

OPINION 6

PARLIAMENT: DUTY
OVER DISRUPTION

WORLD 8

NIKKY HALEY 'STRONGLY
ENDORSES' TRUMP"

MONEY 10

CORPORATE FUNDING IN SOLAR
SECTOR GLOBALLY DIPS: MERCOM

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UP CM Yogi prepares for critical bypolls



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with BJP leader JP Nadda

File Photo

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT
LUCKNOW

Deputy CM fends off Akhilesh Yadav

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Wednesday entrusted Ministers with the responsibility of supervising the bypolls to 10 Assembly seats and to stay for two nights in a week in the respective constituencies. The Chief Minister also asked the Ministers and leaders of party organisations to be active on social media to counter the negative campaign of the Opposition and the false narrative spread by INDIA Bloc parties. The Chief Minister has constituted a team of 30 Cabinet Ministers and Ministers of State to

supervise the bypolls to 10 UP Assembly seats. The Ministers are from the Bharatiya Janata Party and allies Rashtriya Lok Dal and NISHAD Party. The Chief Minister presided over a meeting of the Ministers and leaders of the party organisation. Three Ministers each have been given the responsibility of supervising the elections in the 10 Assembly seats going to bypolls. Yogi has specifically directed the Ministers to focus the attention on the preparations at the polling booth level and be in constant touch with the cadre and grassroot party workers. He said the party worker was the top priority and asked the Ministers in-charge of the poll bound 10 Assembly seats to meet the party workers, ascertain their problems and facilitate them in discharging their responsibility during the elections. The CM said the party workers should feel assured that both the government and the party organisation was solidly behind them. The meeting also discussed the measures to be taken for busting the false narrative of inflation, unemployment, abrogation of Constitution and caste-based reservation for the SC, ST and OBCs. He said the false narrative of amendment to the Constitution for abrogating the reservations need to be particularly busted.

and in UP and the Samajwadi Party has no chance of a comeback. "There is infighting in the Government. BJP leaders are fighting among themselves. The people know about the corruption and are fed up with the game of thrones," Yadav said at a party event. Responding to the SP chief, Maurya tweeted this that the BJP's Governments and organisation in the country and the State are strong. "The return of SP's reign of goons in UP is impossible. BJP will repeat 2017 in the 2027 state polls," he posted on X.



Fire breaks out at Gulati Restaurant in Pandara Market in New Delhi on Wednesday Ranjan Dimri/Pioneer

Iconic Gulati eatery gutted, Delhiites left heartbroken

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

A fire in the iconic Gulati restaurant, a favourite haunt of foodies, in the wee hours of Wednesday in the heart of the national Capital left its patrons broken-hearted. Serving the gourmet since 1959, this famous eatery has had among its clients a number of dignitaries regularly visiting the eating joint to savour the delicacies on offer. As the disheartening news of the fire that gutted a good portion of the restaurant spread by word of mouth, many Delhiites got nostalgic reminiscing about their times at the eatery which is etched in their memories forever. The restaurant that had a humble beginning as a small "dhaba" with simple wooden benches and tables, transformed into a fine dine restaurant in 2013, giving a perfect dining experience to the visitors. The restaurant was also known for its great ambience. The fire broke out at 2.48 am in the sitting area of Veg

Gulati restaurant adjacent the main restaurant, and is a vegetarian alternative to the same. The leaping flames soon spread to the first floor and caused extensive damage. Sharing their sense of loss, many fans of the restaurant told *The Pioneer* that the place was part of many family gatherings. Twenty-six-year-old Aditya Ahuja, who works as a content writer at Prasar Bharti, reminisced how he visited the place with his father as a toddler. According to an official of Delhi Fire Services (DFS), it took one hour for four fire tenders to bring the blaze under control. The cause of fire is suspected to be a short circuit. Police has said a probe is underway in the matter. Over the years, the restaurant has emerged as one of the best serving North Indian cuisine in the city. Long queues outside the place are a usual sight. However, this doesn't deter foodies from visiting the restaurant to savour their favourites dishes which include *dal makhni*, *naan* and *dahi kebab*.

NCP's Ajit Pawar suffers setback



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Still to recover from the Opposition MahaYuti's poor performance in the recent Lok Sabha polls, the Ajit Pawar-led ruling NCP suffered another jolt on Wednesday, as its Pimpri unit chief Ajit Gavahane and three other leaders quit the party, ahead of their joining the rival NCP (Sharad Pawar) on July 20. Apart from Gavahane, three other leaders who quit the ruling NCP (AP) and announced their decision to join the rival Sharad Pawar-led NCP are NCP's Pimpri-Chinchwad Students' Wing chief Yash Sane, former corporators Rahul Bhosale and Pankaj Bhalekar. Gavahane, Rahul and Pankaj submitted their resignations to NCP state President Sunil Tatkare. Sane had sent in his papers to the NCP Student Wing President Prashant Kadam earlier this week. The resignations by four NCP (AP) leaders come a year after Ajit Pawar rebelled against Sharad Pawar, brought about a dramatic split in the parent party and joined the BJP-led MahaYuti Government in the State.

Karnataka Government pushes pause button on job quota Bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

The Congress-led Karnataka Government on Wednesday landed in soup after the Cabinet first approved a controversial Bill mandating first 100 per cent reservation in private firms then revising it to two slabs for Kannadigas and finally "put on hold" facing backlash for 48 hours. The reservation in private firms for Group C and Group D posts was made public by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and later he deleted it, sharing another rectified post clarifying that the Cabinet approved the Bill to fix 50 per cent reservation for administrative posts and 75 per cent for non-administrative posts for Kannadigas in private industries and other organisations in the State. The decision was taken in the Cabinet meeting held on Monday. The move, however, did not go down well with industry leaders and late evening Government sources said the Bill which was to be tabled in the Karnataka Assembly on Thursday has been put on hold now. Sources said the Congress high command from New Delhi had to



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with leaders

File Photo: PTI

intervene given the "sensitivity" of the matter in the Bill as the State including the silicon city Bengaluru has a population from north India and else part of the country. "The Cabinet meeting held yesterday approved a Bill to make recruitment of 100 per cent Kannadigas mandatory for 'C and D' grade posts in all private industries in the state. We are a pro-Kannada Government. Our priority is to look after the welfare of the Kannadigas," the CM said in a social media post and then deleted it and replaced with another message. "It is our Government's wish that Kannadigas should be given an opportunity to lead

a comfortable life in the motherland. We are a pro-Kannada Government. Our priority is to look after the welfare of Kannadigas," he said. Karnataka's move is similar to a Bill introduced by the Haryana Government, mandating 75 per cent reservation in private sector jobs to the residents of the State. It was, however, struck down the Punjab and Haryana High Court on November 17, 2023. According to sources, the "Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories and Other Establishments Bill, 2024" will be tabled on Thursday in the Assembly.

Cowardly terrorists from Pakistan on the run in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

Security forces have mobilised a large number of troops to pin down the foreign terrorists on the prowl in the Doda forest area of Doda. Four Army personnel, including one Captain, were martyred in the fierce gunfight in the same zone late Monday night following which these searches were launched across the hilly areas. It is learnt the terrorists had fled the area after targeting the Army personnel. According to local reports, while the joint teams were combing the area a brief exchange of fire took place on two occasions within a span of three to four hours late Tuesday night. The alert Village Defence Guards (VDGs) reportedly opened fire on observing suspicious movement outside their village, while two explosive shells were recovered from the Gandoh area. The exchange of fire was first reported at Kalaan Bhata at 10.45 pm on Tuesday and then near Panchan Bhata at 2 am during the ongoing anti-terrorist operation in the Doda forest area. Despite the challenging terrain and weather conditions, efforts are underway to track down and



Security personnel amid heavy security near the site of a recent encounter with terrorists in Desa village, in Doda district, on Wednesday PTI

neutralise the terrorists who have links with the banned Pakistan-based terror group Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM). Meanwhile, two explosive shells were recovered during a separate search operation in the Sinoo forest area of Gandoh in Doda district. Sinoo Forest witnessed a day-long encounter on June 26, resulting in the killing of three foreign terrorists and the recovery of a huge cache of arms and ammunition, including a US-made M4 carbine. In a statement on Tuesday, the Army said it had been conducting a series of joint and coordinated operations with the Jammu and Kashmir Police to eliminate foreign terrorists.

Stampeding job seekers in Mumbai



A stampede-like situation prevailed near the Mumbai airport where thousands of job aspirants gathered to apply for a limited number of vacancies for the post of loader though the police on Wednesday claimed they had made adequate arrangements to avoid any untoward incident

Haryana Govt announces quota for Agniveers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

The Haryana Government on Wednesday announced a ten per cent reservation for Agniveers in the recruitment of constables, forest guards and jail wardens along with quotas in other posts. This decision came ahead of the Assembly polls in the State. Chief Minister Nayab Singh Saini also said the Government will provide interest-free loans of up to ₹5 lakh if any Agniveer wishes to set up their own business. "In direct recruitment to posts of constable, mining guard,



forest guard, jail warden and special police officer made by the State Government, there will be a 10 per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers," he said at a press conference in Chandigarh. He said in Group C and D

posts, an age relaxation of three years will also be given. "However, for the first batch of Agniveers, this age relaxation will be five years," Saini added. In direct recruitment for Group C civil posts, there will be a five per cent horizontal reservation for Agniveers, the Chief Minister said. He also announced sops for industrial units employing Agniveers. "If any industrial unit employs an Agniveer at a salary of more than ₹30,000 per month, then our government will give that unit an annual subsidy of ₹60,000," Saini said.

HC reserves order on Kejriwal arrest pleas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi High Court on Wednesday reserved its order on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's pleas challenging his arrest by the CBI in the excise policy case and seeking interim bail. Senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi, representing Kejriwal, referred the case of former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan during a hearing at the Delhi High Court. Singhvi pointed out that while Khan was released, he was re-arrested in another case, arguing, "It can't happen in our country."

Justice Neena Bansal Krishna, who conducted the proceedings on a holiday on account of Muharram, heard the arguments advanced by the lawyers of Kejriwal and the CBI and reserved its order on the petitions. The HC has listed his regular bail plea for further arguments on July 29. During the hearing, Singhvi criticised the trial court's decision to allow the CBI's application for production warrants despite Kejriwal being interrogated for nearly three hours on June 25. Kejriwal's senior counsel not only assailed his arrest by the CBI but also sought his release on bail in the case.

Law Ministry advocates sunset clause in key Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Law and Justice has pitched for the incorporation of a "sunset" clause or automatic repeal provision in certain type of bills to de-clutter statute books and has put it in its 100-day agenda. The sunset clause applies primarily to laws of temporary nature or those dealing with dynamic situations. Once their utility ends, they stand removed from the statute books. Sunset clauses have been widely used in the US, the UK and Germany for more than 20 years now. The legislative department in the Ministry has made "sunset clause" in new legislative



proposal a part of its 100-day agenda, saying steps will be taken in this regard in consultation with concerned ministries. Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed all Union Ministries

and departments to draw up a 100-day agenda for the next Government. Former Union Law Secretary P K Malhotra explained that whenever the legislature — Parliament or State legislature — want to restrict the life of a

legislation being passed by it, it may as a matter of policy provide a sunset clause providing that after a lapse of a certain period — five or 10 years depending on the requirement — the law will come to an end. The legislature can pass a fresh law giving the statute, which has become inoperative due to the sunset clause, a fresh lease of life, Malhotra said. According to the legislative department, it seeks to incorporate sunset clause or automatic repealing clause in new legislative proposal in consultation with administrative Ministries and departments concerned. As and when the proposals in this behalf are received by it, necessary action will be taken

up, it noted. "This is a long-pending demand. This practice is prevalent in some other countries also. I think there are many legislations where this kind of clause can be put so that Parliament or State legislature is also vigilant that with the passage of time, if a legislation needs to continue, then they will give it a fresh look. "And if they do not want to continue, then on the day provided in the law, it will automatically come to an end," Malhotra explained. In the recent past, some commissions set up to look into legal reforms have also pressed or such a clause. A sunset clause is a legal element that establishes an expiration date or conditions

for ending a law or agreement. It outlines that the law or agreement will stop being valid after a certain time, unless renewed. In contracts, a sunset clause permits termination if a particular event doesn't occur by a set date. This clause automatically removes legislative sections once a specific date is reached. It requires certain provisions or laws to stop functioning unless renewed. Sunset clauses have been frequently used in India in fiscal and tax laws, such as tax holidays and exchange control regulations. The Constitution itself provides for a 10 year sunset for reservations to Parliament and Legislative Assembly seats (Article 334).

Delhi Govt lacks sensitivity over environment protection: SC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Government has shown lack of sensitivity over protecting the environment, the Supreme Court said while rapping it for granting permission to the Delhi Development Authority to chop 422 trees in the Southern Ridge's reserve forest area for the construction of a road. A bench of justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said it is an admitted position as reflected in the statement made by the tree officer that for felling 422 trees, the officer did not grant any permission. The apex court was hearing suo motu (on its own) contempt proceedings against the vice chairman of the Delhi Development Authority (DDA) over alleged cutting of 1,100 trees in the ridge forest for a road widening project. "The Delhi government must take the blame for granting permission to fell 422 trees, though there was no statutory power vesting in the Delhi government to grant such permission," the bench said in an order dated July 12. "Thus, apart from the trees in the ridge area, the government facilitated cutting and felling



the trees outside the ridge area without permission under the Delhi Preservation of Trees Act, 1994," it said. The top court said, like the DDA, the Delhi government has shown a lack of sensitivity over protecting the environment. The bench said the Delhi government has not even provided the tree officer and the Tree Authority an office or basic infrastructure. The Delhi government must come before the court and tell "how it will compensate for the damage caused to the environment due to its illegal acts", the bench said. "The affidavit of the Delhi government also shows that this is not the only instance where the forest department of the Delhi government purported to grant permission for the felling of trees. They had done it earlier also," it said.

The Delhi government's stand is that "the DDA has accepted that they misread the notifications issued by the Delhi government", the bench said. "That will not absolve the Delhi government of its responsibility of passing orders permitting the felling of trees, though no statutory power is vested in the Delhi government," it said. The top court said the Delhi government must also come out with an action taken report, if any, against the erring officers who are alleged to have granted permissions for the felling of trees. "Apart from a statement on oath which we expect the Delhi government to make about compensating the loss caused to the environment, we hope and trust that the Delhi government will immediately stop exercising the non-existent power of granting permissions for the felling of trees," it said. The bench said, "While we do so, we direct the Delhi government to ascertain how many such permissions have been granted by the Delhi government in the last five years and place all those permissions on record."

