 2.87%. This highlights the urgent need for India to address the challenges in its manufacturing sector.

The reasons for this stagnation could be diverse, such as high tax burden, overburdened regulatory compliances, inadequate infrastructure and connectivity, unreliable electricity, lack of access to credit or a skilled workforce, and insufficient focus on research, development, and technology adoption.

Despite these obstacles, Indian manufacturers are now more emboldened to transcend their comfort zones and align with the nation's goal of becoming a global player.

Areas to be addressed:

Focus on sectors of strength: There are strong capabilities in various sectors such as automobiles (especially e-vehicles, to raise its current share from 7% to over 30%), pharmaceuticals and chemicals, textiles and apparel, engineering goods, farm-implements, and bicycles. However, there are significant gaps in mega-scale facilities that can anchor large-scale exports. The reliability of supporting infrastructure and fostering global partnerships for MSMEs are critical for accelerating growth.

Revisit PLI: It is necessary to reevaluate the effectiveness of the Production Linked Incentives (PLI) scheme, creat-



THE NATIONAL SAMPLE SURVEY ORGANISATION DATA SHOWS THAT 45.5 PER CENT OF THE WORKFORCE IS EMPLOYED IN AGRICULTURE, 12.4 PER CENT IN CONSTRUCTION, AND ONLY 11.6 PER CENT IN MANUFACTURING, DESPITE ITS POTENTIAL TO CREATE A MULTITUDE OF JOB OPPORTUNITIES

ed in 2020 to invigorate the domestic manufacturing sector, showing the desired results. The progress of schemes worth over Rs.2 lakh crore covering 14 sectors, especially in labour-intensive sectors like automobiles, auto components, textiles, IT hardware, and medical devices, it has been slow.

The PLI scheme's broader goals, such as job creation, attracting substantial investments, enhancing exports, and positioning India as a global manufacturing hub, have yet to be fulfilled. **Restructure GST:** The current Goods and Service Tax (GST) structure applies to over 1250 items and services, with standard tax rates of 5%, 12%, 18%, and the highest rate of 28%. Additionally, there are zero and special rates of 0.25%, 1.5%, and 3% for certain goods and services.

To address inflation and tax-related issues, a restructuring of the tax system is necessary. This could involve transitioning from the existing four-slab structure to a two-slab model and providing exemptions for items such as farm implements, which were previously exempted under the Pre-GST regime.

Opportunities in next-generation sectors: Opportunities in renewable energy, aerospace, and high-tech manufacturing sectors such as semiconductors and mobile devices is a case in point as the \$ 12 billion exports in FY 23, more than double the \$ 4.8 billion in FY20, are rapidly emerging as the world transitions to a

green and connected future. Building a solid foundation in these sectors requires focusing on R&D, investments in technology transfers, global tie-ups, and incentivizing investments, along with collaboration across academia, industry, and the government.

Smart manufacturing stack: India's technology stack is a leading example of digital disruption at scale and showcases the country's capabilities for innovative solutions. A similar innovative leap in manufacturing, oriented toward the next generation of smart industrial clusters, connected factories, enhanced efficiency and reduced waste, high-productivity assets, end-to-end value chain transparency, and tech-enabled real-time interventions, can be significant differentiators. Accelerate future-ready infrastructure: India's inefficiencies are costing the nation heavily in time and money.

It is imperative to reduce current logistics costs from 8-10 per cent to 6 per cent of GDP by 2030. This requires a \$1.2 billion investment in industry-focused corridors. To provide a level playing field to the northern India manufacturing hubs, away from seaports, especially land-locked border states like Punjab needs policy-backed support to combat over double freight burden in comparison to southern-western states.

Labour-intensive manufacturing: As technological advancements drive productivity in manufactur-

ing across various sectors, the government also needs to address the transition of the workforce from agriculture and other fields. The 2024 India Employment Report by the International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes the need to promote labour-intensive manufacturing and enhance efforts in skilling. It is crucial to prioritize skill development, and industry leaders should play a pivotal role in driving this initiative.

The Way Forward: A thriving and self-reliant domestic manufacturing sector is essential for India to achieve inclusive growth by implementing an aggressive and effective reform agenda and navigating geopolitical risks and climate change-driven calamities.

It is crucial to ensure that the recent promises made in the poll can be fulfilled to transform India into a global manufacturing hub, resulting in employment generation and tangible progress. India has the capacity and resources to excel in this area, and it's time for the new government to make it happen.

(The author is Vice-Chairman of Sonalika IITL Group, Vice-Chairman (Cabinet minister rank) of the Punjab Economic Policy and Planning Board, Chairman of ASSOCHAM Northern Region Development Council and President of Tractor and Mechanization Association (TMA). Views expressed are personal)

The petrodollar system and its influence on global finance and geopolitics

A more multipolar financial ecosystem that accommodates a diverse array of currencies and economic influences is taking shape

The petrodollar system, inaugurated in 1974, has long been a linchpin of global finance and geopolitics. Established through an agreement between the United States and Saudi Arabia, it stipulated that the kingdom would exclusively sell its oil in US dollars. This arrangement not only guaranteed a consistent demand for the dollar but also directed oil revenues back into the US economy through investments in US Treasury bonds and other financial assets.

As a result, the system created a significant source of funding for the US government and solidified the dollar's status as the world's primary reserve currency. Geopolitically, the petrodollar system forged a symbiotic relationship between



SANTOSH MATHEW

the US and oil-exporting nations, particularly those in the Middle East. In exchange for security assurances and economic assistance, these countries committed to conducting oil transactions in dollars, thereby granting the US significant sway over global oil markets and the broader economy. This symbiosis reinforced the US's geopolitical influence and allowed it to project power in

the strategically vital Middle East, ensuring the uninterrupted flow of oil, which is critical for the global economy.

Recent developments suggest a potential departure from this long-standing arrangement. On June 9, Saudi Arabia declared its intention to discontinue exclusive oil sales in US dollars. This decision is part of a broader strategy to diversify the Saudi economy and diminish reliance on oil revenues. The move away from the petrodollar system is seen by some as a step towards strengthening ties with other economic powers, notably China, which seeks to promote its currency, the yuan, as an alternative in global trade. The role of Henry Kissinger, a pivotal figure in establishing the petrodollar system, under-

scores its historical significance. Kissinger's negotiations with Saudi Arabia in the 1970s not only secured American dominance in global finance but also assured protection for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, cementing their alliance with the US through military cooperation and strategic partnerships.

Reactions to Saudi Arabia's decision vary widely. Analysts speculate it could weaken the dollar's global hegemony, potentially leading to its depreciation and higher inflation rates in the US. However, mitigating factors include the US's current status as an oil exporter, reducing vulnerability to fluctuations in oil prices and currency dynamics. The broader implications for the global economy remain



uncertain. A shift away from the dollar in oil transactions could promote greater currency diversification and lessen dependence on the US financial system. For oil-importing countries, this shift could offer more stable pricing if transactions are conducted in their own currencies or other stable alternatives. In conclusion, Saudi Arabia's strategic pivot signifies a significant evolution in global financial systems.

While it may not immediately dismantle the petrodollar's influence, it signals a transition towards a more multipolar economic order, where multiple currencies could assume pivotal roles in global trade and finance. This transformation is anticipated to unfold gradually, with profound implications for international relations and economic strategies worldwide.

Throughout decades, the petrodollar system has upheld the dollar's global dominance, intertwining economic power with geopolitical influence. Conclusion The petrodollar system's historical context and its prospective decline illustrate the dynamic nature of global financial and geopolitical landscapes. The shift in Saudi Arabia's pol-

icy highlights the kingdom's strategic intent to align itself more closely with emerging economic powers and reduce its over-reliance on oil revenue. This move is emblematic of a broader global trend toward economic diversification and the quest for greater financial sovereignty among oil-producing nations.

The gradual erosion of the petrodollar system could herald the rise of alternative financial paradigms, challenging the entrenched supremacy of the US dollar. As countries explore new avenues for conducting international trade and finance, the world may witness an increase in currency diversification, potentially leading to a more balanced and less US-centric global economy. Such a shift could also

encourage more equitable economic partnerships and reduce the economic vulnerabilities associated with dependence on a single dominant currency. Moreover, the potential decline of the petrodollar system invites a reexamination of existing geopolitical alliances and economic dependencies.

The ripple effects of these changes could extend beyond the realm of finance, influencing international diplomacy, trade policies, and even security dynamics. The focus will likely shift toward fostering a more multipolar financial ecosystem that accommodates a diverse array of currencies and economic influences.