DMRC now extends check-in facilities for international passengers



STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Metro has extended check-in facilities for international passengers at the New Delhi and Shivaji Stadium metro stations on the Airport Express Line. A statement by the Delhi Metro Railway Corporation (DMRC) said that while the service was previously available only for domestic travellers, the 'check-in and baggage-drop' service now accommodates international passengers flying with Air India and Vistara Airlines too. "The DMRC invites more airlines to set up this facility to further benefit travellers," it added. According to the DMRC, the initiative aims to enhance passenger convenience and streamline travel procedures for international flights departing from Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGI). "In collaboration with Delhi International Airport Limited (DIAL), Air India, and Vistara Airlines, the DMRC is extending this

service to facilitate easier check-in for international passengers at these key metro stations in Delhi," it said. The check-in counters became operational in the first week of June. Passengers can check in their luggage at these metro stations and their baggage will be securely transported to the aircraft using advanced automated systems, the DMRC said. The service is available for Air India passengers at the New Delhi and Shivaji Stadium metro stations from 6 am to 9 pm, and for Vistara Airlines passengers at New Delhi station from 6 am to 8 pm every day, it said. Passengers can check in anytime between 12 and two hours prior to departure of their domestic flight and between four hours and three hours for international flights. At the New Delhi Metro Station, airline check-in counters are located at the concourse level, while at the Shivaji Stadium Metro Station, the check-in counters are situated adjacent to the VFS Global Office at the concourse level, it said.

Excise rules of respective States over carrying liquor bottles prevail in metro trains: DMRC

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Metro emphasised that the excise rules of the respective States prevail regarding the allowance for commuters to carry two sealed liquor bottles on Delhi Metro trains and asked people to ensure compliance with regulations, especially during cross border travel. The Delhi Metro Rail Corporation (DMRC) had in June last year allowed carrying two sealed liquor bottles per person in the Metro trains, eliciting the Delhi Government's objection that it was against the excise rules. The DMRC trains operate in the National Capital Region (NCR) covering Delhi as well as cities like Faridabad, Gurugram in Haryana and Ghaziabad and Noida in Uttar Pradesh. DMRC Managing Director Vikas Kumar said, "Whatever the Delhi government has authorised us is (permitted). The excise rules of the particular state prevail." As per the Excise Act, only one sealed bottle of liquor like rum, vodka and whisky could be carried from one state to another, said a senior Excise department officer. The Metro trains ferry commuters between Delhi and NCR cities like Noida, Ghaziabad, Gurgaon and Faridabad, and allowing two sealed bottles to be carried by any

person will be in violation of the Act, the officer added. DMRC Principal Executive Director Anuj Dayal said, "We are not specifying either one or two whatever number of bottles are permitted. Since we are operating in Delhi, UP and Haryana and whatever is the excise law of the state, it will prevail." The Metro train passengers are expected to follow existing rules and regulations of the concerned state excise departments with regard to carrying liquor during cross-border transit, the DMRC said. "If a commuter boards a train in Delhi with two liquor bottles and is headed to UP then he should understand that he has to follow the excise rule of that state. So, if only one liquor bottle is allowed, he should carry just one," said Kumar. The Delhi government's Excise department had sent a notice to the DMRC after it permitted commuters to carry two sealed liquor bottles in the Metro trains last year. Earlier, carrying alcohol was banned in the Delhi Metro trains except on the Airport Express Line. The Delhi Metro was asked by the Excise department in its notice to change the relaxation of carrying two bottles of liquor to one so that it did not constitute a violation of the Excise Act.

Won't back out from building replica of Kedarnath temple in Delhi: Rautela

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust founder Surendra Rautela on Wednesday asserted he will not back out from building the replica of the Kedarnath temple here and is ready to fight a legal battle if needed. The Badrinath-Kedarnath Temple Committee (BKTC), the apex body that oversees the shrines and temples in Uttarakhand, has threatened to take legal action against the Delhi Trust for planning to replicate the original Kedarnath temple in Burari. The prospect of replicating the holy shrine, which is among the four sacred shrines comprising the Char Dham namely Kedarnath, Badrinath, Gangotri and Yamunotri, has also received objection from the Uttarakhand priests. Rautela said that he has decided to remove the word 'Dham' from his Trust's name to avoid confusion but will not back out from building the temple for the devotees here. "We are not the first ones to build the temple modelled after Kedarnath. It is also there in Indore and Mumbai. If they (BKTC) wants to take legal action they should do it against all," Rautela said. "We have not done anything wrong, we are doing good work for the Hindus and the Sanatan Dharma. We will continue to

build the temple irrespective of the legal challenge," he added. Rautela informed that the Kedarnath temple in Delhi will be build from donation money collected by his trust and will be ready in the next two to three years. BKTC chairperson Ajendra Ajay said they have filed a police complaint against the Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust in Uttarakhand for allegedly using an online application promising devotees to arrange online 'darshan' of the Kedarnath Dham in Delhi. "We have taken legal opinion and are considering different options to stop the construction of the Kedarnath temple in Delhi. Our objection from the Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust is that they are using our name to collect money from people to build the temple," Ajay said. He added the BKTC has received several complaints against Shri Kedarnath Dham Delhi Trust for allegedly using an online application to book Kedarnath 'darshan' for devotees in the national capital. "This is wrong and by doing so they are cheating and misleading them," Ajay said, adding they have filed a police complaint in the matter. Earlier this month, Uttarakhand Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhama attended the 'bhumi puja' ceremony of the temple here.

Private air-conditioned bus service to start in city from August

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhiites will be able to enjoy a ride in air-conditioned buses run by private players as the city Government prepares to roll out the ambitious scheme from August. According to officials, the premium bus service will be launched under the Delhi Motor Vehicles Licensing of Aggregator (Premium Buses) Scheme, which the Delhi government had notified last year, which aims at reducing intricacy usage of private vehicles and curbing pollution. "Under the scheme, two

aggregators, namely Uber and Aaveg, have been granted licenses for operating the buses in Delhi-NCR and are finalising the routes on which the services will be started," an official from the transport department said. "These two aggregators are onboard and the talks with them regarding the final nitty-gritties are in the last stage. We are targeting to flag off the buses by the end of this month or latest by the first week of August," the official added. According to the scheme, a "premium bus" is any full AC luxury bus with a seating

capacity of no less than nine passengers, pre-reserved reclining seats, and equipped with Wifi, GPS, and CCTV. The scheme stipulates that the 'onboarded' bus must not be more than three years old if it runs on CNG, and the buses joining the service after January 1, 2025 must be electric. It also requires that the applicants must have a corporate or branch office located in the National Capital Region. An official from Aaveg, requesting anonymity, said the company has finalised some routes in west and central

Delhi. The bus fleet will comprise electric and CNG vehicles. "By end of December, we plan to switch to an all-electric bus fleet. The buses will be flagged off either by the end of this month or the first week of August. We have conducted the trial and recce of all the routes that the buses will run on. The buses will have 41 seats for as many passengers. People will be able to book seats using the Aaveg app," he said. In a statement in May, Uber had said customers will be able to pre-book seats on their preferred route by choosing the

'Uber Shuttle' option on the Uber app. Each shuttle vehicle will be able to accommodate between 19 to 50 passengers and will be operated by local fleet partners utilising Uber's technology. Sources from the transport department said the two aggregators have to submit the routes, the driver details and bus details to them. Under the scheme, licence holders will be permitted to determine bus routes and provide fares that are dynamic and no lower than the peak fare of the AC buses run by the Delhi Transport Corporation..

Private firm executive ends life due to physical, mental harassment

STAFF REPORTER ■ NOIDA/ GHAZIABAD

A 27-year-old private firm executive has ended her life allegedly due to physical and mental harassment by her colleagues, prompting the Ghaziabad police to launch an investigation into the matter. The woman, who lived in Ghaziabad and worked at the firm located in Noida, was allegedly being harassed for the past five-six months, her family claimed. After the woman killed herself on July 12 allegedly by consuming poison, her brother approached the local Nandgram police station in Ghaziabad where an FIR was lodged under section 108 (abetment of suicide) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The brother claimed that a note was found in her room, in which she had "written about committing suicide due to harassment by these persons as well as some other staff members", according to the FIR. Alleging that his sister ended her life due to physical and mental harassment, he said "these people are responsible for her suicide". He also claimed that his sister had narrated her ordeal to the family three-four days before taking the extreme step.

Bharadwaj meets factory owners of 27 industrial areas to discuss revamp

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Industries Minister Saurabh Bharadwaj on Wednesday held a meeting with representatives of factory owners' associations from 27 industrial areas at Secretariat to discuss the government's plans to revamp those areas. The senior AAP leader assured trade organisations during the meeting that the AAP led Delhi Government is very serious about the development and maintenance of 27 unplanned industrial areas. He mentioned that the government has been working with trade organisations for a long time to develop these



areas and has come up with a scheme for their revamp. "Under this scheme, 90 per cent of the costs associated with the layout plan for the development of these industrial areas will be borne by the Delhi Government, while 10 per cent will be borne by the factory owners," he stated. During the meeting, Chamber of Trade & Industry (CTI)

Chairman Brijesh Goyal requested the minister to consider reducing the high fee for Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) map approvals in these 27 unplanned industrial areas. Goyal highlighted that there are 29 authorised industrial areas and 27 unplanned industrial areas in Delhi. Factory owners from these unplanned areas have requested the government to include the cost of MCD map approvals under the scheme. Bharadwaj agreed to this demand and instructed officials to consider a policy where map approval fees are in line with the government's scheme.

19-year-old accused in GTB Hospital killing case nabbed

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Police on Wednesday apprehended a 19 year old accused in the Guru Tegh Bahadur (GTB) Hospital firing case where a 32 year old dentist was shot dead by a teenager inside the ward of the hospital in a case of mistaken identity. The accused, who is the third arrest in the case, has been identified as Moin is a resident of Ghaziabad's Loni. "He is among the main conspirators and was involved in the recce before the firing incident. He has conducted recce for continuous 4 days of the hospital along with his associates Ayan, Aman and

Shavez," DCP Shahdara Surendra Choudhary said. Earlier, the police on Monday nabbed two accused, 20 year old Faiz from Loni in Uttar Pradesh and Farhan from Delhi's Chauhan Banger area, but said they did not fire the shots on Sunday evening. However, they provided logistic support to the main accused. Moin is the brother of Faiz and was present with him at the apartment of Faheem, associated with the Hasim baba gang, who was the mastermind of the incident. While Faiz provided that vehicle used in the commission of offence, Moin was involved in hiding the motorcycle.

Court hearing clears Kejriwal is mastermind of liquor scam: Sachdeva

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva on Wednesday claimed that submissions by the CBI counsel in state High Court proves that Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is the mastermind of the alleged excise policy linked money laundering scam and asserted that there is a strong bond between him and Pakistan's political setup. "After Wednesday's Court Hearing, it's clear that on one hand Arvind Kejriwal is the main mastermind of liquor scam and on the other hand, there is a strong bond between Kejriwal & Pakistan's political setup," Sachdeva alleged. Delhi BJP chief claimed that the CBI counsel on Wednesday convincingly presented in court that Kejriwal is the mastermind of Delhi Government's Liquor Scam and it was on his direction that wholesale liquor dealers commission was raised from 2 per cent to 12 per cent which resulted in reported massive kickbacks to the ruling AAP. "Secondly the trail of 45 crores kickbacks going to AAP for Goa elections too stands out very clear. Thirdly it stands clear that liquor scam's prime accused Vijay Nayyar was allowed to live in a government bungalow in close proximity to CM House on the instructions of Kejriwal himself," he said. Sachdeva said that the way Kejriwal's counsel Abhishek Manu Singhvi cited the case of a former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan going on some court in Pakistan while pleading for Kejriwal's Bail clearly establishes that there is a close bond between Kejriwal's politics and



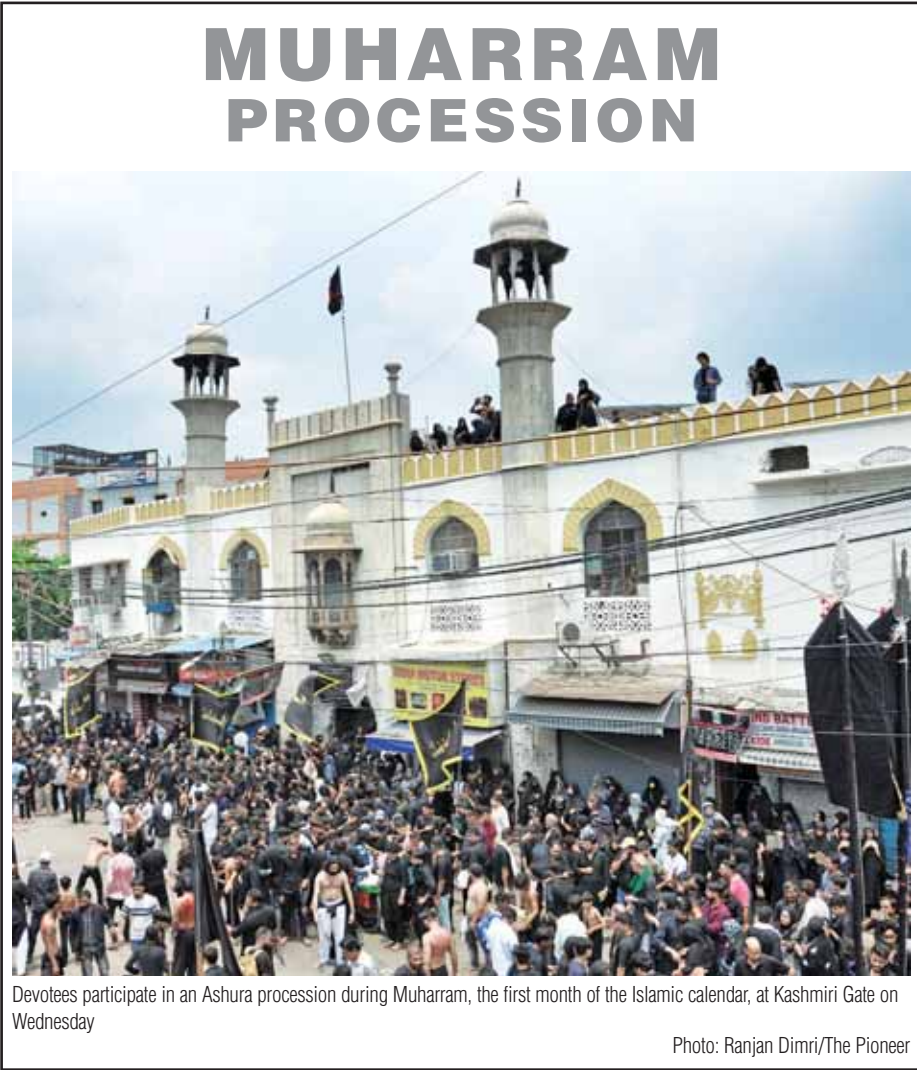
Pakistan's political setup. "It's pertinent to mention here that during the recent Lok Sabha elections a former Pakistan Minister lauded Kejriwal and gave statement appealing to Delhi voters for Kejriwal," he alleged and stated that Kejriwal's counsel cited the example of Pakistan's former PM Imran Khan's case in a Pakistan's court and equated Kejriwal's case to Imran Khan's case calling them cases of political harassment. "A counsel cannot give a statement in court without his client's concurrence and statement of Singhvi relating Kejriwal and Imran's cases shows that there is a strong bond between Kejriwal and Pakistan's political setup," he said.

BJP MLAs meet Speaker, demand Special Assembly Session

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP legislative group on Wednesday met Delhi Assembly Speaker Ram Niwas Goel to demand a special session of the Delhi Assembly to discuss issues such as the exorbitant hike in electricity charges and waterlogging. Addressing a joint press conference after meeting the Speaker, former BJP Delhi President and MLA Vijender Gupta, along with Mohan Singh Bisht, Ajay Mahawar, Anil Vajpayee, Jitender Mahajan and Abhay Verma, said that they want to draw the Government's attention to the burning issues in Delhi and seek their solutions to ensure the accountability of the Delhi Government. Gupta stated that it is well known that TPDDL has significantly increased electricity rates under the name of PPAC. Delhi has already been grappling with a severe drinking water shortage for a long time. Mohan Singh Bisht said that due to the Delhi government's

negligence in making arrangements to tackle the rain, the problem of waterlogging has taken a severe turn. Ajay Mahawar reported that despite receiving timely information, the leaking barrage of the Munak canal broke, leading to three feet of water flooding several blocks in Bawana, disrupting the lives of millions of people. Abhay Verma demanded that a special session of the Delhi Assembly be convened immediately so that these public issues can be discussed and the Delhi government's accountability can be established. Anil Vajpayee said that while there is a provision for monsoon sessions in state assemblies across the country, the Delhi government is preoccupied with securing bail and handling court proceedings for its jailed Chief Minister and ministers. It is clear that the people of Delhi have been left to their own fate by the AAP government.



Devotees participate in an Ashura procession during Muharram, the first month of the Islamic calendar, at Kashmiri Gate on Wednesday
Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

C'garh seeks Centre's help in employment generation

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Wednesday met Union Minister for Labour, Employment, Youth and Sports Affairs Mansukh Mandaviya and urged him to provide more assistance for employment generation as well as for labour welfare and expansion of sports facilities in Chhattisgarh.

During the meeting at the Union Minister's residence in New Delhi, the Chief Minister informed him about the progress made by Chhattisgarh in the fields of labour, employment and



sports in the state. Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma was also present at the meeting.

Sai informed at the meeting that the Chhattisgarh government has taken several important steps to protect the interests of the labourers. These include increase in minimum wage rate, implementation of labour welfare schemes and creation of new employment opportunities.

The Chief Minister sought more cooperation from the Central Government to reduce the rate of unemployment in the state.

In the field of youth and sports, the Chief Minister informed that sports facilities are being expanded in the state.

He said that the Chhattisgarh government has launched various schemes to encourage sports talent in rural and tribal areas. The Chief Minister requested the Union Sports Minister to provide more support to these schemes by the Central Government so that the youth of the state can excel at the national and international level.

Mandaviya appreciated the efforts of the Chief Minister and praised the steps taken towards development in the state. He assured him that the Central Government will provide all possible support to Chhattisgarh.

Kabirdham gets into action to tackle waterborne diseases

STAFF REPORTER ■
KABIRDHAM

Amid a breakout of A seasonal diseases, authorities in Chhattisgarh's Kabirdham have started chlorinating water sources to prevent waterborne diseases, an official communiqué said on Wednesday.

On the directive of Home Minister Vijay Sharma who is also a local MLA, a total of 13,538 water sources will be chlorinated to ensure clean drinking water, especially in rural areas.

Panchayat and Rural Development, Health, and Public Health Engineering departments are conducting drive in all the blocks of the district.



Amity workshop on NEP highlights opportunities

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh's Amity University hosted a seven-day workshop for faculties on "Opportunities and Challenges in National Education Policy" as part of the mission for Viksit Bharat.

The programme concluded on Wednesday and the event was inaugurated by Prasanna R. (IAS), Secretary of Higher Education, Government of Chhattisgarh.

In his inaugural address, Prasanna R. emphasized the mission of developed Chhattisgarh by 2035 and



highlighted the rapid pace of technological change. He stressed the need to adapt teaching and learning

methods to equip students with skills for employment and identified teachers and students as key stakeholders in the implementation of NEP 2020.

Prof. (Dr.) Piyush Kant Pandey, Vice-Chancellor of Amity University Chhattisgarh, in his presidential address, highlighted the university's commitment to fostering educational excellence and aligning with NEP guidelines. He outlined Amity University's initiatives in curriculum development, faculty training, and research promotion to enhance educational outcomes.

Chhattisgarh seeks Centre's help to expand rail network

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR/NEW DELHI

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai was on Wednesday in New Delhi, where he held a series of meetings with Union Ministers and sought assistance for the state.

He met Union Railways Minister Ashwini Vaishnav at his official residence and demanded expansion of railway lines and approval of new lines in Chhattisgarh.

Talking to media, Sai remarked "I along with Deputy Chief Minister Vijay Sharma called on Vaishnav and held discussions regarding



"Railways cover is less in the state but after PM Modi came to power for the third time in a row, we have huge expectations..."

possibilities of new rail lines in Chhattisgarh.

"Railways cover is less in the state but after PM Modi came to power for the third time in a row, we have huge expectations...in near future, Chhattisgarh will get 4 new rail lines", he added.

Sai govt ignoring C'garh's interests: Cong

STAFF REPORTER ■
RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Congress Chief Deepak Bajj on Wednesday accused the Vishnu Deo Sai government of neglecting the interests of the state by approving Rajasthan's coal excavation in eco sensitive Hasdeo Arand forest.

Speaking in Raipur, he said that the BJP government has ignored the interests of Chhattisgarh and the environment concerns to fulfill party commitment.

Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajanlal Sharma has posted information about this on social media.

About 91.21 hectares of forest land in Parsa East and Kanta Basan (PEKB) coal blocks in the Hasdeo Arand coalfield have been approved



for excavation. The previous Congress government had refused to allow excavation here and had sent a resolution to the Centre to cancel this mine, he said.

About 91.21 hectares of forest land in Parsa East and Kanta Basan (PEKB) coal blocks in the Hasdeo Arand coalfield have been approved for excavation.

Whereas, as soon as the BJP government was formed, indiscriminate deforestation resulted in the cutting of 50

thousand trees in the Hasdeo Arand Area, he said.



A special train was on Wednesday flagged off from Chhattisgarh's Ambikapur for pilgrimage to Ramlalla temple in Ayodhya. BJP MP Chintamani Maharaj flagged off the train.

FORM G INVITATION FOR EXPRESSION OF INTEREST FOR GEEKAY COLONIZERS AND BUILDERS LIMITED OPERATING REAL ESTATE INDUSTRY AT RAIPUR CHHATTISGARH (Under sub-regulation (1) of regulation 36A of the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Board of India (Insolvency Resolution Process for Corporate Persons) Regulations, 2016)	
RELEVANT PARTICULARS	
1. Name of corporate debtor along with PAN & CIN/LLP No	Geekay Colonizers And Builders Limited PAN - AAJCS883P CIN - U04520G22005PLC017255
2. Address of the registered office	Shop No. 6 & 7, Sector - 1, Street - A, Geekay Township, Siltara, Raipur, Chhattisgarh - 492001
3. URL/Website	Not Available
4. Details of place where majority of fixed assets are located	● 'Kalpvriksh' at Kollar & Tekari, Raipur ● 'Romanesque' at Village Labhandhi, Raipur
5. Installed capacity of main products/ services	Kalpvriksh- RERA registered resort type project spread over 128 Acres of which 62.6043 Acres is registered in the name of corporate debtor Romanesque- 152 Residential units of which 109 are mortgaged to Omkara Assets Construction Company Private Limited, mostly sold without obtaining NOC
6. Quantity and value of main products/ services sold in last financial year	As per Audited Accounts for the financial year 2021-22 the total revenue for the year was Rs. 342,88,584/-
7. Number of employees/workmen	Number of Staffs :- 0 Workmen :- 0
8. Further details including last available financial statements (with schedules) of two years, lists of creditors are available at URL:-	Can be sought by emailing to the Resolution Professional at geekaycolonizers.lbc@gmail.com / slahiri207@gmail.com
9. Eligibility for resolution applicants under section 25(2)(h) of the Code is available at URL:-	Can be sought by emailing to the Resolution Professional at geekaycolonizers.lbc@gmail.com / slahiri207@gmail.com
10. Last date for receipt of expression of interest	03rd August, 2024
11. Date of issue of provisional list of prospective resolution applicants	13th August 2024
12. Last date for submission of objections to provisional list	18th August 2024
13. Date of issue of final list of prospective resolution applicants	28th August 2024
14. Date of issue of information memorandum, evaluation matrix and request for resolution plans to prospective resolution applicants	03rd September 2024
15. Last date for submission of resolution plans	03rd October 2024
16. Process email id to submit Expression of Interest	geekaycolonizers.lbc@gmail.com

Monsoons may trigger brain infections in Indians living in coastal areas, rice belts

AGENCIES ■

Children and the elderly living in coastal and rice belt regions of India are highly vulnerable for viral encephalitis and other brain infections during monsoon, said a neurologist at Amrita Hospital, Faridabad on Wednesday. The experts cited high humidity and increased mosquito breeding behind the increased risk.

A brain infection, also known as encephalitis, occurs when the brain experiences severe inflammation. It causes damage to brain tissues, potentially causing a range of neurological symptoms.

"Brain infections can be of several types like viral, bacterial, tubercular, fungal, or protozoal. The most

common symptoms of brain infections include fever, headache, vomiting, seizures, and altered consciousness," said Dr Sanjay Pandey, HoD, Neurology and Stroke Medicine at Amrita Hospital, Faridabad.

He stated that the weaker immune systems in children and senior citizens make them more prone to such infections.

Brain infections, which are relatively rare in developed countries, remain a significant public health issue in South Asian nations like India.

The incidence of brain infections spikes during the monsoon season due to favourable conditions for mosquito breeding, which are vectors for several viral infections such as dengue



and Japanese encephalitis.

A recent study published in the Lancet Global Health (NS:GLOH) showed that coastal regions such as Karnataka and Orissa, as well as Assam and Tripura, and rice belts like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, are endemic zones for viral encephalitis in India.

Dr Pandey advised parents to be vigilant for "symptoms such as rashes and loss of consciousness in their children during this season". Early intervention is crucial, he said, noting that "if not treated timely, viral encephalitis can pave the way for parkinsonism, dystonia, and tremor".

Preventing mosquito breeding and protecting against mosquito bites are essential steps, the doctor

said.

On treatments, the doctor said it depends on the type and cause of the infection. While bacterial infections are typically treated with antibiotics, viral infections like Japanese encephalitis and dengue require antiviral drugs. A prolonged course of anti-tuberculosis drugs is needed to treat a tubercular brain infection.

"Fungal infections are treated with antifungal medications. Supportive care, including anti-seizure drugs, corticosteroids to reduce inflammation, and hospitalisation, is often necessary," Dr Pandey said. He added that advanced cases might require intensive care and surgical interventions.

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RPF rescues 84,119 kids at risk of falling into wrong hands

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The RPF has during last seven years rescued 84,119 children, who were at risk in stations and trains, preventing them from falling into wrong hands, a press statement from the Railway Ministry said. The Railway Protection Force (RPF) has over the past seven years been at the forefront of an operation named "Nanhe Farishtey" - a mission dedicated to rescuing children in need of care and protection across various Indian Railway Zones, according to the Ministry. "During last seven years (2018-May 2024), the RPF has rescued 84,119 children who were at risk in stations and trains, preventing them from falling into harm's way," the Ministry said. "Nanhe Farishtey is more than just an operation; it is a lifeline for thousands of children who find themselves in precarious situations. The data from 2018 to 2024 illustrates a story of unwavering dedication, adaptability, and resilience.

Each rescue is a testament to the RPF's commitment to safeguarding the most vulnerable members of society," it added. Giving year wise data, the Ministry said the year 2018 marked a significant start for "Operation Nanhe Farishtey" and in this year, the RPF rescued a total of 17,112 children, including both boys and girls. "Out of 17,112 children rescued, 13,187 were identified as runaway children, an alarming number of 2105 were found to be missing, 1091 children as left behind, 400 as destitute, 87 as kidnapped, 78 as mentally challenged and 131 as street children.

This year 2018 set a strong foundation for the operation, highlighting the urgent need for such an initiative," the Ministry said. "During 2019, the RPF's efforts continued to bear fruit, with a total of 15,932 children, including both boys and girls were rescued. Out of 15,932 children rescued, 12,708 as runaway children, 1454 as missing, 1036 children as left behind, 350 as destitute, 56 as kidnapped, 123 as mentally challenged and 171 as



street children. The consistent numbers showcased the persistent issue of children running away and needing protection," it added. According to the Ministry, the year 2020 was challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted normal life and significantly impacted the operations. Despite these challenges, the RPF managed to rescue 5,011 children, it added. "During 2021, the RPF saw

resurgence in their rescue operations, saving 11,907 children. This year saw a notable increase in the number of children found and protected, with 9601 children identified as runaways, 961 as missing, 648 as left behind, 370 as destitute, 78 as kidnapped, 82 as mentally challenged and 123 as street children," the Ministry said. Lauding the RPF, the Ministry stated that during 2022, the RPF's unwavering commitment was evident as they res-

cued 17,756 children, the highest in the recorded period. It said, "This year saw a significant number of runaways and missing children being found and given the necessary care and protection. 14,603 children were identified as runaways, 1156 as missing, 1035 as left behind, 384 as destitute, 161 as kidnapped, 86 as mentally challenged and 212 as street children. The efforts were bolstered by increased awareness and more coordinated operations across the railway zones."

"During the year 2023, RPF managed to rescue 11,794 children. With 8916 children rescued as runaways, 986 as missing, 1055 as left behind, 236 as destitute, 156 as kidnapped, 112 as mentally challenged and 237 children as street children, the RPF continued to play a crucial role in ensuring the safety and well-being of vulnerable children," it added. Highlighting the persistent issues of child runaways and the dedicated efforts of the RPF to address them, the Ministry maintained that in the first five

months of 2024, the RPF has already rescued 4,607 children. "With 3430 children rescued as runaways, the early trends suggest a continued commitment to the operation "Nanhe Farishtey," the Ministry said. It added, "Through their efforts, the RPF has not only rescued children but also raised awareness about the plight of runaway and missing children, prompting further action and support from various stakeholders.

The operation continues to evolve, adapting to new challenges and striving to create a safer environment for children across India's vast railway network." Informing the initiatives of the Indian Railways, the Ministry said, "Track Child Portal contains comprehensive details about aggrieved children. Indian Railway has established child helpdesks at over 135 railway stations. When a child is rescued by the Railway Protection Force (RPF), they are handed over to the District Child Welfare Committee which hands over the child to parents."



Indian CAPF, special commando dogs to secure Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Ten specially-trained Indian CAPF and special commando force dogs are in France to provide a counter-terrorist and anti-sabotage security cover to various venues of the Paris Olympics slated to open next week, official sources said on Wednesday. The ten Indian K9 (canine) teams will undertake sniffing and patrolling duties at various venues that will hold events for the Paris Olympics. They have been given special 10-week training for this first-ever kind of collaboration of canine squads between the Indian and the French government, a security officer told PTI.