(The writer is an associate professor; views are personal)

Congress & CPN-UML strike deal to oust PM Prachanda

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

In a dramatic political development, Nepal's two largest parties - Nepali Congress and CPN-UML - have inked a midnight power-sharing deal to form a new 'national consensus government' to replace the coalition government led by Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda", who on Tuesday refused to resign.

a rotation basis for the rest of the term of the Parliament, said Saud, who is also a Nepali Congress central member. Nepali Congress, the largest party in the House of Representatives (HoR), has 89 seats at present, while CPN-UML has 78 seats. The combined strength of the two large parties is 167, which is sufficient for a majority of 138 seats in the 275-member HoR. The two leaders also met on Saturday to lay the ground for a potential new political alliance between the two parties, following which Oli's CPN-UML ended its association with the Prachanda-led government barely four months after extending support to it. Embattled Prime Minister Prachanda has decided not to resign from the post despite the agreement between the Nepali Congress and CPN-

UML. In a meeting of the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist Centre) office-bearers held in Baluwar, Prachanda said he would rather face a vote of confidence in Parliament than resign from the post, the party Secretary Ganesh Shah told PTI. Prachanda, 69, has won three votes of confidence in Parliament during his one-and-a-half-year term. Nepal has had 13 governments in the last 16 years, indicating the fragile nature of the Himalayan nation's political system. Under the agreement that is likely to be finalised on Tuesday, the CPN-UML chief Oli will lead the government in the first phase of the remaining term of Parliament. The two leaders have agreed to share the premiership for one and a half years, turn by turn,

Saud said. The two leaders tentatively agreed to form a new government, amend the Constitution, and work out a power-sharing formula, which they reportedly shared with a few confidants, media reports said, quoting multiple senior leaders from both parties. The ministers belonging to the CPN-UML in the Prachanda-led Cabinet are likely to resign en-masse in the afternoon, sources close to the CPN-UML said. CPN-UML secretary Shanker Pokharel has told media persons that an agreement was reached with the Nepali Congress to form a national government led by Oli, a former prime minister. The new government will be formed to maintain political stability in the country and make necessary amendments to the Constitution.

France's far-right National Rally to lead govt only with absolute majority

AP ■ PARIS

The star president of France's National Rally will take the helm of government only if the party wins an absolute majority in Sunday's second round of legislative elections, the leading far-right figure Marine Le Pen said Tuesday. The National Rally, under party president Jordan Bardella, secured the most votes in the first round of the surprise legislative elections on June 30 but not enough to claim overall victory. "We cannot accept going into government if we cannot act," Le Pen said in an interview Tuesday with public broadcaster France Inter. "It would be the worst betrayal of our voters." Round one on Sunday propelled the National Rally closer than ever to government but also left open the possibility that voters could yet block its path to power in the second and final round on July 7. Le Pen's party and its opponents in the left-wing alliance of the New Popular Front as well as President Emmanuel Macron's weakened centrists are all seeking to deny the far right an absolute majority by ral-

lying supporters in high-stakes campaigning this week. The National Rally and its allies could secure a working majority in parliament in the final round on Sunday. Or they could fall short, stymied at the last hurdle by opponents who still hope to prevent the formation of France's first far-right government since World War II. Both scenarios are fraught with uncertainty for France and its influence in Europe and beyond. With the stakes high and the time frame compressed, the election has overshadowed preparations for Paris to host the Olympic Games, which open in less than a month. To block the far right's ascent to government, some leftist and centrist candidates who did not win outright in round one but qualified for round two have stepped aside. Candidates have until 6 pm Tuesday to decide whether to stay in the race or withdraw. By pulling out, opponents of the National Rally might divert votes to other candidates better positioned to beat the far right on Sunday. "We have one objective today (and that) to deny an absolute majority to the

National Rally," said François Ruffin of the hard-left France Unbowed party that is part of the new National Front alliance along with French greens, Socialists and Communists. Macron dissolved the National Assembly and called the snap election on June 9, after a stinging defeat at the hands of the National Rally in French voting for the European Parliament. The deeply unpopular and weakened president gambled that the far right would not repeat that success when the country's own fate was in the balance. But Macron's plan backfired. He is now accused, even by members of his own camp, of having opened a door for the National Rally by calling voters back to the ballot box, especially when so many are angry over inflation, the cost of living, immigration and at Macron himself. The far right tapped into voter frustration with inflation and low incomes and a sense that many French families are being left behind by globalisation. Le Pen's party campaigned on a platform that promised to raise consumer spending power, slash immigration and take a tougher line on European Union rules.

Biden and Democrats raise \$264 mn in second quarter

AP ■ WASHINGTON



President Joe Biden's reelection campaign and the Democratic National Committee reported raising USD 264 million in the year's second quarter, an impressive haul that may help them calm fears within their own party about last week's shaky debate performance.

Some of the campaign's top leaders have held multiple calls since the debate, preaching patience to donors and top surrogates. Campaign officials nonetheless insist there's been no discussion "whatsoever" of Biden exiting the race nor of any staff shakeups. Former President Donald Trump, who is set to accept the Republican presidential nomination at the party's convention this month in Milwaukee, has yet to announce the quarterly fundraising totals for his campaign and affiliated entities. A spokesman said they would release them "when we're ready." Biden enjoyed a large fundraising advantage over Trump in the early

stages of the race, but the former president has narrowed the gap more recently. In April, which is included in Tuesday's full second quarter totals, Biden and the DNC reported raising more than USD 51 million. That was well short of the USD 76 million that Trump and the Republican Party reported taking in for that month. Trump also reported raising USD 141 million in May, padded by tens of millions of dollars in contributions that flowed in after Trump's guilty verdict in his criminal hush money trial. Biden's most recent quarterly total was enhanced by a glitzy June fundraiser in Los Angeles that he held with superstars George Clooney and Julia Roberts and former President Barack Obama. That event took in more than USD 30 million, a record for a Democratic candidate. The president's campaign said nearly half of the donations that came after the debate were from first-time donors. It said 95 per cent of all second-quarter donations were under USD 200, and more than 1.5 million total donors made over 2.8 million contributions.

Mulino sworn in as Panama's new president

AP ■ PANAMA CITY



José Raúl Mulino was sworn in Monday as Panama's next president, facing pressure to slow irregular migration through the Darien Gap that connects his country with Colombia. The 65-year-old former security minister has promised to shut down migration through the jungle-clad and largely lawless border. More than half a million people traversed the corridor last year and more than 190,000 people have crossed so far in 2024, with most of the migrants hailing from Venezuela, Ecuador, Colombia and China. "I won't allow Panama to be an open path for thousands of people who enter our country illegally, supported by an international organisation related to drug trafficking and human trafficking," Mulino said Monday, after he was sworn in. "I understand that there are deep-rooted reasons for migration, but each country has to resolve its problems." Last week on a visit to the Darien, Mulino announced he would seek an agreement with the United States government to aid in deporting migrants who crossed into Panama. US Homeland Security Secretary

Alejandro Mayorkas was among those who attended his inauguration. The US role would largely be covering the cost of deportation flights. Panama's Foreign Affairs Minister-designate Javier Martínez Acha said Sunday that the US would help cover the costs, but that the amounts were not yet set. "As the key issue on his agenda, Mulino has promised to end irregular immigration through the Darien Gap," said Michael Shifter, adjunct professor at Georgetown University. "The new president appears to be supremely committed to this idea." "However, it won't be easy to carry out this policy, groups and interests can be expected to come out against it," Shifter

said. The US government will have to shoulder the costs of deportation, he said. Panama's active efforts to stop and deport migrants would be a massive shift. Under the outgoing administration, Panama had sought to help migrants cross the country quickly and in an orderly fashion. Migrants emerge from the jungle, register with authorities and are swept across the country to the Costa Rican border. The presidents of Costa Rica and Colombia also attended the inauguration. Strengthening enforcement efforts in Panama could potentially reduce the number of migrants reaching the US border, at least for a time until new routes are established. But it

could also force migrants to riskier paths and be a boon for smugglers. Mulino won the election in May in a crowded field with more than 30 per cent of the vote. He replaced former President Ricardo Martinelli as candidate after the former leader was banned from running after being sentenced to 10 years in prison for money laundering. In addition to migration, Mulino will have to manage one of the world's key trade routes, the Panama Canal, which was forced to limit traffic this year by persistent drought. He will also have to find a way to plug a hole in Panama's budget caused by the scrapping of a major mining concession after popular protests. On Monday, Mulino criticised the outgoing administration of President Laurentino Cortizo for leaving him a limping economy and high levels of public debt. "I will have an administration mainly focused on resolving the problem of the great majority of Panamanians," Mulino said. "That doesn't mean getting rid of wealth, but rather combatting poverty." He promised to launch a programme aimed at youth employment and an effort to rebuild the country's roads and highways.

Dutch king swears in new govt

The Hague (AP): The Netherlands has a different prime minister for the first time in 14 years as Dutch King Willem-Alexander swore in the country's new government Tuesday, more than seven months after elections. The anti-immigration, anti-Islam party of firebrand Geert Wilders won the largest share of seats in elections last year but it took 223 days for the four parties in the coalition to form a government. Dick Schoof, former head of the Dutch intelligence agency and counterterrorism office, signed the official royal decree at Huis Ten Bosch Palace, saying he "declared and promised" to uphold his duties as the country's prime minister. The 67-year-old was formally installed alongside 15 other ministers who make up the country's right-leaning coalition.