The teams along with their handlers are drawn from the central armed police forces (CAPFs) like the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) force apart from the federal contingency commando force National Security Guard (NSG) and the Assam Rifles. The dogs are from the ferocious-looking Belgian Malinois breed which undertakes sniffer tasks to detect bombs, improvised explosive devices (IEDs) and trouble makers in various internal security theatres of the country like anti-Naxal operations and counter-terrorist operations, he said. A second officer said the handlers of these ten canine teams have undertaken refresher physical training apart from a special capsule of basics of the French language for the Olympics task. The squad includes five-year-old CRPF canine Vast and three-year-old Denby. They have been chosen for this task after stringent tests conducted at the CRPF dog

breeding and training school located on Taralu near Bengaluru, Karnataka, the second officer said. "The Belgian Malinois breed is considered to be the most preferred combat dog by security forces across the globe," he said. The Malinois, a litter of an Israeli male Malinois crossed with an American bitch, shot to fame when it was reported that the dogs assisted US Special Forces in sniffing out Osama Bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad in Pakistan in 2011. The dog, which has a heavy snout and a big head, can detect suspicious human presence and IEDs with precision and it is intelligent enough to communicate these signals through a nod of its head and not by barking which could lead to alerting of the target. The Indian dog teams will be deployed as per the requirements of the French Police and security agencies and this deployment is part of the security cooperation between the two countries, the first officer said. The handlers are donning their regular combat uniform with a special patch of the Indian flag on their chest and another on the shoulder provided to the security agencies deployed for the mega games event, he said. According to international media reports, France is deploying around 30,000 police officers each day for the Olympics, which will be held between July 26 and August 11, with a peak of 45,000 for the opening ceremony on the Seine river. About 18,000 members of the military are also helping ensure security, including thousands housed in a huge, special camp erected on the edge of Paris, the reports said. India will be represented by 117 athletes at the Olympics apart from 140 support staff and officials.

Childhood obesity may lead to weakened heart, says UCL research

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In the midst of a rapid increase in childhood obesity both in India and globally, researchers from University College London have issued a stark warning: individuals who gain excessive weight from their 20s onwards may face weakened hearts by the time they reach their 60s. The study, published in the European Heart Journal, underscores that early weight gain has lasting implications on heart health, separate from the effects of later-life obesity. Alun Hughes, Professor of Cardiovascular Physiology and Pharmacology at UCL, emphasised that while the adverse effects of being overweight on heart health are known, the long-term impact of weight gain across adulthood remains less understood. He said that while it is known that "being overweight is associated with poorer heart health, we know little about the long-term relationship between being overweight over the adult life course and subsequent heart health". The study holds importance for countries across the globe including in India, given that obesity is one of the major symptoms of diseases like type 2 diabetes, kidney problems, hypertension (high blood pressure), gut issues and even liver diseases. A person is considered obese when their body mass index (BMI), a measure of body fat based on an individual's weight and height) is more than 30. Statistics reveal a concerning trend, with over 1.25 crore children aged 5 to 19 in India now classified as overweight, a significant rise from 40 lakh in 1990. Hughes noted that the research



aimed "to look at whether being overweight at earlier stages of adult life showed lasting associations with poorer heart health irrespective of people's weight in later life". The study included 1,690 people born in England, Scotland, and Wales in 1946. The participants were examined based on their body mass index (BMI), waist-to-hip ratio, and ECGs. Researchers found that elevated BMI from age 20 onwards led to higher left ventricular mass in individuals in their 60s, indicating poor heart health and increased mortality risk. A five-unit higher BMI at age 43 correlated with a 15 per cent or 27-gm increase in left ventricular mass. They added that the study included mostly white European people, so it may not apply to the global population, although Professor Hughes said there is a close link. With alarm bells ringing, particularly for the young, these findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive strategies to address the obesity epidemic in India, aiming to safeguard future generations from serious cardiovascular health risks. World over too, the picture is not very encouraging. A recent World Health Organisation (WHO) study reported that over one billion people have been struggling with obesity across the globe.

Compensation for IAF soldier infected with HIV after blood transfusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

An Indian Air Force (IAF) soldier, who contracted AIDS due to transfusion of contaminated blood at a military hospital in Jammu and Kashmir's Samba in 2002, has received Rs 18 lakh and the residual amount from over Rs 1.41 crore awarded to him as compensation has been deposited with the apex court registry, the IAF has informed the Supreme Court. The apex court, in a judgement delivered on September 26 last year on a plea by the veteran, had directed the IAF to pay him around Rs 1.5 crore as compensation. The former soldier had taken ill during "Operation Parakram", launched in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on Indian Parliament on December 13, 2001, and was admitted to the hospital where he had to be administered one unit of blood. The top court had in April this year dismissed a plea seeking review of its September 2023 judgement in the matter. The veteran's petition alleging con-



tempt of the directions issued by the top court in its 2023 verdict came up for hearing before the bench on Tuesday. Additional Solicitor General (ASG) Vikramjit Banerjee said they have filed a compliance affidavit in the matter. The bench, also comprising Justices Sanjay Karol and K V Viswanathan, observed that the amount deposited in the court registry be released to the veteran. An advocate, who is assisting the top court as an amicus curiae in the matter, spoke about the soldier's regular medical check-up and said the bench can consider referring him to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences

(AIIMS), Delhi, for it. The bench said since the man resides in Ajmer, a good medical facility can be found in Jaipur to ensure he is not inconvenienced. It asked the amicus to discuss the issue with the ASG so that it can be sorted out and posted the matter for hearing after two weeks. On March 5, the apex court had directed that an amount of Rs 18 lakh towards attendant expenses be paid to the man and the remainder be deposited in the court's registry within two weeks. The bench had also directed that his disability be considered as 100 per cent for paying him

the disability pension. In its 2023 verdict, the apex court had said, "It is held that the appellant is entitled to compensation, calculated at Rs 1,54,73,000 towards compensation on account of medical negligence of the respondents, who are held liable for the injury suffered by the appellant." It had said since individual liability cannot be assigned, the respondent organisations (IAF and Indian Army) are held vicariously liable, jointly and severally. "The amount shall be paid to the appellant within six weeks by the IAF, his employer; it is open to the IAF to seek reimbursement, to the extent of half the sum, from the Indian Army. All arrears related to disability pension too shall be disbursed to the appellant within the said six weeks period," the apex court had said. The top court had passed the verdict on an appeal by the IAF veteran who challenged an order of the National Consumer Disputes Redressal Commission (NCDRC) rejecting his claim for compensation.

Country needs new liberalised approach to political economy: Ramesh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Wednesday claimed that India has been locked into a cycle of low investment since 2014 due to a combination of "erratic policy, rampant cronyism, and the ED/IT/CBI raid raj," and asserted that the country needs a new liberalised approach to political economy. Ahead of the presentation of the Union Budget next week, Congress General Secretary in charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said the single

most important statistic that explains India's inability to grow faster since 2014 is the "sluggish investment rate". "India has been locked into a cycle of low investment since 2014, due to a combination of erratic policy, rampant cronyism, and the ED/IT/CBI raid raj," Ramesh said in a statement. Low investment drags down the medium and long-term GDP growth rates, which in turn drags down wages and consumption growth, he said. "The biggest component of investment - private domestic



investment - has been in the doldrums since 2014. It was solidly in the 25-30% of GDP range during Dr Manmohan Singh's tenure. Under the self-declared divinity, it has been

squarely in the 20-25% of GDP range," Ramesh said. He said gross FDI as a percentage of GDP has also more or less stayed constant since 2014. "This is, however, only part of

the story. Since at least 2016, multinational companies across the world have been looking to divest from China and invest in other developing countries. "India, with a large and growing labour pool, was at the right place at the right time - but this generational opportunity to garner FDI and become a manufacturing and export-oriented economy has been squandered," Ramesh said. Countries like Bangladesh and Vietnam have walked away with the benefits, he said. "Sops like corporate tax cuts

and PLIs can't compensate for a freer society, polity, and economy one that is free from demonetization-like master-strokes, cronyism, and Raid Raj," Ramesh said, hitting out at the Modi government. "What India needs is not marginal policy tinkering, but a new, liberalised approach to political economy," the Congress leader said. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Budget for 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha on July 23.

JP Nadda for global regulatory standards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Amid recent scrutiny of several drug companies over product issues such as cough syrup, Union Health Minister JP Nadda on Wednesday stressed the critical need for the Central Drugs Standard Organisation (CDSCO) to draw a roadmap with timelines of adopting global standards in its regulatory functions. His directives came while reviewing the regulation of drugs, cosmetics and medical devices here where he underscored India's aspiration to reaffirm its status as the 'pharmacy of the world' by aligning its drug regulatory framework with international norms. Nadda emphasised the necessity for a robust regulatory structure that matches India's extensive pharmaceutical industry and meets global expectations effectively. He stated that the upscaling needs to be systems-based, focusing on the highest standards of uniformity, technical upgrade and futuristic approach. For export of drugs and phar-



maceuticals, the system should be designed for proper intervention to maintain the quality of drugs being exported, he emphasised amid the backdrop of a few Indian-made drugs in regions as far afield as North America, Africa and Central Asia were found to be toxic and causing deaths. Nadda also underscored the importance of transparency in the working of CDSCO. "In order to achieve global standards, our focus needs to be on transparency of procedures at CDSCO and within the drugs and medical devices industry," he said. "Both the drugs regulatory body and the industry should

work on highest principles of transparency to ensure that the products manufactured and sold by India meet the highest indices of global quality standards," he said. The Health Minister stated that it is important for CDSCO to be in continuous dialogue with the drugs' and medical devices' industry to understand their issues and support them to fulfill the quality expectations and standards of CDSCO. "Our focus should be on developing mechanisms that ensure easy of doing business for the drugs industry within the regulatory requirements. For this, CDSCO needs to be a user-friendly organiza-

tion with state-of-the-art facilities matching global standards," he said. On the topic of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector in drugs manufacturing and the issues faced by the small scale industries to meet quality standards, Nadda said, "Let us understand the issues faced by MSME sector and support them to strengthen their capacity and quality of products on the one hand, and encourage them to meet the regulatory requirements on the other." Nadda was briefed about the mandated activities of CDSCO, its achievements, future plans and various issues and challenges faced by CDSCO, according to a statement issued here. He was also updated on the progress of the scheme for strengthening the state drug regulatory system with a budget of Rs 850 crore which was launched in 2016 during his earlier tenure. Nadda was also apprised of the roles and responsibilities of the central and state drugs regulatory bodies, and some of the challenges faced in alignment between them.

Indian Embassy, OMSC working to rescue cargo vessel crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Comoros-flagged cargo vessel that capsized off the Oman coast has 13 Indians seafarers and the Indian embassy in the Gulf nation is in contact with the concerned authorities, official sources said on Wednesday. The vessel, MT Falcon Prestige, transmitted a distress call around 2200 hours on July 14 off the coast of Oman, they said. The merchant vessel has a crew of 16, of which 13 are Indian seafarers, the sources said, adding the vessel seems to have capsized. "Our embassy in Oman is in constant touch with the Omani authorities. A search and rescue operation for the seafarers, coordinated by the Omani Maritime Security Center (OMSC), is on," one of the sources said. "The Indian Navy has also joined the search and rescue operations," the source said.

90 per cent drop in water-borne diseases in Andaman Nicobar

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Union Minister of Earth Sciences, Dr Jitendra Singh on Wednesday said that after installation of Kavaratti plant in Andaman Nicobar has cut down the incidence of water borne diseases by 90 per cent highlighting the health benefits and impact of provision of potable water. Administrator of Lakshadweep, Daman Diu, Dadra and Nagar Haveli Praful Patel who had called on Dr Singh to express gratification for initiatives such as installing world's first of its kind "Desalination Plant" for drinking water by National Institute of Ocean Technology, Chennai, said that it has brought huge relief by providing clean drinking water to people of the Union Territory. "Total nine desalination plants are approved of which seven are operational and one more will be opera-



tionalized in the coming weeks. The capacity of each of these LTTD units is around 1 Lakh litre of potable water per day which will be increased to 1.5 lakh litres per day in the coming time," he said. The LTTD technology uses the naturally available temperature difference in oceans, evaporating the surface water at low pressure and condensing the resultant vapour with deep sea cold water at 120C, obtained from about

400 m depth. The technology is indigenous, environmentally friendly and easy to operate. Dr. Singh also informed Patel that two re-mineralization plants are being made operational which will add the essential salts evaporated during the desalination process. Other desalination units/plants will also be provided with similar re-mineralization facilities in course of time, he added.

Bihar: Four detained in connection with murder of VIP chief's father

PTI ■ DARBHANGA/PATNA

Bihar Police have detained four persons for questioning in connection with its probe into the murder of Jitan Sahni, father of Vikassheel Insaan Party (VIP) chief Mukesh Sahni. A statement issued by Darbhanga Police said, "Analysis of the CCTV footage has revealed that these four persons entered the house of Jitan Sahni around 10.30 pm on July 15 and stayed there for half an hour." Former state minister Mukesh Sahni's 70-year-old father was found stabbed to death at his home in Darbhanga district on July 16. "Investigators are analysing call detail records of all the four detained persons, their history and also the purpose of visiting the victim's house on Monday night. Other information about the detained persons is also being collected from the villagers," the statement added. Preliminary investigation and examination of the detained persons have revealed that two of them had previously



borrowed money at interest from the deceased, it said. "It has also been found that these two persons had been involved in a heated argument with the deceased two days before the latter's murder. It has also been found that these two people had threatened the victim to teach him a lesson following the heated argument," the statement added. "One of the detained persons is believed to have pledged his motorcycle as collateral for a loan from the victim," it said. The case is being investigated

from all angles, it added. All crucial evidence collected from the spot is being forensically examined, a senior police officer said, adding investigators are also trying to recover 'weapon of offence'. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) of the district police has been formed to investigate the murder case. "Investigators are also examining financial transactions between the detained persons and the deceased," the officer said. Jitan Sahni's last rites were

performed on Tuesday. After the incident, many leaders, including Union minister and chief of Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) Chirag Paswan, former chief minister Jitan Ram Manjhi, Bihar Deputy Chief Minister and state BJP chief Samrat Choudhary, and RJD leader Tejashwi Yadav among others, condemned the murder of Sahni's father. Talking to reporters in Patna on Wednesday, Union Minister of State (MoS) for Home Affairs, Nityanand Rai, said, "The matter is being investigated by Bihar Police in a highly professional manner. Killers are probably in the police net. This is the Nitish Kumar-led NDA government in Bihar where killers cannot roam freely." Rai hit back at the RJD-led opposition which alleged that the law and order situation has collapsed in the state. "When the RJD was in power, the CM's residence had turned into the headquarters of all criminal gangs. Now, it's not possible under the Nitish Kumar-led government," he added.

Fresh arrest in Rajasthan's Jal Jeevan Mission case

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Enforcement Directorate has made a fresh arrest in connection with its money laundering investigation into alleged irregularities in the Jal Jeevan Mission scheme being implemented in Rajasthan, officials said on Wednesday. Sanjay Badaya, an alleged middleman, was taken into custody on Tuesday after questioning at the agency office here, they said. The central government's Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) aims to provide safe and adequate drinking water through household tap connections and is being implemented in Rajasthan by the state's Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department. This is the fourth arrest in the case. The central agency had earlier arrested three people -- Mahesh Mittal, proprietor of Shree Ganapati Tubewell Company, Padamchand Jain, proprietor of Shree Shyam Tubewell Company, and Piyush Jain. The agency's investigation found that Padamchand Jain, Mittal and others were



involved in giving bribes to public servants to obtain illegal protection, tenders, getting bills sanctioned and covering up irregularities in works executed by them in respect of various tenders they received from the PHED. The suspects were also involved in the purchase of stolen goods from Haryana for using them in their tenders and had also submitted "fake" work completion letters from IRCON to get PHED contracts, the agency claimed. The ED's money laundering case stems from an FIR

registered by Rajasthan's Anti-Corruption Bureau (ACB) in which Padamchand Jain, Mahesh Mittal, Piyush Jain and others were charged. Premises in Jaipur and Dausa, including the residential and official premises of senior PHE Department officials, former Rajasthan minister Mahesh Joshi and former additional chief secretary Subodh Agarwal, have been searched by the ED in connection with the probe. Assets worth Rs 11.03 crore have been attached in the case so far.

TN Governor calls on Shah, discusses security 'situations' in State

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi on Wednesday called on Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi and said he had a "very productive meeting" with the central minister on security and related situations in the state. "Had a very productive meeting with the Hon'ble Home Minister Shri Amit Shah Ji on the prevailing security and related situations in Tamil Nadu and their implications for the peace, progress and safety of the people of the state," Tamil Nadu Raj Bhavan said on social media platform X, quoting Ravi. Shah "has amazing insight into the issues affecting our people and immense concern for their well-being," the governor further said. Ravi is camping in the national capital and had earlier met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union ministers Kiren Rijiju, who holds the Parliamentary Affairs portfolio, and Dharmendra Pradhan, who heads the Ministry of Education.

Nagaland BJP appeals for early solution to Naga political issue

PTI ■ KOHIMA

The BJP's Nagaland unit appealed to the Centre and the Naga groups to expedite the process of finalising the Naga political solution for lasting peace and all-round development of the state. A resolution in this regard was adopted on Tuesday at the party's extended state executive meeting held in Dimapur in the presence of Union Shipping Minister Sarbananda Sonowal. Supporting an early, inclusive and honourable solution to the decades-old Naga political issue, the state BJP appealed to the Centre and the negotiating parties "to expedite the process of finalisation so that there can be lasting peace in Nagaland which will positively facilitate the process of all-round development and economic upliftment of the state in the near future". The Centre inked the Framework Agreement with NSCN-IM in 2015 and also



signed the Agreed Position with the Working Committee of Naga National Political Groups in 2017. However, with NSCN-IM remaining adamant on its demand for a separate flag and constitution for the Nagas, the final solution could not be arrived at. The BJP state executive also resolved to support the demand for appointment of deputy chairpersons in urban local bodies in the state. To strengthen the party at the grassroots level, it resolved to complete the formation of booth-level committees in the state before the next executive meeting in Tuensang district in November.

Prakash Ambedkar to launch yatra over quota issue from July 25

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

The Vanchit Bahujan Aghadi (VBA) will hold the 'Aarakshan Bachao Janyatra' on the reservation issue in parts of Maharashtra from July 25, party chief Prakash Ambedkar said. Talking to reporters here on Tuesday, Ambedkar demanded that the Kunbi caste certificates issued without the people applying for it be cancelled and political parties clear their stand on the reservation issue. He also claimed the demand for the implementation of the "sage soyare" (blood relatives) notification amounted to "adulteration" of the quota and courts have given decisions against it earlier. Activist Manoj Jarange has been demanding implementation of the government's draft notification that recognises Kunbi as "sage soyare" of Maratha community members. He has been demanding that Kunbi certificates be issued to all Marathas, thus making them eligible for quota benefits. Kunbi, an agrarian group, is



part of the Other Backward Classes (OBC) category. However, some OBC activists recently launched an agitation, demanding scrapping of the draft notification and an assurance that their quota would not be diluted. "There are two groups in the state in the form of OBCs versus Marathas. The OBC leaders have a fear over the outcome of this issue. A way out is not possible till parties of the rich Maratha community like the Shiv Sena (UBT), Congress, NCP (Sharad Pawar) and also BJP do not clear their stand," Ambedkar said. He said the OBC leaders have endorsed the VBA's stand on the quota matter and stressed

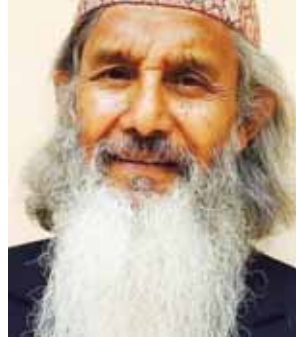
the need to create awareness about the issue among people in villages. The VBA chief said the 'Aarakshan Bachao Janyatra', which will traverse through different villages, will begin on July 25 after his visit to his grandfather Dr B R Ambedkar's memorial 'Chaityabhoomi' in Mumbai and social reformer Jyotiba Phule's residence in Pune. "This yatra will head to Kolhapur (on July 26), Sangli, Solapur, Dharashiv, Beed, Latur, Nanded, Yavatmal, Amravati, Akola, Buldhana, Washim, Jalna district. It will culminate in Chhatrapati Sambhajinagar on August 7 or 8," he said. "We will create awareness about the demand for

doubling the SC/ST students scholarship, giving the same scholarship to OBC students, promotion in jobs for SC/ST and OBCs. We will also put pressure on the parties which have not taken any stand on the reservation issue through the janyatra," Prakash Ambedkar said. On the protest by activist Jarange, he said though people had been attending his rallies, it was not clear in which direction the agitation would be headed. "Jarange has to take a stand on whether he is with the rich Maratha community or the poor Marathas," he said. Prakash Ambedkar claimed the demand for the implementation of the "sage soyare" notification amounted to "adulteration" of the quota and courts have given decisions against it earlier. "The reservation of Kunbi is intact. The demand of reservation to others through a different way is the disputed issue now. The Kunbi certificates are now given without applications and should be cancelled," he said, adding those who need them should apply for it and obtain it.

Body of former Sikkim Minister found in West Bengal canal

PTI ■ GANGTOK

The body of former Sikkim Minister RC Poudyal was found in a canal near Siliguri in West Bengal nine days after he went missing, police said on Wednesday. The body of Poudyal, 80, was found floating in the Teesta Canal at Fulbari on Tuesday, they said. "Prima facie, it is suspected that the body might have been brought down by the Teesta river from upstream. The identification was made through the watch and the clothes he was wearing," a police officer said. A Special Investigation Team (SIT) was constituted to search for the veteran politician after he went missing on July 7 from his hometown of Chota Singtam in Pakyong district, police said. "The investigation into the death will continue," the officer said. Poudyal was the deputy speaker in the first Sikkim assembly and later became the state's forest minister.



He was considered a pivotal figure in the Himalayan state's political landscape during the late '70s and '80s, founding the Rising Sun Party. He was also known for his profound understanding of Sikkim's cultural and social dynamics. "I am deeply saddened by the sudden demise of the Late Shri RC Poudyal Jy, a statesman and distinguished senior political leader who had served the Sikkim Government in various capacities, including as a minister, and was the leader of the Jhulke Gham Party," Chief Minister PS Tamang said.

Gujarat's 'Cooperation among Cooperatives' initiative to be rolled out in all 33 districts

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

After successfully launching the "Cooperation among Cooperatives" initiative in two districts on a pilot basis, the Gujarat government has decided to implement it across all 33 districts of the state, officials said on Wednesday. The initiative aims to enhance the cooperation among Gujarat's thousands of cooperative societies by centralising their bank accounts and deposits in various district and state cooperative banks. The initiative was envisioned by Union Cooperation Minister Amit Shah and launched on a pilot basis in Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts of Gujarat, the state government said in a statement. Gujarat Cooperation Minister Jagdish Vishwakarma said the success of the pilot project has led the government to decide on implementing the initiative across all 33 districts of Gujarat. As part of the pilot project in these two districts, over 4 lakh new accounts were opened by cooperative societies and their active members in the district cooperative banks, resulting in a jump of over Rs 966 crore in the bank deposits, it said.



To further strengthen this, more than 1,700 micro ATMs were installed at cooperative societies in these two districts, it said. "The district cooperative banks will be able to extend their services on the village level and ensure that the capital and funds of Gujarat cooperatives' stay within the community and come to the aid of other cooperative societies," Vishwakarma said. "The initiative consolidates the existing bank accounts of cooperatives and their members operating in various commercial banks and brings them under a centralised district/state cooperative banks," the government said. This helps consolidate the

collective capital of these cooperative societies under one centralised bank, resulting in enhanced deposit pool for loans and increased financial liquidity among cooperatives. This helps address the credit needs of the cooperative societies and ensure that the collective capital of cooperatives comes to the dedicated use of other cooperatives, Vishwakarma said. "In this way, the capital and deposit of one successful cooperative society comes to the use of other societies, benefiting the entire cooperative sector of Gujarat," he said. The pilot project was launched between June 2023

to January 2024 in two districts, the government said in its statement. During the pilot project period, the existing bank accounts held by 1,048 milk societies were consolidated into the district co-operative banks along with the complete transfer of surplus funds into their new bank accounts. The two districts saw the opening of over 4.7 lakh new savings accounts in cooperative banks, enhancing the existing deposits of these banks by a whopping Rs 966 crore, it said. A total of 3.32 lakh RuPay debit cards were also issued to the societies and their active members, it said. In order to enhance banking facilities and financial liquidity at village level, a total of 1,736 societies in these districts, including prominent milk societies affiliated with dairy unions, were also equipped with micro-ATMs and affiliated as "Bank Mitra". To help members access financial services, over 1,631 employees associated with the cooperative societies were given a comprehensive training on digital transactions, including micro-ATM operations, cash withdrawals, and deposits, it said.

Tezpur Airport in Assam to be shut for maintenance work

PTI ■ TEZPUR

Flight services will be shut at the Tezpur airport in Assam in October for one-and-a-half years for maintenance works, a senior official said on Wednesday. Tezpur Airport Director G Shiva Kumar said passenger flights will be suspended from October 1, 2024, to March 31, 2026. "This is due to the resurfacing works of the runway along with other projects to



improve the facilities at the terminal," he said. The Tezpur Airport is adjacent to the Tezpur Base of the Indian Air Force, and the runway is used for both commercial and fighter aircraft. The Tezpur Air Force Base had earlier informed the Tezpur Salonibari Passenger Airport Authority about the maintenance work, for which passenger aircraft services will be temporarily halted. Kumar said that during this time, the authority is considering providing helicopter services from Tezpur to Guwahati, but it is yet to be finalised.

At present, a 90-seater SpiceJet flight fly directly from Tezpur to Kolkata daily. In addition, two airlines operate daily flights to Kolkata via Guwahati, Pasighat and Tezpur. The airport is located on the north bank of the Brahmaputra river and is 12 km from Tezpur town, the capital of Sonitpur district. Established at Salonibari in 1942, the airport terminal can accommodate a total of 400 passengers at a time.

ED questions ex-K'taka Min Nagendra's wife in Valmiki Corporation scam case

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) on Wednesday questioned former minister B Nagendra's wife in connection with the Rs 187 crore scam in a state-owned corporation here. The ED sleuths summoned Manjula for interrogation in the alleged financial irregularities in the Karnataka Maharshi Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation. Nagendra, a Congress MLA, is already in the ED custody. The alleged illegal money transfer scam involving the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki



Scheduled Tribes Development Corporation Ltd came to light after its accounts superintendent, Chandrashekhar P, died by suicide on May 26, leaving behind a note. The note

revealed the unauthorised transfer of Rs 187 crore belonging to the Corporation from its bank account, and said that out of the sum, Rs 88.62 crore was illegally moved to various accounts

allegedly belonging to 'well-known' IT companies and a Hyderabad-based cooperative bank among others. Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra tendered his resignation on June 6 after allegations were made against him in connection with the scam. The ED, which joined the probe after the Union Bank of India lodged a complaint with the Central Bureau of Investigation, had previously raided Nagendra and Valmiki Corporation Chairman Basanagouda Daddal, who is Raichur Rural Congress MLA.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A new lease of life

The Govt reconstitutes NITI Aayog, inducts union ministers and NDA allies to enhance strategic planning

In a significant move to bolster its policy-making prowess, the Indian Government has reconstituted the National Institution for Transforming India (NITI) Aayog. This reconstitution includes 15 Union Ministers and notable allies from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), marking a strategic shift in the country's planning and development framework. This underscores the Government's commitment to integrating diverse ministerial insights into the policy-making process. These ministers come from various portfolios, ensuring that a broad spectrum of expertise and perspectives is brought to the table. This comprehensive approach aims to address multifaceted national challenges more effectively. The reconstitution also sees the induction of key NDA allies, signalling a collaborative effort to drive the nation's development agenda. By involving NDA allies, the Government aims to foster a more inclusive and cooperative environment within the Aayog. Among the notable ministers included are Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Home



Minister Amit Shah, and Defense Minister Rajnath Singh. Their presence is anticipated to significantly influence the economic, internal security, and defence policies of the country. The inclusion of ministers from portfolios such as Health, Education, and Rural Development indicates a holistic approach to addressing India's development needs.

This reconstitution is seen as a strategic shift from the traditional Planning Commission model to a more dynamic and inclusive NITI Aayog framework. It reflects the government's intention to leverage the collective wisdom of its senior ministers and allies to drive forward its vision of a 'New India'. The Aayog's reconstitution aims to facilitate better coordination between the central and state governments, ensuring that policies are effectively implemented at the grassroots level. One of the primary goals of this reconstitution is to enhance the implementation of policies. The government hopes to streamline the execution of key initiatives and programs. This is expected to result in more efficient policy delivery and improved outcomes on the ground. NITI Aayog was established on January 1, 2015, as a replacement for the Planning Commission. Its primary purpose is to promote cooperative federalism by involving state governments in the policymaking process. However gradually it lost its importance. The Indian government has increasingly favoured a centralised approach, leading to reduced involvement of states in planning and decision-making processes, undermining NITI Aayog's role. It lacks financial powers and direct allocation of funds, limiting its influence on actual policy implementation. Besides, there has been a tendency to prioritize immediate economic and political goals over long-term strategic planning, diminishing NITI Aayog's relevance in sustainable development. As the NITI Aayog embarks on this new phase, there is a sense of optimism about its potential to drive substantial progress. It is anticipated that the Government's latest move will lead to more robust policy frameworks.

use of the television channels by speaking for as long as possible. During the question hour between 11 am and 12 pm, only five or six questions and their answers could be completed, instead of all twenty. The reason was that those who had asked the questions spent as long a time as possible over asking their supplementary question, which was a privilege to the Member(s). The ruling party/parties have a better opportunity of exposure than opposition parties generally get. Yet, the opposition mindlessly throws away a lot of the session time by walking out, protesting otherwise, compelling the Speaker to adjourn the House for several hours or even the rest of the day. July 2 was another example when the Prime Minister rose to thank the President for her inaugural speech. For well over two hours, groups of opposition members took turns shouting slogans in an attempt to drown the Prime Minister's address to Parliament, or perhaps even to prevent him from speaking. Little do they realize that most television channels were telecasting his speech live, duly cutting out the sloganeering.