S'pore prepared to recognise Palestine in principle at appropriate time

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Singapore is prepared in principle to recognise Palestine as a state and will make this move at an appropriate time, Foreign Minister Vivian Balakrishnan said in Parliament on Tuesday, emphasising that the country has advocated a negotiated two-state solution, consistent with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions to achieve lasting peace. "In particular, there needs to be an effective Palestinian government that accepts Israel's right to exist and categorically rejects terrorism," Dr Balakrishnan said. "Both sides have legitimate rights, and both peoples have a right to live in peace and dignity within secure borders." The Straits Times quoted the Singapore minister as saying. He was responding to questions from parliamentarians on Singapore's May 10 decision to vote for a United Nations resolution backing the admission of

Palestine as a member of the world body, which it said was made after "serious and careful consideration." Dr Balakrishnan urged both sides to seize the moment to take steps towards a long-lasting peace and put an end to the suffering that has "gone on for too long." "Ultimately, Israelis and Palestinians would need to exercise leadership and would have to work together to forge a better future for their people. As Singapore is a friend to both, Singapore will continue to offer our encouragement and our tangible support to both Palestinians and Israelis," he said. The minister also reiterated the principles guiding Singapore's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He pointed out that Singapore has consistently advocated a negotiated two-state solution, consistent with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions, as a way for Israelis and Palestinians to live side by side in peace and

security. "This is the only viable path for achieving a comprehensive, just, and durable solution to this conflict," the broadsheet had Dr Balakrishnan as saying in the House. Answering a question about the thresholds that need to be crossed for Singapore to recognise the state of Palestine, Dr Balakrishnan said it depends on whether there is an effective Palestinian government or leadership that represents all Palestinians. This authority should have effective control over the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and the mandate and authority to negotiate with the Israelis on behalf of the Palestinians, he said. "So, I would say that we are not going to lock ourselves into a specific time, or to whether or not other countries have made decisions in parallel on the same fundamental question," he added. Dr Balakrishnan said that Singapore has consistently supported the right of the Palestinian

people to a homeland. On April 18 this year, a UN Security Council resolution that recommended that Palestine be admitted to the United Nations was vetoed. On May 10, the General Assembly took up a resolution expressing support for Palestine's membership in the UN and recommending that the Security Council reconsider this matter favourably. Singapore had voted in favour of this resolution. The vote in the UN General Assembly was supported by 143 members and opposed by nine - including the United States and Israel - while 25 members abstained. "Singapore voted in favour of this resolution after very careful consideration, and this reflected our hope to encourage both Israel and Palestine to resume direct negotiations towards a two-state solution, at a time when in fact, the prospects for such negotiations were increasingly bleak," said Dr Balakrishnan.

'Tropical Cyclone Freddy that hit S Africa was longest ever'

GENEVA (AP): The UN weather agency said Tuesday that Tropical Cyclone Freddy, a deadly Indian Ocean storm that lashed eastern Africa last year, was confirmed to be the longest-lasting cyclone ever recorded at 36 days. Freddy topped the previous record held by Hurricane John, which struck Hawaii and lasted almost 30 days in the northern Pacific three decades ago, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said as it released a study which began as Freddy waned in March last year. It was also the second-longest in terms of distance traveled, at some 12,785 kilometers (7,945 miles) - while John was more than 13,000 kilometers, the agency said. In the wake of Freddy, more than 1,200 were reported dead or missing in Malawi while more than 180 people died in Mozambique, the WMO said.

Iranian presidential candidates accuse each other of having no plan ahead of runoff

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran's presidential candidates on Monday accused each other of having no solution for the country's problems ahead of Friday's runoff election aimed at choosing a successor for the late President Ebrahim Raisi, who died last month in a helicopter crash. During a more than two-hour debate on public TV, reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian attacked his competitor, Saeed Jalili, a hard-line former nuclear negotiator, for his lack of experience, saying: "Tell me, what single company have you ever managed to make you capable of running the country? Jalili, who is known as the 'Living Martyr' after losing a leg in the 1980s Iran-Iraq war and is famous among Western diplomats for his haranguing lectures and hard-line stances, defended himself highlighting his career and several positions

held, including that of top nuclear negotiator. Pezeshkian further questioned his opponent on what plans he would have for reaching a nuclear deal, with Jalili responding he would approach it "based on strength not weakness," without providing details. Jalili accused Pezeshkian of having no plans for managing the country, saying his presidency would drive the country to a "backward position," as it was under relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021). Rouhani struck a nuclear deal with world powers that capped Iran's uranium enrichment in return for lifting sanctions but later, in 2018, President Trump pulled the US out from the landmark deal abruptly restoring harsh sanctions on Iran. Jalili said that "with the support of people," Iran would achieve an economic growth of 8 per cent a year, a promise

Pezeshkian mocked, saying authorities should be allowed to "execute him if he failed" to deliver on it. Iran must implement "a dynamic foreign policy" if it wants to have a successful economy, Jalili said, adding that it should not be limited to those nations that it has a problem with - a reference to the US and the western world. Instead, he said, "Iran should look to the other 200 nations in the world where 'foreign relations should be improved.'" Pezeshkian said his foreign policy will be based on "engagement with the world" including engaging in "negotiations for lifting sanctions." Both sides promised to address the problems of the country's poor, workers, women, ethnic groups and religious minorities, and vowed to provide better and faster internet - a plea to a younger generation that showed apathy during Friday's vote.

UN adopts Chinese resolution with US support on closing gap in access to AI

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations General Assembly adopted a Chinese-sponsored resolution with US support urging wealthy developed nations to close the widening gap with poorer developing countries and ensure that they have equal opportunities to use and benefit from artificial intelligence. The resolution approved Monday follows the March 21 adoption of the first UN resolution on artificial intelligence spearheaded by the United States and co-sponsored by 123 countries including China. It gave global support to the international effort to ensure that AI is "safe, secure and trustworthy" and that all nations can take advantage of it. Adoption of the two non-binding resolutions shows that the United States and China, rivals in many areas, are both determined to be key

players in shaping the future of this powerful new technology - and have been cooperating on these first important international steps. The adoption of both resolutions by consensus by the 193-member General Assembly shows widespread global support for their leadership on the issue. China's UN Ambassador Fu Cong told reporters Monday that the two resolutions are complementary, with the US measure being "more general" and the just-adopted one focusing on "capacity building." He called the Chinese resolution, which had over 140 sponsors, "great and far-reaching," and said. "We're very appreciative of the positive role that the US has played in this whole process." Fu said AI technology is advancing extremely fast and the issue has been discussed at very senior levels, including by the US and Chinese leaders.

"We do look forward to intensifying our cooperation with the United States and for that matter with all countries in the world on this issue, which... will have far-reaching implications in all dimensions," he said. The Chinese ambassador, however, strongly criticized the US Treasury Department's proposed rule, announced on June 21, that would restrict and monitor US investments in China for artificial intelligence, computer chips and quantum computing. "We are firmly opposed to these sanctions," Fu said. China doesn't believe the rule will be "helpful to the healthy development of the AI technology per se, and will, by extension, divide the world in terms of the standards, and in terms of the rules governing AI." He called on the US to lift the sanctions. The Chinese resolution calls on the international community "to provide and pro-

vide a fair, open, inclusive and non-discriminatory business environment," from AI's design and development to its use. Fu said China doesn't think the US actions foster an inclusive business environment. Both the US and Chinese resolutions focus on the civilian applications of AI, but Fu told reporters the military dimension of artificial intelligence is also very important. "We do believe that it is necessary for the international community to take measures to reduce the dangers and the risks posed by the development of AI," he said. China is actively participating in negotiations in Geneva on controlling lethal autonomous weapons, Fu said, adding that some countries are considering proposing a General Assembly resolution this year on the military dimension of AI - "and we are in broad support of that initiative."

North Korea brags of new missile with 'super-large warhead'

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korea said Tuesday it had test-fired a new tactical ballistic missile capable of carrying "a super-large warhead," a claim quickly disputed by South Korean officials and experts who speculate the North likely fabricated a successful test to conceal a botched launch. It's the second time that South Korea has questioned North Korea's claim on the development of new weapons in recent days, as the rivals are locked in heightened animosities over the North's testing activities. The North's official Korean Central News Agency said that Monday's test involved the Hwasongpho-11 Da-4.5 missile, which can carry a 4.5-ton class warhead. It said the test was meant to verify the weapon's



flight stability and hit accuracy at the maximum range of 500 kilometers and the minimum range of 90 kilometers. The test apparently refers to the two ballistic missile launches that South Korea said North Korea performed Monday. Joint Chiefs of Staff spokesperson Lee Sung Joon said at a briefing later Tuesday that the second North

Korean missile was found to have fallen on an uninhabited area near Pyongyang, the North's capital. He said he could find few previous test-launches by North Korea that have aimed at ground target sites. "Regarding the North Korean assessment, we're weighing a possibility of deception," Lee

said. The South Korean military has said the second North Korean missile possibly travelled abnormally during the initial stage of its flight. It said if the missile exploded, its debris would likely have scattered on the ground. The KCNA dispatch didn't say from where it launched the new missile and where it landed. Unlike previous weapons tests, North Korea also didn't publicise any photos of Monday's test. The fact that it tested both the missile's maximum and minimum ranges suggested North Korea performed two launches. KCNA, citing North Korea's Missile Administration, reported that North Korea will test-fire the missile again later in July to verify the performances of its simulated warhead at the medium range of 250 kilometers.