PICTALK



Shia mourners participate in the 9th Muharram procession, on boats, at Dal Lake, in Srinagar

Parliament: Duty over disruption

The opposition can leverage parliament debates to engage with their constituencies but they often waste this opportunity by walkouts and protests



PRAFULL GORADIA

It is difficult to understand, especially since parliamentarians, appeared to overlook an essential of their vocation. That is, that the legislature usually does not take much time. The rest of the session is the opportunity for the opposition to demonstrate their talent and commitment through television. The ruling party or parties do not need the legislature except to have bills passed and enacted into law. If there are no laws that need to be passed urgently, the government and ruling party can do without the legislature virtually for an entire year. Of course, there remains the presenting and passing of the Budget, which can be legitimized only by the legislature, particularly the Lok Sabha.

What has been stated hitherto has been well demonstrated by the state assemblies in India. They pass the odd bill once in a while, and the annual budget is the other essential item of business during the year. Most state legislative assemblies meet for three or four days at a time. Otherwise, for the few times they have to statutorily meet, each session is seldom for more than three or four days. However, the members of the legislative assemblies (MLAs) draw their pay and perks for the entire term of the legislative body.

This applies to Parliament too, although it has the budget, monsoon and winter sessions, which are long enough. In short, to restate, most of the time the legislatures can work for the benefit of the opposition members, who can display their skills, knowledge, familiarity and touch with their constituencies. With the advent of full-time coverage by television channels—Sansad TV being a prominent one—a great advantage has fallen into the hands of the Opposition. This is a boon for them; it is a free and constant medium to, as it were, communicate with their constituencies.

This institution was introduced under the time I was in Parliament. Back then, most Members who spoke made full



THE OPPOSITION MINDLESSLY THROWS AWAY A LOT OF THE SESSION TIME BY WALKING OUT, PROTESTING OTHERWISE, COMPELLING THE SPEAKER TO ADJOURN THE HOUSE FOR SEVERAL HOURS OR EVEN THE REST OF THE DAY

The only people who could hear the PM's speech being disturbed by slogans were the Members of the Lok Sabha. All that the slogan-shouting Members gained was a reputation of being wasters, as members who cost the taxpayer a lot, merely to put in negative effort to try and prevent the Prime Minister from being heard. Each session and day of Parliament cost several crores of rupees. Each Member of Parliament costs several lakh rupees a year to serve the country and its people, and not to prevent Parliament from functioning. There are many better ways of protesting, such as, such as wearing black bands on one's sleeves, sometimes wearing black caps, or sometimes, dressed fully in black. Members can also refuse to take their seats for the entire day, instead, occupying the adjacent aisles for the duration of the session, as a mark of protest, but let the work go on. This would assure all the people, including their constituents that they are spending money on the functioning of Parliament with its thousands of employees constructively and in the interests of the nation. They should realize that the

British departed from India long ago, and such negative activities have no place in our country anymore. Let it be borne in mind that being elected to Parliament (or the state legislative assemblies) is a national duty more than the privilege it has come to be mistakenly understood. What we have witnessed over the two days of July 2 and 3 portends ill for the institution of democracy, which everyone, from the opposition parties to the media and academia, not to forget their cheerleaders overseas, keeps shouting is "under threat in India". But where is the real threat to democracy coming from? This needs to be clearly understood. No democracy can be threatened because its electorate gives a clear mandate for stable governance for a developed economy and a better future. It is the cavalier fashion in which certain parties—and political families living in a sense of entitlement—treat Parliament and its protocols and rules that are emerging as the real threat to democracy.

(The writer is a well-known columnist, an author and a former member of the Rajya Sabha. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RBI'S NEW GUIDELINES FOR BANKS

Madam — According to a report, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has mandated that banks cannot label borrowers as frauds without giving them a hearing. Banks must now issue a 21-day show-cause notice before classifying an account as fraudulent. This decision follows a Supreme Court order. The RBI has instructed banks to develop a fraud risk management policy, approved by at least three board members, including one full-time director and two independent or non-executive directors, to ensure compliance with the principles of natural justice. Additionally, banks are required to update their Early Warning Signal (EWS) systems within six months, integrating data analytics to detect unusual patterns. The RBI has set a threshold of Rs. 1 crore for reporting frauds to the state police, with private banks also reporting to the Serious Fraud Investigation Office and the Ministry of Corporate Affairs, while public sector banks report frauds above Rs. 6 crore to the CBI, as usual.

In consortium lending, if separate offenses are committed, each member may file separate complaints; otherwise, one member can file a complaint with support from the others. In summary, the new RBI rule mandating a 21-day notice before classifying borrowers as frauds enhances borrowers' rights by allowing them to present their cases and defend against allegations, ensuring fair treatment. This rule will improve transparency, foster trust between borrowers and financial institutions, strengthen governance through board-approved risk management policies, and regulate and streamline the processes of borrowing and lending.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

THE PLIGHT OF GIG WORKERS

Madam — This letter addresses the plight of gig workers in our country. Gig workers are a pitiable lot. Regardless of the weather, they must fulfill their cus-

Defeating global warming



A well-defined quadrilateral encompassing solar, wind, green hydrogen, and nuclear clean energies as its four vertices is essential to effectively combat global warming and related weather catastrophes, which lead to loss of lives, assets, and properties. "Well-defined" means urgently establishing both global and national annual

targets for each of the four clean energy sources. What percentage should be allocated to solar energy? What percentage should be allocated to nuclear energy? And similarly, for wind and green hydrogen? Currently, the world lacks direction, resulting in slow progress towards achieving 100% clean energy and 0% carbon emissions. The "greater capacity" and "economic power" of nuclear energy, compared to the other three clean energies, cannot be ignored. Increasing the capacity of existing nuclear reactors is more economical than constructing new ones. It would be much better and safer if all nations signed a pact to use nuclear energy solely for peaceful purposes, such as generating clean energy and electricity, rather than for making bombs, weapons, and war paraphernalia.

PV Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

tomers' demands.

I used to wonder how much they earn by zipping and zapping on their bikes, risking their lives in India's urban jungle. My curiosity was answered when I saw a delivery boy working on a rainy day. The bags on his bike were covered with a plastic sheet, but he was drenched to the bone. Since then, I have made it a point to order via the "Cash on Delivery" mode, so that I can tip gig workers generously. Surprisingly, most of the time my tip is politely declined ("Arre sir, yeh to humara kaam hai") or accepted with reluctant embarrassment.

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

STRENGTHENING INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS

Madam — In the neighboring country of Nepal, which borders India to the east, west, and south, KP Sharma Oli's appointment as Prime Minister was met with congratulations from PM Modi. India and Nepal have shared a deep bilateral relationship since early days, but the abolition of the monarchy in

2008 introduced challenges. Enhancing trade, investment, and infrastructure development can provide mutual economic benefits. Joint ventures in hydropower projects and tourism can foster economic interdependence. Promoting cultural and educational exchanges can strengthen people-to-people connections, building a stronger foundation for bilateral ties. Short-sighted and selfish politicians sought to please China, which exploited the situation.

The Modi government must provide aid to Nepal and invigorate the relationship more than ever before, ensuring that Nepal does not feel the need to turn towards China, which would harm India's interests. India must infuse new energy into its relationship with Nepal, ensuring that both nations work together for mutual growth and regional stability.

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

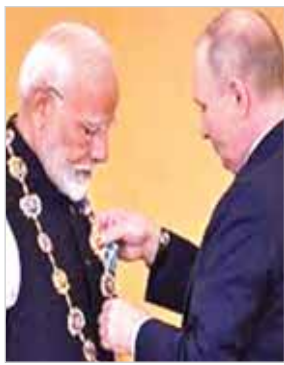
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Defying the Western pressure, India prioritises national interests

Prime Minister Modi's visit to Moscow highlights significant gains for India on strategic, economic, and diplomatic fronts, despite Western reservations

Despite a concerted campaign by the US and Western countries to isolate Russia following its 2022 invasion of Ukraine, several nations, including India, have prioritized their national interests. This has allowed President Putin to bolster Russia's economy, with India's \$65 billion worth of crude oil imports playing a crucial role in mitigating the impact of US-imposed sanctions. India maintains close strategic ties with the United States, yet it has become the second-largest importer of Russian crude oil after China. This alignment with Russia serves as a counterbalance to US influence. In recognition of this support, President Putin awarded Prime Minister Modi the Order of St. Andrew.

The US, as expected, reacted by urging India to ensure that any resolution to the Ukraine conflict respects the UN charter and Ukraine's territorial integrity. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller emphasised the importance of these principles in international engagements with



Russia. In this context, experts view Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow through multiple lenses, highlighting significant gains for India on strategic, economic, and diplomatic fronts: India's geopolitical strategy significantly revolves around balancing China's rising influence. Strengthening ties with Russia serves as a counterbalance to China's aggressive posturing in the region. The visit underscored mutual interests in ensuring a multipolar world order, acting as a strategic buffer against unilateral actions by any major power, including China.

Strategic Gains:

A key highlight of Modi's visit was the reinforcement of India-Russia defense ties. Historically, Russia has been one of India's most reliable defense partners. Discussions around the S-400 missile defense system and potential future collaborations in defense technology were central to the visit, enhancing India's military capabilities and contributing to regional stability. Western sanctions against Russia have led it to seek stronger ties with non-Western countries, including India. Both India and Russia advocate for a multipolar world order, balancing US influence. Modi's visit reflects India's independent foreign policy, maintaining strong ties with both the US and Russia.

Energy security is a cornerstone of India's economic policy, and Russia plays a critical role with its vast oil and natural gas reserves. Modi's visit focused on long-term supply agreements, investments in energy infrastructure, and collaboration in nuclear energy projects, ensuring a stable and diversified energy supply for India. Boosting bilateral trade and investment was another focal point. Despite historical ties, trade volumes between India and Russia have not reached their full potential. The visit aimed to address this by exploring new trade avenues in sectors like pharmaceuticals, information technology, and agriculture, promising long-term benefits for both economies. Modi's visit signifies a reaffirmation of traditional alliances. Reinforcing ties with Russia offers India a more balanced foreign policy amidst the US's increasingly transactional approach. The visit likely included discussions on expanding cooperation in space exploration and nuclear technology, fostering innovations that benefit both nations. Cybersecurity is crucial in the digital age. Modi's visit likely explored collaboration in these fields, ensuring both nations can safeguard their digital infrastructures and harness economic benefits.

(Writer is a political analyst; views expressed are personal)



K S TOMAR



FIRST COLUMN TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

Accepting events as they happen brings a great sense of calmness



RAVI VALLURI

Aeons ago in ancient China lived an old farmer who worked on his land for several years. One day his horse ran away. Upon hearing the news, a group of neighbours came to commiserate with him. "Such misfortune," the agitated group of villagers reacted. "Maybe," the farmer replied nonchalantly. A few days later the horse returned, accompanied by three wild horses. Another group of villagers approached the house of the agriculturist to sympathise. "Maybe," replied the aged farmer.

The following day, the farmer's son tried to mount one of the untamed horses and was thrown off. The strapping youngster broke his leg. The overwrought neighbours once again queued up to offer their sympathies at this misadventure. "Maybe," was the desultory answer yet again. A few days later some military personnel swooped on the village to draft young men. Looking at the incapacitated stripling, he was disqualified from being recruited. The exuberant neighbours congratulated the old grazier on the turn of events. "Maybe," was the laconic reply yet again. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar has succinctly elucidated the significance of the aphorism, 'to accept people and situations as they are' in his teachings.

The 4 Ds of Abnormal Behaviour

Abnormal behaviour can be construed as behaviour that is disturbing (socially unacceptable), distressing, maladaptive (or self-defeating) and often the result of distorted thoughts (cognitions) as per Wikipedia. There are four strains in this abnormal behaviour. These are deviance, dysfunction, distress, and danger. Deviant behaviour is usually different, extreme, and unusual and could even include bizarre behavioural patterns. The second in the series is distressing behaviour.

People who are related to such individuals feel unpleasant and unsettled in their presence. Dysfunctional behaviour discommodates the patient to such an extent that it acts as a deterrent in his day-to-day functioning and behaviour and interferes with his range of activities. Five specific patterns of anxiety disorders fall into this category. The first is termed General Anxiety Disorder. This is a prolonged, vague, quite inexplicable fear having no objective basis, accompanied by hypervigilance, and attached motor tension of the brain. Next is what in quotidian parlance



is called panic disorder. These are none other than perpetual and frequent anxiety attacks which are accompanied by psychological symptoms such as breathlessness, palpitations, a trembling feeling, dizziness and even a sense of total loss of control over the self.

Next in the line of mental disorders are phobias. Humans have irrational phobias such as Acrophobia (fear of heights), Glossophobia (fear of addressing an audience), Claustrophobia (fear of enclosed spaces), and Aviophobia (fear of flying). In such situations, a human being is preoccupied with a wide range of thoughts, which are normally irrational. Last, but no less distressing – on this ill-fated checklist is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). These individuals suffer repeated and recurrent nightmares, flashbacks, impaired concentration, and emotional numbing which invariably follows traumatic or stressful events. Our country is plagued by three major issues namely, addictions, women's issues, and psychological disorders. Generally, citizens approach tantriks, babas, and quacks hoping for a miraculous cure. It is paramount to meet a qualified medical practitioner. The first step to recovery is medication under the expert guidance of a doctor. Next, after a period of treatment, it would be prudent to contact self-help groups, which sustain the treatment. For instance, undergoing the Happiness Course of the Art of Living, where one learns the Sudarshan Kriya breathing technique which harmonises the body and thought. "No matter how hard the past, you can always begin again," said Gautama Buddha.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; views are personal)

Focus on employment, innovation and skill



DINESH SOOD

The Union Budget 2024 must factor in rising unemployment and need for innovation for boosting the economy and sustaining economic growth



The upcoming Union Budget on July 23 will shed light on initiatives that may reshape economic priorities under the Modi3.0 government. Amid various expectations and commitments, the government's focus on skills, employment, and innovation emerges as a key strategy in addressing current challenges and shaping future opportunities. The decision to rename the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development to include livelihood emphasizes a shift to provide employable skills to the most vulnerable 67 per cent of the country's underprivileged population.

Placing skill development ahead of employment underscores a proactive approach to addressing the issue of a shortage of skilled workforce, especially in the health & wellness, manufacturing, and technology sectors. This not only recognizes the immediate need for a trained workforce but also positions skill development as a key driver for sustainable employment generation.

As the Budget approaches, stakeholders across sectors eagerly await concrete measures that go beyond mere promises and lead to tangible outcomes. The effectiveness of these initiatives in translating into job creation, technological innovation, and sustainable economic growth will be carefully scrutinized. The government's steadfast commitment to enhancing skills holds the promise of unleashing India's potential as a global economic powerhouse in the years ahead.

The rebranding and revitalization of the 15-year-old National Skill Development Mission (NSDM) as the Skill India Mission under PM Narendra Modi has sparked concerns about the effectiveness of the ambitious Skill India program. This program has received support from two governments over 15 years — first the UPA and then the NDA. India is in the midst of an urgent unemployment crisis due to an employment



SKILL INDIA WAS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT UNSKILLED YOUNG PEOPLE AND EQUIP THEM FOR THE JOB MARKET, BUT UNEMPLOYMENT RATES REMAIN HIGH

deficit. Issues such as the delayed implementation of PMKVY 3.0 and lack of placement support are exacerbating this problem. The latest data underlines the severity of India's unemployment crisis, making it crucial to prioritize employment generation to confront the challenges facing the Indian economy, especially with a significant number of young people entering the working age each month.

In July 2015, PM Modi stated that "Skill India aims to build self-confidence among the underprivileged, rather than just providing jobs". However, nearly a decade later, the youth's interest in the program seems to be waning. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship has implemented strict attendance monitoring and centralized student information. Unfortunately, this has led to a decline in student retention, with many dropping out due to the rigid attendance requirements. Skill India was designed to attract unskilled young people and equip them for the job market, but unemployment rates remain high. Data from the International Labour Organization reveals that the proportion of educated unemployed individuals has risen sharply from 35.2% in 2000 to 65.7% in 2023. Established in 2014, the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship absorbed the NSDC and other programs to train 300 million people by 2024. Despite partnering with various organizations and raising awareness, the programs have not been as effective as envisioned. Experts argue that even traditional degrees do not guarantee employment, and the education system is outdated and not job-focused. Only a small percentage

of candidates certified by the PMKVY program have found jobs, indicating a fundamental challenge with the current skilling initiatives. Boosting skilling programs and industry partnerships is an urgent necessity to create ongoing skilling avenues and improve employability for school dropouts, and unskilled, or semi-skilled workers who need to secure a livelihood.

Although the announcement of setting up 75 skilling e-labs for simulated learning in the 2022-23 Union Budget is a positive move, we must recognize that our problem is far-reaching. API-based trusted skill credentials and discovery layers to find relevant jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities won't suffice beyond a certain point, necessitating an urgent need to skill the masses and empower the country's youths. We must acknowledge that over 40% of Indians aged 15 to 24 are neither in education, employment, or training, which is significantly higher than the South Asian (30%) and global (24%) averages. Indian firms report substantial skill shortages compared to other countries, and they assess only about 46% of graduates as employable.

The majority of students lack the necessary skills, and the skills they do possess are not aligned with the needs of their employers. Every year, more than 12 million young people in India become employable, yet we are unable to absorb them into the workforce. Many of these individuals hold higher education degrees, but they lack the necessary employable skills. The India Skills Report (ISR) 2024 highlights that only 50.3% of graduates from higher education institutions are deemed employable. A skill gap study conducted

by the NSDC during 2010-14 indicates that by 2025, India will need nearly 109.7 million additional skilled workers across various sectors. While the government's interventions in promoting skill development are commendable, more needs to be done to bridge the skill gaps. Wish List: In the 2024-25 Union Budget, it is crucial to prioritize upskilling initiatives for gig workers, due to the eight-fold increase in young people's participation in the gig economy from 2019 to 2023, the majority of these youth come from Tier-I and Tier-II cities and rural areas.

While the government is working to make employable skills more accessible through public-private partnerships, there is a need to facilitate and incentivize the establishment of more skill development universities to steer the youth, especially undergraduates towards skills. This will help align the skill courses with global standards and significantly enhance the youth's skills, contributing to the nation's workforce development. I strongly urge a significant budget allocation to provide employable skills, particularly to school dropouts on a priority basis. This will not only empower them but also significantly contribute to the growth of the Indian economy, aiming to reach \$7 trillion by 2030 and position India as the world's third-largest economy.

(The writer is Co-Founder and MD, of Orane International, a Training Partner with the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC), and a Network Member of India International Skill Centres.; Views expressed are personal)

Kerala: Beyond the well-crafted image of a tidy, literate State

Behind its progressive facades lies a struggle with industrial stagnation, healthcare shortcomings, and a surprising reliance on superstition

The assumption among the people outside Kerala is that it is the most literate, intelligent and hygienic State in the country. The ruling CPI(M) leaves no stone unturned to portray it as the land of people with a scientific temper and is the numero uno in all spheres of life. There are no countries in the world where you will not find expatriate Malayalees. S.K Pottekkadu, the best travel writer the State has produced in the last 150 years has written articulately about the Keralites whom he met in South Africa and Rhodesia (present-day Zimbabwe) even in the days when there were no diplomatic ties between India and these countries. The modern-day reality of Kerala is entirely different and far from



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

what is projected by the CPI(M). Malayalees are leaving en masse from Kerala to Europe, Australia, the USA, Canada, Latin America, Africa and of course the West Asian countries in search of livelihood and for higher studies. There are no major industries worth their names in the State other than some public sector companies like FACT, Cochin Refineries and Cochin Shipyard. Industrialists and entrepreneurs have translocated

their enterprises to neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The claim by Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and his minister of health Veena George that the State is a role model in health care and well-being for the rest of the country and the world is a great joke. The chief minister boards the first available flight to the USA whenever he is afflicted with the common cold. Recently, a four-year-old girl was admitted to Government Medical College Hospital in Kozhikode for the removal of her sixth finger. However, the doctor who performed the surgery operated on her tongue while leaving the finger untouched. Though her parents alerted the hospi-

tal authorities, the initial reaction was denial of the faux pas by the latter. Remember, the Kozhikode Medical College and Hospital is a most sought-after institution by prospective medical students! This is not an isolated incident as such things happen quite regularly in the State's government hospitals. The doctors have their justification for such mistakes. Most of them say they are overworked and underpaid. When they work under pressure, such errors are bound to happen, claim the doctors! The aim of this column is not to embarrass the doctors or their minister of health who was a mere news reader in one of the many TV news channels that have mushroomed in the State over the last two decades.

The recent controversy about sorcerers digging out (or mining?) copper plates, miniature artefacts and bones of some birds like hens or ducks from the residence and office of K Sudhakaran MP who is president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee is an issue that shows the large scale obscurantism prevailing among the descendants of Jawaharlal Nehru, the wholesale dealer of scientific temper. According to sources close to Sudhakaran, the sorcery was the handiwork of people in the party itself who wanted to see the KPCC chief remain in bed for the rest of his life. There are black magicians across Kerala who have the "expertise" to neutralize one's enemies or help you to become a minister or even chief min-

ister! This is not an exaggerated statement as this writer himself has spoken to a sorcerer who was into this kind of business for decades. When Oommen Chandi was the chief minister (2011-2016), there was this Congress leader who felt left out during the formation of the UDF Government. When his efforts to become a minister failed, he approached a sorcerer from Malabar who offered the former to make him a minister and that too with a plum portfolio by performing puja. The sorcerer said that witchcraft had to be done and it would cost the politician Rs 12 lakh and the latter accepted the proposal with glee. The magician rang up this writer and said that the puja would begin the next morning

and the politician would become the minister in three months. Presto, in three months, the politician was sworn in as a minister with a coveted portfolio! The story did not end there. The sorcerer was not paid the promised money and he had to warn the politician that he had the know-how to get the minister dismissed from the government. Last heard, the politician (nay, minister) hushed up the issue by paying half the amount he had agreed to pay earlier. Politicians cheating the electorate is quite common but hoodwinking even wizards and warlocks is new information. Sorcery and black magic are not confined to Kerala. They are a global phenomenon with even our Dravidian politi-

cians who swear by rationalism seeking guidance from astrologers, wizards and sorcerers for survival. Some of the countries that played in the World Cup football championship in the 1970s and 1980s used to have an official sorcerer for the team. His mission is to perform witchcraft near the rival team's goalposts to ensure that the ball enters the post without failure! If you feel that sorcery is restricted to politics, business and sports, you are mistaken, Sir. There are many instances of it being used by scientific researchers in the US and Russia. Wait for another occasion.

(The writer is special correspondent with The Pioneer; views expressed are personal)

Nikky Haley 'strongly endorses' Trump

PTI ■ MILWAUKEE

Indian-American Republican leader Nikky Haley has endorsed her former boss Donald Trump as the party's candidate for the presidential election, delivering the message of unity after their bitter rivalry during the primaries.

Haley, 52, unsuccessfully challenged Trump for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination and spent months sparring with the former president. But last week, she instructed her 97 delegates to vote for Trump at the convention as she called for unity in the party.

"I'll start by making one thing perfectly clear: Donald Trump has my strong endorsement, period," Haley said Tuesday as she addressed the Republican National Convention here during which the party will nominate Trump as its presidential candidate.

Haley, who was the only Republican leader to have seriously challenged Trump during the bruising campaign primaries, told thousands of delegates and party leaders that Trump is the best bet for the country and that the Republicans are united to defeat incumbent President Joe Biden.

"Let us join together as a party. Let us come together as a people — as one country — strong and proud. Let us show our children and the world that



even on our worst day, we are blessed to live in America," said the former South Carolina governor and the US Ambassador to the United Nations.

As Trump, 78, watched on from the convention centre's VIP suite, Haley used her speech to defend the former president's foreign policy record and speak directly to voters who disagree with him on certain issues.

"There are some Americans who don't agree with Donald Trump 100% of the time," she said. "My message to them is simple: You don't have to agree with Trump 100% of the time to vote for him."

"Our country is at a critical moment. We have a choice to make. For more than a year, I said a vote for Joe Biden is a vote for President Kamala Harris. After seeing the debate, everyone knows it's true," Haley

said. "If we have four more years of Biden... or a single day of Harris... our country will be badly worse off. For the sake of our nation, we have to go with Donald Trump," Haley said.

Trump was present at the convention centre when she spoke. Trump and his running mate Senator JD Vance gave a standing ovation to Haley when she started her speech and endorsed him.

"Our foreign enemies win when they see Americans hate each other. They see that today, whether it's on college campuses or in a field in Butler, Pennsylvania. But we can conquer those fears with strength and unity," she said.

"Our fellow Americans are fearful right now. Families are suffering from inflation and wages that don't keep up with prices. Young people are being

indoctrinated to think our country is racist and evil. The Jewish community is facing an obscene rise in antisemitism. Too many minorities are trapped in communities devastated by crime," she said.

She said no president can fix all problems alone.

"We have to do this together. America has an amazing ability to self-correct. At this moment, we have a chance to put aside our differences and focus on what unites us and strengthens our country," Haley said.

"We must not only be a unified party. We must also expand our party. We are so much better when we are bigger. We are stronger when we welcome people into our party who have different backgrounds and experiences. And right now, we need to be strong, to save America. This is a defining moment, not only for our party but for our country," said the popular Indian-American leader.

Haley said under Donald Trump, the US didn't have the border disaster being faced today.

"And we won't when he is president again," she said.

"Under Joe Biden, migrants are coming into our country by the thousands every day. We have no idea who they are, where they end up, or what they plan to do," she said.

Biden, she alleged, lifted the sanctions on Iran.

Iran rejects accusations

AP ■ TEHRAN

Iran has rejected accusations regarding plots to assassinate former US President Donald Trump, while citing legal action for the 2020 assassination of a revered general by US drone, the state-run IRNA news agency reported Wednesday.

IRNA quoted Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani as saying Iran "strongly rejects any involvement in the recent armed attack on Trump or claims about Iran's intention for such an action."

Kanaani added, "The Islamic Republic of Iran is determined to pursue legal action against Trump for his direct role in the crime of assassinating Martyr General Qassem Soleimani." Soleimani was the commander of the Iranian Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Quds Force and was killed in a U.S. drone attack in Baghdad in January 2020.

A threat on Trump's life from Iran prompted additional security in the days before Saturday's campaign rally, but it was unrelated to the assassination attempt on the Republican presidential nominee, two US officials said Tuesday.

Traces of cyanide in blood of 6 dead Bangkok hotel guests

AP ■ BANGKOK

Doctors who performed autopsies on the six Bangkok hotel guests who died mysteriously confirmed Wednesday that they had traces of cyanide in their blood.

Dr. Kornkiat Vongpaisarnsin, head of the forensic medicine department at Chulalongkorn University's medical school, said at a news conference that a CAT scan showed no signs of blunt force trauma on the dead, reinforcing the hypothesis that they had been poisoned.

Police found traces of cyanide in the cups of six Vietnamese and American guests at a central Bangkok luxury hotel and one of them is believed to have poisoned the others over a bad investment, Thai authorities said Wednesday.

The bodies were found Tuesday in the Grand Hyatt Erawan Bangkok, a landmark at a central intersection in the capital busy with malls, government buildings and public transit. The six had last been seen alive when food was delivered to the room Monday afternoon. The staff saw one woman receive the food, and security footage showed the rest arriving one by one shortly after. There were no other visitors, no one was seen leaving and the door was locked. A maid found them Tuesday afternoon when they failed to check out of the room.

Lt. Gen. Trairong Piwpan, chief of the Thai police force's forensic division, said there were traces of cyanide in the cups and thermoses that police found in the room, but initial results of an autopsy were expected later Wednesday.

Bangkok police chief Lt. Gen. Thiti Sangsawang identified the dead as two Vietnamese Americans and four Vietnamese nationals, and said they were three men and three women. Their ages ranged from 37 to 56, according to Noppasin Punsawat, Bangkok deputy police chief. He said the case appeared to be personal and would not impact the safety of tourists.

A husband and wife among the dead had invested money with two of the others, suggesting that money could be a motive, said Noppasin, citing information obtained from relatives of the victims. The investment was meant to build a hospital in Japan and the group might have been meeting to settle the matter. Bangkok police chief Lt. Gen. Thiti Sangsawang said Tuesday that four bodies were in the living room and two in the bedroom. He said two of them appeared to try to reach for the door but collapsed before they could.

Noppasin said Wednesday that a seventh person whose name was part of the hotel booking was a sibling of one of the six

and left Thailand on July 10. Police believe the seventh person had no involvement in the deaths.

The Vietnamese and United States embassies have been contacted over the deaths, and the American FBI was en route, Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin said.

He said the case would likely not affect a conference with Russian Energy Minister Sergei Tsiviliev at the hotel later Wednesday. "This wasn't an act of terrorism or a breach in security. Everything is fine," he said.

Trairong said a mass suicide was unlikely because some of the victims had arranged future parts of their trip, such as guides and drivers. He added that the bodies being in different parts of the hotel room suggested they did not knowingly consume poison and wait for their deaths together.

US State Dept. spokesman Matthew Miller in Washington offered condolences to the families of the victims. He said the US is closely monitoring the situation and would communicate with local authorities. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Thai counterpart on Tuesday, but Miller said he thought that call happened before the deaths were reported and he didn't know if it came up in their conversation.