Hungary PM in Kyiv for talks with prez

AP ■ BUDAPEST



Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was in Kyiv on Tuesday for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, his first visit to the neighbouring country since Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022 as Budapest has repeatedly broken ranks with the rest of the European Union and leaned toward Moscow. Orbán's visit was a rare gesture in a relationship that has long been marred by tensions. Known as Russian President Vladimir Putin's closest EU ally, Orbán has routinely blocked, delayed or watered down EU efforts to extend assistance to Ukraine and to sanction Moscow over its war, frustrating both Zelenskyy and other EU leaders. Meanwhile, on the war's front line, Kyiv's forces are scrambling to hold at bay a Russian push in eastern Ukraine. Delays in the provision of crucial Western military aid left the Ukrainian army at the mercy of the Kremlin's bigger and better-

equipped forces. Orbán's press chief, Bertalan Havasi, who confirmed the visit early Tuesday to Hungarian news agency MTI, said the meeting will be an opportunity for building peace as Ukraine fights off Russia's invasion. A photo issued by Orbán's press office showed the two men by themselves, facing each other across a small round table with their national flags and an EU flag against a wall. Signaling frosty relations, Kyiv is yet to confirm Orbán's arrival, a usual protocol with VIP visits. This comes a day after Hungary took over the six-month rotating presidency of the European Union, a position that has lit-

tle real power but can be used to set the tone of the bloc's agenda. Hungarian officials have indicated that they will act as "honest brokers" in the role despite worries from some EU lawmakers that Hungary's democratic track record makes it unfit to lead the bloc. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov played down the importance of the visit, saying Hungary "must fulfill (the) functions" of its EU presidency and adding that Moscow had no particular expectations for its outcome. Orbán has previously accused Kyiv of mistreating an ethnic Hungarian minority in Ukraine's western region of Zakarpattia, a community he has used to justify his refusal to provide weapons to Ukraine or allow their transfer across the two countries' shared border. The self-described "illiberal" leader has long been accused by his European partners of dismantling democratic institutions at home and acting as an obstinate spoiler of key EU policy priorities. The bloc has frozen more than \$20 billion in funding to Budapest over alleged rule-of-law and corruption violations, and Orbán has conducted numerous anti-EU campaigns depicting it as an overcentralised, repressive organisation. Orbán's visit also comes as he seeks to recruit members into a new nationalist alliance that he hopes will soon become the largest right-wing group in the European Parliament. On Sunday, Orbán met in Vienna with the leaders of Austria's far-right Freedom Party and the main Czech opposition party, announcing the formation of the new group, "Patriots for Europe". The trio would need to attract lawmakers from at least four more EU countries to successfully form a group in Europe's new parliament, which held elections in June. Right-wing nationalist parties across Europe strengthened their position in the elections, but ideological differences over the war in Ukraine and cooperation with Russia have often prevented deeper alliances among some of the parties.

Hurricane Beryl rips through open waters



AP ■ SAN JUAN

Hurricane Beryl roared through open waters on Tuesday as a monstrous Category 5 storm on a path that would take it near Jamaica and the Cayman Islands after earlier making landfall in the southeast Caribbean, killing at least two people. A hurricane warning was in effect for Jamaica and a hurricane watch for Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac. Beryl was forecast to start losing intensity on Tuesday but still to be near major hurricane strength when it passes near Jamaica on Wednesday, the Cayman Islands on Thursday and Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Friday, according to the National Hurricane Center. The center warned that Beryl was expected to bring life-threatening winds and storm surge to Jamaica, where officials warned residents in flood-prone areas to prepare for evacuation. "I am encouraging all Jamaicans to take the hurricane as a serious threat," Prime Minister Andrew Holness said in a public address late Monday. "It is, however, not a time to panic." Beryl is the earliest Category 5 storm ever to form in the Atlantic, fueled by record warm waters. Early Tuesday, the storm was located about 300

miles (485 km) southeast of Isla Beata in the Dominican Republic. It had top winds of 165 mph (270 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 22 mph (35 kph). "Beryl remains an impressive Category 5 hurricane," the National Hurricane Center said. A tropical storm warning was in place for the entire southern coast of Hispaniola, an island shared by Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As the storm barreled through the Caribbean Sea, rescue crews in the southeast Caribbean fanned out across the region to determine the extent of the damage that Hurricane Beryl inflicted after landing on Carriacou, an island in Grenada, as a Category 4 storm. One person was reported killed in Grenada and another in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, officials said. The fatality in Grenada occurred after a tree fell on a house, Kerryne James, minister of climate resilience, environment and renewable energy, told The Associated Press. She said the nearby islands of Carriacou and Petit Martinique sustained the greatest damage, with water, food and baby formula a priority. "There is no communication whatsoever," she said. "The prime minister is doing his best to get people over there to re-

Pakistan CJ comes to EC reserved seats

Islamabad (PTI)

Amidst a legal tussle on the reserved seats in Pakistan's legislatures, Chief Justice Qazi Faez Isa has ruled that the election commission was not a subordinate institution to the Supreme Court or the government but an independent authority conferred with a constitutional role to conduct elections. He was heading a full court of the Supreme Court (SC) hearing on Monday on a set of appeals by the Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) against the denial of reserved seats to women and non-Muslim candidates, the Dawn newspaper reported on Tuesday. The top judge said the Supreme Court can only exercise its jurisdiction if it is convinced that the commission has gone beyond its constitutional role, pointing out that ideally, all institutions should function within their own pre-scribed domain. The Supreme Court ordered the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) to do a calculation by applying the formula of allotting reserved seats among political parties based on the election results of 2018 by excluding, as well as including, independents to understand the difference, the report said. The bench intends to understand the actual calculations of allocation of reserved seats applied to the results of the February 8 elections, the report said. Last month, the ECP submitted to the Supreme Court that jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's party-backed Sunni Ittehad Council (SIC) is not eligible for reserved seats as the party does not allow non-Muslims to be a part of it. The ECP filed a reply before the Supreme Court to the SIC plea against the rejection of its claim on reserved seats for women and minorities in the national and provincial assemblies after the general election held on February 8. The ECP said that reserved seats cannot be allocated to the SIC, which is backed by 71-year-old Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), as the party failed to submit the list of nominees for the reserved seats by the deadline of December 24.

UN group terms Imran Khan detention politically motivated, calls for release

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A UN group has demanded the immediate release of Pakistani jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, saying at least two cases slapped on him were "politically motivated" and aimed to exclude him from the country's political scene. The United Nations Working Group on Arbitrary Detention adopted its opinion on the 71-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party founder's detention in its 99th session from March 18-27 in Geneva. The UN body said that Khan's detention and prosecution in the first Toshakhana corruption case and cipher cases were "politically motivated" to exclude him from competing in the political arena. The UN group also said that it was "without legal basis", the Dawn newspaper reported. The case alleges that Khan had "deliberately concealed" details of the gifts he retained from the Toshakhana — a repository where presents handed to government officials from foreign officials are kept — during his time as the prime minister and proceeds from their reported sales. It is separate from the second Toshakhana corruption case against Khan and his spouse Bibi which alleged that they retained a jewellery set received from the Saudi crown prince against an undervalued assessment. Listing many legal inconsistencies and irregularities in the various court proceedings of the PTI chief, the body said it was rendering its opinion on whether Khan's detention was arbitrary. On August 5, 2023, a trial court in Islamabad convicted the PTI founder in the first case filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and jailed him for three years. He was arrested by Punjab police later that same day from his Zaman Park residence in Lahore. The ECP had later disqualified Khan for five years following his conviction. However, the Islamabad High Court later suspended his three-year sentence. The UN body based its opinion on its source's detailed and

unrebutted submissions regarding the ultra vires nature of the prosecution in the first Toshakhana case, as well as the context of the political repression of Khan and his party in which that prosecution occurred. "The working group concludes that his detention had no legal basis and appears to have been intended to disqualify him from running for political office. Thus, from the outset, that prosecution was not grounded in law and was reportedly instrumentalised for a political purpose," it said. It further added that how Khan was convicted in the first Toshakhana case (namely, a summary judgment delivered in absentia) and his subsequent arrest by law enforcement personnel who broke into his residence and assaulted him and his staff were concerning and compounded the illegality. The working group further said that Khan's prosecution in the cipher case "lacks a grounding in law, as his actions do not appear to have violated the Official Secrets Act, as was apparently corroborated by the intelligence services, according to the source's unrebutted submissions". The cipher case pertains to a diplomatic document that the Federal Investigation Agency's charge sheet alleges was never returned by then-PM Khan, who long held that the document contained a threat from the US to topple his government. Regarding his sentences in the second Toshakhana case and the Iddat case, the UN group noted: "The working group cannot but observe the coincidence in the timing of the four prosecutions, which effectively prevented Mr Khan from contesting the general election originally scheduled for November 2023." The working group noted that in the absence of any rebuttal from the government, "it would appear that the prosecutions brought against Mr Khan are related to his leadership of the PTI and indicate a determination to silence him and his supporters and exclude their political participation."

Pakistani court grants pre-arrest bail to Imran Khan's wife Bushra Bibi

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani anti-corruption court on Tuesday granted pre-arrest bail to jailed ex-prime minister Imran Khan's wife and former first lady Bushra Bibi in a case of alleged corruption. Khan and Bibi, along with other accused, face charges of causing a loss of about Rs 50 billion to the national exchequer in the Al-Qadir Trust corruption case, which involves allegedly providing benefits to a property tycoon in return for getting land for a university. Judge Muhammad Ali Warraich presided over the hearing at Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi, where both Khan and Bushra Bibi have been incarcerated in another case, and approved her pre-arrest bail plea. However, despite the grant of bail, Bushra, 49, will



remain behind bars due to a conviction in the illegal marriage case. Khan, 71, was already granted pre-arrest bail in the case by the Islamabad High Court on May 14 but the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) challenged it before the Supreme Court on June 29. The NAB filed the Al-Qadir Trust case in December 2023 against Khan, his wife, a close family friend Farah Gogi and others in the accountability court. Khan and Bibi were indicted in this case by a Rawalpindi accountability court in February.

Debt restructuring deal gives breathing space for Lanka's economic revival: President

Colombo (PTI)

President Ranil Wickremesinghe on Tuesday said "substantial progress" has been achieved in Sri Lanka's debt restructuring, which he said provided the much-needed breathing space for the cash-strapped country to transform its bankrupt economy into a resilient and stable one. Briefing Parliament on the country's resulting benefits of the correct course of action, President Wickremesinghe also countered the Opposition's criticism of the debt restructuring agreement with major bilateral creditors and promised to table all agreements and documents related to it to a Parliamentary panel. In April 2022, the island nation declared its first-ever sovereign default since gaining

Independence from Britain in 1948. The unprecedented financial crisis led President Ranil Wickremesinghe's predecessor Gotabaya Rajapaksa to quit office in 2022 amid civil unrest. Earlier last week, President Wickremesinghe announced that debt restructuring agreements were finalised with bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris on June 26 and described it as a "significant milestone" for bolstering international trust in the debt-ridden economy. On Tuesday, while making a special statement in Parliament, Wickremesinghe said: "Sri Lanka's external debt now totals USD 37 billion, which includes USD 10.6 billion in bilateral credit and USD 11.7 billion in multilateral credit.

China, Philippines hold talks after chaotic confrontation in SCS

AP ■ MANILA

China and the Philippines held a crucial meeting Tuesday to try to ease escalating tensions following their worst confrontation in the disputed South China Sea that sparked fears of a wider conflict that could involve Manila's ally the United States. There was no mention of any major agreement to try to prevent a repeat of the chaotic June 17 clash at Second Thomas Shoal that caused injuries to Philippine navy personnel and damaged two military boats. The shoal off the northwestern Philippines has emerged as the most dangerous flashpoint in the disputed waters, which China claims virtually in its entirety, Chinese naval and civilian vessels have surrounded the

Philippine marines aboard a grounded ship, tried to prevent their resupply and demanded the Philippines pull out. The Chinese and Philippine delegations "affirmed their commitment to de-escalate tensions without prejudice to their respective positions," the Department of Foreign Affairs in Manila said in a statement late Tuesday. "There was substantial progress on developing measures to manage the situation at sea, but significant differences remain." Philippine Foreign Undersecretary Theresa Lazaro told her Chinese counterpart, Vice Foreign Minister Chen Xiaodong, "that the Philippines will be relentless in protecting its interests and upholding its sovereignty, sovereign rights, and jurisdiction" in the South China Sea, according to the Philippine

side. An agreement was signed to improve communications during emergencies at sea and both sides agreed to continue talks on enhancing ties between their coast guards but no details were provided. There was also another confidence-building plan to convene an academic forum among scientists and academics to improve marine scientific cooperation. Ahead of the meeting, the Philippines planned to formally ask China's delegation to return at least seven rifles that Chinese coast guard personnel seized during the June 17 face-off at the shoal and pay for damage, a Philippine official told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity for lack of authority to discuss the sensitive matter publicly.

Pakistan holds 'good' meeting with Af Taliban

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistani diplomats held a "good" meeting with the representatives of Afghanistan's Taliban-led interim government in Qatar this week during which they discussed bilateral and regional issues, in what was seen as an effort to ease tension and mend strained ties between the two neighbours. The Afghan Taliban delegation, which was in Qatar's capital of Doha to attend a UN-sponsored meeting on Afghanistan this week, was hosted over a dinner by the Pakistani mission in Qatar on the sidelines of the conference, the Dawn newspaper reported Tuesday. Zabihullah Mujahid, chief Taliban government spokesman who headed the delegation to Doha, described his meeting with Pakistani diplomats as "good" and expressed the hope for developing "positive relations" with Pakistan, the paper said. "We had a good meeting with the special representative of Pakistan, Asif Durrani, and the ambassador and consuls of the country in Qatar," Mujahid wrote on X on Tuesday. "I am

grateful for their hospitality and hope for good and positive relations for both countries." On his part, Durrani said both sides discussed the "Doha-III, bilateral and regional issues" during the meeting, according to the newspaper. Pakistan's envoy to Qatar, Muhammad Aejaz, who hosted the meeting at his residence, said "Both [sides] remain neighbours and brothers and have a lot in common, including a strong desire for regional peace and security." During his speech at the opening session of the UN-sponsored meeting on Afghanistan on June 30, Durrani raised the issue of militancy and urged the Afghan interim government to take action against the Tehreek-e-Taliban and other terror groups. Pakistan has repeatedly called on the Afghan interim government to prevent its soil from being used against it by the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and other terrorist groups - a claim rejected by Kabul. Pakistani and Taliban officials also had another interaction in Doha at a quadrilateral meeting along with Uzbekistan and Qatar officials.

"On the sidelines of Doha-III, a quadrilateral meeting between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Qatar reviewed the Trans-Afghan Railway project to connect Uzbekistan and Pakistan via Afghanistan. The project will effectively connect South & Central Asia," Durrani wrote on X. Mujahid, who attended the quadrilateral meeting said, "All sides called for early start and completion of the Trans-Afghan Railway project." During the meeting, Durrani called for enhanced international engagement with the Afghan interim government and unfreezing Afghanistan's assets. Pakistan also highlighted the issue of Afghan refugees and called for creating a conducive environment in Afghanistan for their repatriation. Relations between the two countries have lately become strained, largely because of the TTP but also due to frequent border skirmishes. On Saturday, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif slammed

the Afghan Taliban-led government in Kabul for not taking action against militants along the Pakistan-Afghanistan border, despite repeated requests made by Islamabad. "Pakistan hoped for cooperation from the Afghan government, how-

ever, the latter was not ready to take action against the militants," Asif said in an interview with BBC Urdu in which he also said that Pakistan even offered to grant Rs10 billion to shift the militants towards the western border.

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3.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy Feeding of Rice husk into Boiler (Manpower).	01 Complete Job
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Sensex, Nifty settle flat after hitting fresh lifetime high

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty hit fresh lifetime high levels before closing flat due to profit-taking in select banking and telecom shares amid concerns over rich valuations on Tuesday. The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 34.74 points or 0.04 per cent to settle at 79,441.45 in a volatile trade. During the day, it jumped 379.68 points or 0.47 per cent to hit a record peak of 79,855.87. The Nifty declined by 18.10 points or 0.07 per cent to 24,123.85. Intra-day, it climbed 94.4 points or 0.39 per cent to hit a lifetime high of 24,236.35.



Among the Sensex pack, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Bharti Airtel, IndusInd Bank, Tata Motors, ICICI Bank, Bajaj Finance, State Bank of India and Titan were the biggest laggards. Larsen & Toubro, Infosys, HDFC Bank, Tata

Consultancy Services, HCL Technologies and Tata Steel were the biggest gainers. On Monday, the BSE benchmark settled higher by 443.46 points or 0.56 per cent at an all-time peak of 79,476.19. The Nifty climbed 131.35 points or 0.55 per cent to settle at a fresh lifetime high of 24,141.95. In Asian markets, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the positive territory on Tuesday, while Seoul ended lower. European markets were trading down. US markets ended in the green on Monday. India's gross GST collection increased 8 per cent to Rs 1.74 lakh crore in June, sources said on Monday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.66 per cent to USD 87.17 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 426.03 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

RBI proposes rationalising regulations on export, import transactions

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The RBI on Tuesday proposed rationalising regulations that cover export and import transactions with an aim to promote ease of doing business and empower banks to provide more efficient service to their foreign exchange customers. The central bank has issued 'Regulation of Foreign Trade under Foreign Exchange Management Act (FEMA), 1999 - Draft Regulations and Directions' in this regard. As per the draft, every exporter should furnish to the specified authority a declaration specifying the full export value of the goods or services. "The amount representing



the full export value of goods and services shall be realised and repatriated to India within nine months from the date of shipment for goods and date of invoice for services," it said. The draft also proposes that an exporter who has not realised the full value of

satisfaction of the authorised dealer. According to the draft, no advance remittance for the import of gold and silver should be permitted unless specifically approved by the Reserve Bank of India. The RBI said the proposed regulations are intended to promote ease of doing business, especially for small exporters and importers. They are also intended to empower Authorised Dealer banks to provide quicker and more efficient service to their foreign exchange customers, the central bank said. The RBI has sought comments on the draft regulations under FEMA and directions to authorised dealer banks by September 1.

International toy fair to begin on July 6; over 100 foreign buyers to participate

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
More than 300 domestic companies and over 100 foreign buyers from the US, Germany and other countries are expected to participate in the four-day international toy fair beginning on July 6 in the national capital, a statement said on Tuesday. More than 250 Indian brands will display their products during the fair, which is being organised at Pragati Maidan here, Toy Association of India senior vice-president Naresh Kumar Gautam said in the statement. Gautam said that the 15th Toy Biz International B2B Expo 2024 is the largest fair in South Asia. "It is a big platform for Indian toy makers to showcase their products and capabilities to the global audience. It helps us attract new customers and partners, expand market reach for our toys and boost exports," he said.

In addition, he said, Toy Biz also provides a platform for industry players to network and connect with each other, which can help foster collaborations, partnerships and joint ventures. Gautam, who is also the CEO of Noida-based Little Genius Toys Pvt Ltd, also suggested the government provide fiscal support to manufacturers in organising these fairs. "At least Rs 1 lakh should be given to all the stalls in these fairs. At present, we are providing hotel accommodation to foreign buyers and ticket cost up to Rs 1 lakh," he added. He said that the expo can also help raise awareness about the importance of the Indian toy industry, both domestically and internationally. Wooden toy maker Gautam said that different categories of toys will be showcased to buyers such as electronics, soft toys, playground equipment and board games. The country's toy exports declined



marginally to USD 152.34 million in 2023-24 from USD 153.89 million in the previous financial year, according to a report by economic think tank GTRI. India has taken several steps since 2020 to curb the inflow of substandard toy imports, especially from China, and strengthen the domestic toy industry. The report has proposed a comprehensive strategy aimed at developing India's toy industry and boosting exports. It has suggested steps such as developing a robust domestic ecosystem, encouraging global toy brands to manufacture in India, learning from China, and localise production of key inputs. The report recommended setting up specialized toy

manufacturing hubs to reduce costs and increase efficiency; modernising traditional Indian toys while preserving their cultural value to create unique products. It has also asked for making separate strategies for each group of toys such as plush toys like stuffed animals (world trade is about USD 7 billion); educational toys (world trade is about USD 6 billion); construction toys like LEGO (USD 10 billion); action figures and dolls (USD 10 billion); electronics (USD 15 billion); board games and puzzles (USD 9 billion); and outdoor and sports toys (USD 5 billion). In 2022, the global market imported toys valued at about USD 60.3 billion. Dominating this market, China exported toys worth USD 48.3 billion, securing an 80 per cent share of the global exports. Other significant contributors to the global toy export market include the Czech Republic with exports of USD 3.2 billion, the European Union with USD

2.7 billion, Vietnam with USD 1.7 billion, and Hong Kong with USD 1.1 billion. In contrast, India's share in the global toy export market is minimal, totalling USD 167 million, which represents only 0.3 per cent of the global exports, ranking it 27th, the report said. On the import side, India ranks even lower, at 61st, with toy imports amounting to USD 60 million. The US is the largest importer of toys with a total procurement of USD 22.2 billion. It is followed by the European Union (USD 9 billion), Japan (USD 2.8 billion), and Canada (USD 1.6 billion). India raised import duties on toys beginning in February 2020. The basic customs duty was increased from 20 per cent to 60 per cent and then to 70 per cent in July 2021. Implemented from January 2021, the QCO mandates that all toys sold in India, whether domestically produced or imported, must comply with specific Indian Standards for safety.

Divine Power Energy makes stellar debut; shares jump over 284 per cent

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of Divine Power Energy Ltd, a manufacturer of insulated wires and strips, on Tuesday made a remarkable debut, closing with a premium of more than 284 per cent against the issue price of Rs 40. The stock was listed at Rs 155, reflecting gains of 287.50 per cent from the issue price on the NSE SME platform Emerge. Later, shares of the company settled at Rs 150 apiece, down by 3.23 per cent. At the close of the trading session, the company's market valuation stood at Rs 322.01 crore. In volume terms, 31.44 lakh shares of the company exchanged hands on the bourse. Last week, Divine Power Energy's initial public offering (IPO) was subscribed nearly 394 times on the final day, driven by an overwhelming response from retail investors. The Rs 22.76 crore IPO is entirely a fresh issue of 56.90 lakh equity shares. The price band was Rs 36-40 per share. The company proposes to utilise Rs 18 crore of the net IPO proceeds to meet its working capital requirements and plans to use the remaining capital for general corporate purposes.



DPEL manufactures copper and aluminium wires/strips insulated with paper, crepe paper, and fiberglass and supplies them to discoms and transformer manufacturers. Its clientele include TATA Power, BSES, Uttar Pradesh Power Corporation Ltd and Uttarakhand Power Corporation Ltd. Incorporated in 2001, DPEL is promoted by Rajesh Giri and Vikas Talwar. The company posted a revenue of Rs 222.08 crore and a profit after tax of Rs 6.4 crore in FY2023-24.

India in talks with Africa, Latin America for critical mineral block: Govt official

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
India is in talks with Africa as well as Latin America to get critical mineral blocks on a government-to-government basis, Veena Kumari Dermal, joint secretary of the Ministry of Mines, said on Tuesday. Critical minerals such as lithium are essential components in many of today's rapidly growing clean energy technologies, including wind turbines, electricity networks, and electric vehicles. Demand for these minerals is growing quickly with clean energy transitions gathering pace. "We are having lots of discussions with many other resource-rich countries both in Africa as well as in Latin America for getting... A block on a G2G basis or on a priority basis," Dermal said at India Energy Storage Week (IESW) 2024 organised by India Energy Storage Alliance (IESA). The mines ministry, she said, is giving more and more importance to the exploration of critical minerals in India. At the domestic front, the



government has successfully auctioned one lithium block in Chhattisgarh, the joint secretary added. She explained hopes that the Chhattisgarh government will take steps to start the exploration and production from the lithium block at the earliest. Maiki South Mining Pvt Ltd had last month bagged the country's first lithium block in Chhattisgarh that was put up for sale. Meanwhile, the government cancelled the auction of 14 critical minerals that were on offer in the second round of

Sebi mandates email as default mode for dispatching CAS by depositories, Mutual Fund-RTA

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Markets regulator Sebi on Tuesday mandated email as a default mode of dispatch of 'Consolidated Account Statement', which provides an account of securities traded by an investor, by depositories and Mutual Fund-Registrar and Transfer Agents (MF-RTAs). The new framework will come into force from April 1, the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in a circular. A Consolidated Account Statement (CAS) is a single or combined account statement which shows the details of financial transactions made by an investor during a month across all mutual funds and also other securities held in dematerialised (demat) mode. The CAS is dispatched to the investors by the depositories (NSDL or CDSL), providing

the details of financial transactions in both mutual fund folios and depository accounts if PANs are common across the RTAs and the depositories. In respect of mutual fund folios, where there is no common PAN between the RTAs and the depositories, the CAS is sent by mutual funds containing only the mutual fund transactions. "Considering the increasing reach of digital technology, electronic mode now being the preferred mode of communication and as a green initiative measure and to streamline the regulatory guidelines on the mode of dispatch of account statements, it has been decided to revisit the regulatory provisions and provide for email as the default mode of dispatch for CAS by depositories, MF-RTAs and holding statement by DPs," Sebi said.

Electronics industry body ICEA calls for lower input tariffs in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Ahead of the Union Budget, India Cellular & Electronics Association (ICEA) has recommended reduction in input tariffs for building a strong components ecosystem. ICEA based its recommendations on a "tariff study" it conducted across seven competing economies, including India. "...High tariffs on inputs limit the very engine of growth that would lead to higher production. High tariffs on inputs reduce exports because they become uncompetitive, leading to lower production of the final product, i.e., mobile phones. Addressing this requires a reduction in tariffs on inputs. "We recognise that developing the domestic supply chain is extremely critical but the right way is not by protecting with high tariff but drastically reducing disabilities by creating

competitiveness and infuse incentive schemes wherever there are gaps," the report, which was released on Tuesday, said. To attract global value chains (GVCs) and increase the scale of production, ICEA said all tariff lines that increase costs significantly, including components of complex subassemblies, should be brought down to zero. It also suggested removal of 2.5 per cent tariff on sub-assembly parts and inputs. "These tariffs don't serve any purpose. They fail to build a domestic industry while increasing costs, complexity and compliance for legitimate manufacturers," it said. The industry body further said the e-government should provide appropriate policy and financial support for building large-scale components and sub-assembly ecosystem, with a longer gestation and incentive period.

Rupee falls 6 paise to close at 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee depreciated 6 paise to settle at 83.50 (provisional) against the US dollar on Tuesday, weighed down by a strong greenback in the overseas market and elevated global crude oil prices. Besides, a muted trend in domestic equities and foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments, forex traders said. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.51 and hit the intraday high of 83.47 and a low of 83.56 against the American currency during the session. It finally settled at 83.50 (provisional) against the dollar, 6 paise lower than its previous close. On Monday, the rupee depreciated 10 paise to settle at 83.44 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to



trade with a slight negative bias as the strength in the US Dollar and surge in crude oil prices may keep the rupee under downside pressure," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Choudhary further said the overall positive trend in the domestic markets and expectations of fresh foreign inflows may support the rupee at lower levels. Traders may take cues from Fed Chair Jerome Powell's speech

Groww Asset Management, trustee settle case with Sebi

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Groww Asset Management Ltd (formerly known as Indiabulls Asset Management Company Ltd) and its trustee have settled with markets watchdog Sebi a case pertaining to alleged violation of regulatory norms after paying Rs 9 lakh. This came after the applicants - Groww Asset Management Company and Groww Trustee Ltd (earlier known as Indiabulls Trustee Company Ltd) - proposed to settle the alleged violation by "neither admitting nor denying the findings of fact." "It is hereby ordered that any proceedings that maybe initiated for the violations...Are settled in respect of the applicants," the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) said in its settlement order passed on June 28. The applicants have submitted that on account of change in control of Indiabulls Asset Management Company and Indiabulls Trustee due to the acquisition of these entities by



Nextbillion Technology Pvt Ltd, the entities are now known as Groww Asset Management and Groww Trustee with effect from May 3, 2023. The applicants, in the settlement application, stated that during April 2020 to March 2022, certain scheme-related expenses were being paid by the AMC and were not paid from the schemes. This resulted in the AMC bearing the expenses towards running their schemes thereby violating Sebi's rule. The Sebi's rule mandates that all scheme-related expenses, including commission paid to distributors, need to necessarily be paid from the scheme only within the regulatory limits and not from the books of the AMC, its associate, sponsor, trustee or any other entity through any route.

Epic penalties drama for Ronaldo ends with Portugal beating Slovenia

AP ■ FRANKFURT (GERMANY)

No one does high drama in international soccer to such an operatic extent as Cristiano Ronaldo. Portugal is heading to a blockbuster quarterfinal with France at the European Championship after its star captain generated compelling viewing on center stage of the victory over Slovenia on Monday. Winning a penalty shootout 3-0 after a 0-0 game against the 57th-ranked team in world soccer might not sound much. But there were tears, lots of them, from Ronaldo; an apology in prayer-form to his fans, who responded with adulation; extravagant arm gestures of anger, frustration and exasperation; chances wasted and denied to make more tournament history; a renewed duel with an old rival goalkeeper; and ultimately redemption and victory. Ronaldo's mother was in the stadium and TV pictures showed her crying, too, after he missed his penalty. "Sometimes it's hard and difficult to score penalties," Ronaldo told Portuguese broadcaster RTP after the match, getting emotional again. "I've scored more than 200 penalties in my career. Sometimes it's a mess." Still, the last act of Monday's show gave Portugal what it needed. "We showed the enthusiasm that we still have to play, to have fun, to give joy to the fans and that's it, this is our life," he said after it was all over,

close to midnight in Frankfurt. The 39-year-old Ronaldo went into the game without a goal at Euro 2024. The moment when he surely had to become the oldest player ever to score at a Euros finals tournament came in the first period of extra time, the 105th minute, after missing five or six of the kind of chances he has thrived on now for 20 years at this level. Portugal had been awarded a penalty kick and Ronaldo stepped up to take what could have been the decisive goal. Instead, Slovenia goalkeeper Jan Oblak, a long-time adversary from their time playing Spanish league soccer in Madrid, dived left to push aside the well-struck shot against a post and away to safety. Tears welled in Ronaldo's eyes and soon flowed during the break before the second period of extra time began. Teammates consoled him, kissed his forehead and urged him to keep going. Extra time also finished 0-0 and when the penalty shootout started, Slovenia's first kick was saved by Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa. Up stepped Ronaldo, facing a massed stand of about 10,000 Portugal fans. He placed it perfectly low beyond Oblak diving to his right. Ronaldo looked apologetically to the fans and put his hands together as if in prayer. The fans responded with a howling and forgiving shout of "Siuuuu" - their soccer icon's trademark goal scream.



"I was certain that he had to be the first penalty taker and show us the way to victory," Portugal coach Roberto Martinez said. "Life gives you difficult moments and the way he reacted makes us very proud." Costa answered the rest of those fans' prayers with as good a penalty shootout as any goalkeeper could have. He saved all three of Slovenia's kicks

from Josip Ilicic, Jure Balkovec and Benjamin Verbic. Then he was in tears, too. Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva also scored for Portugal to seal the shootout 3-0 with two kicks to spare. "I was sad and now I'm overjoyed. This is what football gives you," Ronaldo said in translated comments in a post-game

interview. "You cannot explain it." Portugal will face France in the quarterfinals on Friday in Hamburg, a rematch of the 2016 final that Portugal won in Paris after Ronaldo went off injured early. "We all know that Cris is the hardest worker. I understand how frustrated he is," Costa said. "For me, it's an honor to play on the same team."

The personal duel between Ronaldo and Oblak had been memorable merely in regulation time. It was an intensely frustrating first 90 minutes for Ronaldo with three free kicks, two mistimed jumps for headers and a golden chance to score with his first clear shot in open play. That was in the 89th, when he ran clear on goal with the ball passed

perfectly into his stride. The left-foot shot was low and powerful but Oblak's block was better. The best of Ronaldo's free kicks was a powerful line drive right at Oblak in the 55th that the tall goalkeeper squatted to push away with strong hands. The intense drama for the Portugal superstar almost overwhelmed the troubled evening for Slovenia's emerging star. Benjamin Sesko had chances to win the game, in the 62nd and 115th minutes, going one-on-one with Costa after racing past 41-year-old defender Pepe. The first was a weak shot that screwed wide, and the second was powerful and accurate but saved by the goalkeeper's outstretched boot. So it went penalties. Just as it had in the Euro 2012 semifinals, when Spain beat Portugal before Ronaldo - as the fifth scheduled taker - even had the chance to step up. Just as it had when Ronaldo's Real Madrid and Oblak's Atletico Madrid met in the 2016 Champions League final. Back then, Ronaldo placed the fifth and decisive spot-kick past Oblak to win the title. Portugal is still competing to win back the European title it also won in 2016, at the expense of an admirable Slovenia squad that was effectively unbeaten after drawing all four of its games at Euro 2024. "His emotions show respect for Slovenia," coach Matjaz Kek said of Ronaldo, "and that is what I am content with."

Mbappé and France into Euro 2024 quarterfinals after Kolo Muani's late goal beats Belgium 1-0

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)

Another frustrating match for Kylian Mbappé. Another underwhelming performance by France at the European Championship. Didier Deschamps isn't concerned - his team is into the quarterfinals. "It's beautiful," the France coach said after Les Bleus relied on the ninth own-goal scored at Euro 2024 to squeeze past Belgium 1-0 in the round of 16 on Monday. A heavyweight match between neighbors and teams ranked No. 2 (France) and No. 3 (Belgium) failed to live up to its billing, and the nature of the only goal proved to be fitting. Randal Kolo Muani, on as a second-half substitute, turned in the area and sent in a shot in the 85th minute that deflected off Belgium defender Jan Vertonghen and looped over stranded goalkeeper Koen Casteels. "I was lucky enough to get my shot on target," he said of his decisive intervention. "It was blocked but it went in. We're very, very happy and very, very proud." UEFA thought differently about the destination of Kolo Muani's shot and put it down as an own-goal, the latest in a tournament full of them. It's the second own-goal earned by France while there has also been a penalty by Mbappé. It means a France player has yet to score from open play. "Even if today that goal was enough to get us to the quarterfinals, we have the capability to score more," Deschamps said. France will play Portugal or Slovenia in the last eight on Friday. Mbappé, again wearing a mask to protect his broken nose sustained against Austria in France's opening match, had five of France's 20 shots but none were on target. He played mostly on the left wing and was well-marshalled by a Belgian defensive set-up that included Kevin De Bruyne - the team's most creative player - deployed



as a deep-lying midfielder. De Bruyne had more clearing headers than incisive passes before being pushed further forward for the final half-hour of the game. Back in his favored position, he created Belgium's best chance when he played through Yannick Carrasco, who took too long over a shot that was blocked by France left back Theo Hernandez. The match-winner, instead, was Kolo Muani, whose last big moment at a major tournament came when he bore down on goal in the last seconds of extra time in the 2022 World Cup final against Argentina. His shot was saved by Emi Martinez, when a goal would surely have won the title for France. France's overall display will do little to stop the growing dissent among many of its fans who feel more can come from a talented bunch of players headlined by Mbappé, playing on the day he officially became a Real Madrid player.

Deschamps, however, was happy with his pragmatic tactics, saying: "We were intelligent, playing the waiting game and not falling into their trap." Mbappé will be playing in his first ever quarterfinal at the European Championship, with France having lost on a penalty shootout to Switzerland in the last 16 at the last tournament in 2021. As for the Belgians, they head home after a fairly miserable Euro 2024, during which the players were jeered loudly by their own fans following a 0-0 draw with Ukraine at the end of the group stage. Against France, they were intent on not leaving the game too open for the quick French attackers and the deployment of De Bruyne in a deeper role helped in that regard, even if it limited the team's attacking options. The tactic would have been a masterstroke had Belgium won. Unfortunately for coach Domenico Tedesco, it didn't.

Jamshedpur, Shillong to be new venues for Durand Cup beginning in Kolkata on July 27

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Domestic season opener Durand Cup football tournament will be held from July 27 to August 31 across four venues with Indian Super League, I-League and other invitational teams competing in it. The 133rd edition of the Asia's oldest tournament will have 43 matches to be played

in a round-robin league-cum-knockout format, with the opening match and the final scheduled at the iconic Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan (VYBK) in Kolkata. The 24 participating teams will be divided into six groups. Eight teams -- group toppers and two best second-placed sides -- will qualify for the knockout stage.

Like last year, international teams are expected to participate this year too, the organisers said on Tuesday. Continuing with its commitment to spread the tournament further into the East and North-East, two new cities -- Jamshedpur and Shillong -- have been added as host venues this year. Matches will be held in Kokrajhar in Assam for the

second consecutive year, besides Kolkata, which has been a host for the last five years. Kolkata will host three groups while Kokrajhar, Shillong and Jamshedpur will host one group each. ISL side Mohun Bagan Super Giant are the defending champions, having won the tournament for a record 17th time, the most by any team.

Andy Murray playing only doubles at his last Wimbledon after back surgery

AP ■ LONDON

Two-time Wimbledon champion Andy Murray will play only doubles at his last appearance at the All England Club following his withdrawal from singles on Tuesday, just over a week after back surgery. The 37-year-old Murray pulled out of the singles competition hours before he was supposed to play Tomas Machac on Centre Court. "Unfortunately, despite working incredibly hard on his recovery since his operation just over a week ago, Andy has taken the very difficult decision not to play the singles this year," his management team said in a statement. "As you can imagine, he is extremely disappointed but has confirmed that he will be playing in the doubles with Jamie and looks forward to competing at Wimbledon for the last time."



Murray had surgery on June 22 to remove a cyst from his spinal cord. Murray has said he wants to retire after the Paris Olympics, which start later this month. He has dealt with injuries in recent years, including a bad hip that required two procedures. Murray stopped playing during a second-round match at the grass-court tournament at Queen's Club in London last

month because he was having trouble walking. He later explained that the cyst was compressing a nerve in his back and leaving his right leg numb. Murray owns three major championships: The U.S. Open in 2012 and Wimbledon in 2013 and 2016. His 2013 title made him the first British man to win the Wimbledon singles in 77 years. He reached No. 1 in the ATP

rankings and is the only player with two consecutive tennis gold medals in Olympic singles. He won at London in 2012 - when the Summer Games matches were at the All England Club - and at Rio de Janeiro in 2016. Murray underwent hip operations in 2018 and 2019. While he thought he would need to retire after the second surgery, in which he received a metal hip implant, Murray eventually returned to action. He has since been hampered by various issues, including tearing ligaments in his left ankle at the Miami Open in March. Murray lost in the first round of the French Open in May. He had been practicing in recent days at the All England Club and undergoing medical tests to see whether he would be able to compete at what was expected to be his farewell to Wimbledon.

Naomi Osaka wins at Wimbledon for the first time in 6 years, and Coco Gauff moves on, too

AP ■ WIMBLEDON

Naomi Osaka had not won a match at Wimbledon in six years. Hadn't even played there in five. Grass courts never were her favorite surface. Twelve months ago at this time, Osaka was off the tour while becoming a mother - her daughter, Shai, turns 1 on Tuesday - and recalls flipping on the TV in the hospital and seeing a certain Grand Slam event on the screen. "I'm just really excited to be here," Osaka said Monday after pulling out a 6-1, 1-6, 6-4 victory over Diane Parry in the first round at the All England Club by taking the last two games from 4-all in the third set. "It's funny, because Wimbledon was the first tournament I watched after pregnancy." On a day when there was plenty of focus away from the courts and instead on the health and status of various players who have been ranked No. 1 and won multiple major championships - tournament favorite Aryna Sabalenka and

Victoria Azarenka, each a two-time Australian Open winner dealing with a bum shoulder, withdrew hours before they were due on court; Andy Murray, twice a titlist at Wimbledon, was trying to decide whether to compete less than 10 days after surgery to remove a cyst from his spinal cord - another person fitting that description, Osaka, was making a happy return. She's won the U.S. Open and Australian Open twice apiece on hard courts, but never has been past the third round on either Wimbledon's grass or the French Open's clay. Osaka had not entered Wimbledon since a first-round loss in 2019, and while she's topped the WTA in the past, she is now No. 113 in the rankings after being off the tour for 15 months until returning in January. Before facing the 53rd-ranked Parry, Osaka said, she was sifting through pictures on her phone. "They have that feature, This time last year. I was looking at that. I was looking at photos of myself in the hospital. It's

really cool to be here now," Osaka said. "My mindset last year was just trying to survive. Honestly, I didn't really know what was going on after I gave birth; just trying to piece myself back together." Other big names who won on Day 1 at Wimbledon included reigning U.S. Open champion Coco Gauff, 2021 U.S. Open winner Emma Raducanu and three-time major champion Carlos Alcaraz, all on Centre Court. Alcaraz began his title defense feeling a bit jittery, he said afterward, but came through with a 7-6 (3), 7-5, 6-2 victory over Estonian qualifier Mark Lajal. "I still get nerves when I am playing here," said Alcaraz, who won the French Open last month to become, at 21, the youngest man with a major trophy on three surfaces. "I practiced 45 minutes on Thursday, and it's the first time that I was nervous in a practice - just because I'm playing here." Lajal (pronounced la-YAHL), who's a week younger, was making his Grand Slam debut and felt it to his core, too.



"Two days before, I felt like I was going to throw up. I was so stressed," said Lajal, who actually went up a break in each of the first two sets. "When I found out who I was playing, and where I was playing, I was super excited. But as it sunk in - what I would

be doing and who I was going to be playing - I was stressed about playing in front of such a huge crowd on one of the biggest stages in tennis." A year after a first-round exit at Wimbledon, Gauff eliminated Caroline Dolehide 6-1, 6-2. Raducanu was a 7-6

(0), 6-3 winner against Renata Zarazua, a late replacement when No. 22 Ekaterina Alexandrova pulled out because of an unspecified illness. Thinking back to her 2023 loss to 2020 Australian Open champion Sofia Kenin, Gauff

said: "It was a very tough moment for me. I'm a little bit emotional." But the All England Club also brings back good memories for the 20-year-old American, whose initial Slam appearance came after becoming the event's youngest qualifier at 15 in 2019. "Wimbledon is the place - I wouldn't say where the dream started," Gauff said, "but maybe where I believed the dream was possible." From a tennis perspective, Osaka had a real breakthrough at Roland Garros in May - although the end result was a loss. Osaka pushed current No. 1 Iga Swiatek to the brink in Paris, leading 5-2 in the third set, serving for the victory at 5-3, even standing one point from victory, before the eventual tournament champion managed to eke out a 7-6 (1), 1-6, 7-5 second-round win. That was the only set Swiatek lost in what would become an otherwise dominant run to her fourth French Open trophy in five years.

"I, personally, was absolutely gutted, to be honest, because I thought she was going to win. ... But I was also happy for her and proud of her. And she was extremely upbeat," said Stuart Duguid, Osaka's agent. "I don't think she took it as a match where, I had a match point." She took it more as she got some belief back that she can beat the top players." Osaka called Monday's match against Parry "a little up-and-down" and "really fun and really stressful at the same time." She had more than twice as many winners as Parry, 34 to 14, but also twice as many unforced errors, 38 to 19. Still, Osaka considers herself a work-in-progress and some of that entails allowing herself to make mistakes, to cede a game here and there, and not be too bothered. "I know that I didn't play bad. I think I just put too much pressure on myself that I need to win all the games - that I can't be broken and things like that," she said. "When that eventually happened, I felt like I doubted myself, even though I knew my game plan going in."