Won't stop telling the truth about Trump: Biden

AP ■ DUBAI

President Joe Biden returned to the campaign trail Tuesday for the first time since the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump, continuing his call to calm the divisive rhetoric on both sides, but also arguing that doing so "doesn't mean we should stop telling the truth" as he tore into his Republican rival.

Addressing the NAACP convention in Las Vegas, Biden said addressing political violence in the country should mean curbing all kinds of bloodshed — including better combating police brutality and banning weapons like the AR-style rifle used in the weekend attack on Trump.

"It's time for an important conversation in this country. Our politics have become too heated," Biden said. That didn't stop him from list-

ing why Trump's administration was "hell" for Black Americans, including the former president's mishandling of the coronavirus pandemic, skyrocketing unemployment amid early lockdowns and attempts to, as Biden put it, erase Black history.

"Just because we must lower the temperature in our politics as it relates to violence doesn't mean we should stop telling the truth," Biden told the crowd that often broke into chants of "Four more years!"

The president is aiming to showcase his administration's support for Black voters who are a tentpole of the Democratic coalition and of his personal political support. As part of his swing in Nevada, he'll also participate in an interview with BET and address the Hispanic advocacy group UnidosUS, another crucial Democratic-leaning bloc. For the NAACP crowd, Biden



seized on Trump recently referencing "Black jobs," drawing big applause by joking, "I love the phrase."

"I know what a Black job is. It's the vice president of the United States," Biden said of Vice President Kamala Harris, who he added "could be president." He also referenced Barack Obama as the nation's first Black president, and his own appointment to the Supreme Court of its first Black and

female justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Biden's trip comes as Democrats have been engaged in a weeks-long crisis of confidence over his candidacy after his devastating debate with Trump last month. The president's shaky performance inflamed voter concerns about his age, fitness for office and capacity to defeat Trump once again.

Republicans, for their part, are demonstrating that they are more coalesced than ever around Trump amid their national convention in Milwaukee.

The 81-year-old Biden has rejected a flurry of calls from within his party to step aside, restating his belief that he is the best-positioned Democrat to beat Trump. He has relied heavily on his support among Black and Latino elected officials, and was set to appear with many of them in Nevada.

The president made indirect reference to unrest in his own party on Tuesday, recalling President Harry S Truman famously saying, "If you want a friend in Washington, get a dog."

"After the last couple of weeks, I know what he means," Biden said. He said later, "hopefully, with age, comes a little bit of wisdom."

Biden also promised that in the first 100 days of a second term he would oversee congressional approval of a dramatic expansion of voting rights — something he's been unable to do as president so far. He also renewed earlier promises to "end medical debt," saying he was working with states to settle outstanding bills for care for "pennies on the dollar."

"I know the good Lord hasn't brought us this far to leave us now," Biden told the convention, offering overtly religious tones.

Two attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels strike ships in Red Sea

AP ■ DUBAI

Two attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted ships in the Red Sea on Monday as a new US aircraft carrier approached the region to provide security for the key international trade route that has been under assault since the Israel-Hamas war erupted nine months ago.

Three small Houthi vessels, two of which were crewed and another uncrewed, attacked the Panama-flagged and Israeli-owned MT Bently I off the coast of Al Hudaydah, Yemen, according to British and American authorities.

The "reported unmanned small craft collided with the vessel twice and the 2 manned small craft fired at the vessel," the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade

Operations centre reported. "The vessel conducted self-protection measures, after 15 minutes the small craft aborted the attack."

The captain later reported three separate waves of missile attacks that exploded in close proximity to the vessel. Later on Monday, in a separate incident off the same coast, the MT Chios Lion, a Liberian-flagged and Marshall Islands-owned oil tanker, was attacked by an uncrewed Houthi aerial vehicle, which "impacted on the port side causing some damage and light smoke," the UKMTO said.

Both ships and all crew were reported safe, the UKMTO said in a warning to mariners. Late Monday, the Houthis claimed responsibility for the attacks on Bently I and Chios Lion.

Early Tuesday, the US Central Command confirmed the attacks and identified the names and flags of the ship.

"This continued reckless behaviour by the Iranian-backed Houthis threatens regional stability and endangers the lives of mariners across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden," a Central Command statement said.

"The Houthis claim to be acting on behalf of Palestinians in Gaza and yet they are targeting and threatening the lives of third country nationals who have nothing to do with the conflict in Gaza."

Also on Monday, the Central Command said US forces destroyed five uncrewed Houthi aerial vehicles, three over the Red Sea and two in Houthi-controlled areas of Yemen.

Israel's military will begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men on Sunday

AP ■ JERUSALEM

The Israeli military on Tuesday said it would begin sending draft notices to Jewish ultra-Orthodox men on Sunday — a step that could destabilise Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government.

The announcement followed a landmark Supreme Court order for young religious men to begin enlisting for military service. Under long-standing political arrangements, ultra-Orthodox men had been exempt from the draft, which is compulsory for most Jewish men.

The exemptions created resentment among the general public in Israel, especially

after more than nine months of war against Hamas militants in Gaza. The army summons is the beginning of a months-long enlistment process that could be difficult to enforce if there is large-scale refusal to comply. The army did not say when it expects ultra-Orthodox men to begin serving or how many it expects to enlist.

The court ruled that the system of exemptions, which allow religious men to study in Jewish seminaries while others are forced to serve in the army, was discriminatory. Ultra-Orthodox leaders say religious study is equally important for the country's future and that their generations-old way of life will be

threatened if their followers serve in the army.

Netanyahu's government relies on the support of ultra-Orthodox parties that oppose changes to the system. Religious leaders have not said what steps they will take. If they leave the ruling coalition, the government would likely topple and the country would be plunged into early elections two years ahead of schedule. Past attempts to enlist ultra-Orthodox men have triggered mass protests in ultra-Orthodox communities. Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox men blocked a main highway in central Israel for several hours on Tuesday in the ultra-Orthodox city of Bnei Brak, near Tel Aviv. Police on horse-

back pushed the crowd back, and officers dragged protesters away. Police said nine people were arrested.

"The army is not an army for fighting. It's an army with indoctrination" against religion, said Yona Kay, a protester. "Therefore our children, our boys — and I have a son over here — will not go to the army, not for one minute."

On Monday night, dozens of ultra-Orthodox surrounded the cars of senior military commanders who were meeting with local rabbis in Bnei Brak to discuss an ultra-Orthodox unit in the army. The crowd threatened the officers, calling them "murderers" and throwing bottles, according to Israeli media.

Not enough info on Covid-19 vaccine deals shared with public: EU court

AP ■ BRUSSELS

The European Commission did not allow the public enough access to information about COVID-19 vaccine purchase agreements it secured with pharmaceutical companies during the pandemic, the EU general court said Wednesday.

The decision came a day ahead of a vote at the European Parliament at which European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is seeking reelection.

A group of EU lawmakers had taken legal action after the Commission refused to grant them complete access to COVID-19 vaccine contracts secured between the EU's executive arm and manufacturers. The pandemic shed light on the

issue of transparency surrounding the negotiations for vaccines between the EU and big pharmaceutical groups. The EU Commission was mandated by member countries to organize the joint procure-



ment of vaccines during the pandemic and led negotiations with manufacturers. According to the court, the procurement of vaccines on

behalf of all 27 member states allowed the bloc to quickly gather 2.7 billion euros (\$2.95 billion) to place an order for more than a billion doses of vaccines.

In 2021, some members of the European Parliament asked for the full details of the agreements, but the Commission only agreed to provide partial access to certain contracts and documents, which were placed online in redacted versions. It also refused to say how much it paid for the billions of doses it secured, arguing that contracts were protected for confidentiality reasons.

In a statement, the court said that "the Commission did not take sufficient account of all the relevant circumstances in order to weigh up correctly the interests at issue."

Post violence, Bangladesh asks all universities to close down

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Authorities in Bangladesh urged all universities to close on Wednesday, after at least six people died in violent protests over the allocation of government jobs.

Some universities quickly moved to comply, but others, including the major university at the center of the violence, were still deciding how to respond.

The University Grants Commission asked all public and private universities to suspend classes and empty their dormitories until further notice, in order to protect students. The country's universities are run autonomously and the request did not have legal force.

Authorities said that at least six people were killed on Tuesday in violence across the country as student protesters clashed with pro-government student activists and with police, and violence was reported around the capital of Dhaka, the southeastern city of Chattogram and the northern city of Rangpur.

On Wednesday, stray protests took place at Dhaka University and elsewhere in the country. Police were deployed on the campus, while paramilitary border forces patrolled the streets in Dhaka and other big cities.

The protests began late last month, demanding an end to a quota that reserves 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans of Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence in 1971, but turned violent on Monday as protesters clashed with counter-protesters and police at Dhaka University, leaving 100 people injured.

Court voids US Marine's adoption of Afghan orphan

AP ■ WASHINGTON

A Virginia appellate court ruled Tuesday that a US Marine should never have been granted an adoption of an Afghan war orphan and voided the custody order he's relied on to raise the girl for nearly three years. The decision marked a major turning point in a bitter custody battle that has international ramifications far greater than the fate of one child.

The appeals court decision dealt a significant blow to Marine Maj. Joshua Mast's years-long legal quest to keep the child, who was orphaned on the battlefield in Afghanistan in 2019.

Mast and his wife, Stephanie, convinced the courts in his hometown, rural Fluvanna County, Virginia, to grant him an adoption of the child, even

though she remained in Afghanistan as the government there tracked down her extended family and reunited her with them.

The family fled Afghanistan with thousands of other evacuees when the Taliban took over in the summer of 2021. Once she arrived in the United States, Mast used the Fluvanna County documents to convince federal government officials to take the child from her Afghan relatives and give her to him. She turns five years old this month. The Masts have insisted they are her legal parents and "acted admirably" to save a child in a desperate and dangerous situation. The Afghan family, who challenged Mast's adoption, have not seen her for nearly three years. The child's fate is still in limbo: The decision by the appellate court Tuesday does not clarify

who should ultimately get to raise the girl, and she remains with the Mast family for now. No government agencies involved would clarify Tuesday what the next steps might entail, or what their role might be in determining where the child should live as the remaining legal fight unfolds.

The Masts could appeal to the Virginia Supreme Court and ask that Tuesday's decision not be enforced through that process.

All the parties involved have been forbidden by the court to speak to the press about this case. Attorneys for the Masts and the Afghan couple did not return phone calls. A lawyer appointed by the court to represent the interests of the child, who is referred to in court records as Baby Doe to protect her identity, also did not respond.



Several legal organisations supporting the Afghan couple said they were encouraged. National Centre for Youth Law senior attorney Becky Wolozin said that by "clearly stating that the Masts have no legal rights over Baby Doe, the Court refused to legitimise

their unlawful actions — actions which have led to profound and unnecessary suffering," Charlottesville Circuit Court Judge Claude Worrell last May vacated Mast's adoption order, which was granted by another judge in 2020, but left in place a custody order that allowed the child to stay with the Masts. A three-judge appellate panel heard arguments in the fall, and issued a 23-page order Tuesday that dissolved Mast's legal guardianship over the girl.

Appellate Judge Daniel E Ortiz wrote in Tuesday's order that Mast's adoption "did not fit into any" of the criteria required by state law. He said the "procedural errors" that led to it were "so outside the scope of the adoption code that the circuit court lacked the power" to sign the adoption. He also acknowledged

that Mast failed to inform the court of key developments, including that the government of Afghanistan never gave up its claim to the girl, that she had been given to Afghan relatives and that a federal court had already rebuffed his efforts to stop that reunification.

How exactly the court justified granting the Marine the adoption in the first place remains shrouded in secrecy. The Associated Press filed in court to get the case unsealed. In January 2023, Worrell granted that request, ordering the case opened to the public. But more than 18 months later, the court continues to keep the entire file hidden despite numerous letters sent by lawyers representing The Associated Press.

The appellate panel directed the circuit court to dismiss all

adoption proceedings and conduct a hearing on the Afghan couple's adoption petition, which is currently pending before the court. The Masts may file their own petition as well, Ortiz wrote.

Retired Circuit Court Judge Richard Moore, who issued the original adoption order, declined to comment on the case. The US government has insisted in court that Mast never had any claim to this child, and that she be returned immediately to her Afghan family. Justice Department lawyers have written that allowing the child to remain with the Marine could have broad consequences for American foreign policy: from threatening international security pacts to endangering troops stationed abroad by feeding Islamic extremist propaganda.

Pak delivers strong demarche to Afghanistan over terror attack

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan on Wednesday lodged a strong protest with the Afghan interim government over the deadly terrorist attack this week at a key military cantonment, reiterating its call for "decisive action" against militants hiding in the neighbouring nation. The terror attack on the Bannu Cantonment in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province on Monday killed eight soldiers and injured many others. Security forces also killed all 10 terrorists who launched the attack at the major military cantonment. The terrorists' failed attempt to attack the facility forced them to ram an explosive-laden vehicle into the perimeter wall of the cantonment, leading to the collapse of a portion of the wall and damaging the adjoining infrastructure. The Deputy Head of Mission of the Afghan embassy, Sardar Muhammad Shakib, was summoned to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to "deliver Pakistan's strong demarche over the deadly terrorist attack", the Foreign Office said in a statement on Wednesday. "The Bannu Cantonment attack is yet another reminder of the serious threat posed by terrorism to regional peace and security," it said. "Pakistan reiterates the call for decisive action against terrorism and remains steadfast in its commitment to combat this menace and to uphold its security against all threats," it said. The Foreign Office said the terrorist attack was carried out by the Hafiz Gul Bahadur Group based in Afghanistan, which, along with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of civilians and law enforcement officials in multiple terrorist attacks inside Pakistan. It urged the interim Afghan government to fully investigate and take immediate, robust

and effective action against the perpetrators of the Bannu attack and prevent the recurrence of such attacks against Pakistan using the territory of Afghanistan. The Foreign Office said such incidents also go against the spirit of bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. It also reiterated serious concerns over the presence of terrorist outfits inside Afghanistan that continue to threaten Pakistan's security. Pakistan has consistently raised its concerns with the interim Afghan government, asking them to deny the persistent use of Afghan soil by the terrorists and take effective action against such elements. But so far, little has been done as Kabul rejects the presence of terrorists on its soil. Pakistan has witnessed an increase in terrorist activities over the past year, particularly in regions like Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan,

following the cessation of a ceasefire between the government and the banned TTP militant group in November 2022. Last week, Islamabad reiterated its stance against engaging in talks with the TTP and called for Kabul's action against terrorists operating from Afghan territory. According to the Centre for Research and Security Studies' annual security report, violence and casualties in Pakistan saw a notable decline in the second quarter of 2024. The report said there was a 12 per cent reduction in overall violence, with 380 fatalities reported compared to 432 in the preceding quarter. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan were identified as the epicentres of violence, accounting for over 90 per cent of fatalities and 84 per cent of all attacks involving both terrorist incidents and security force responses.

Indian killed in attack on Oman mosque

PTI ■ DUBAI/MUSCAT

Among six people killed in a rare shooting attack by Islamic State militant group near a Shia Muslim mosque in Oman's capital. The shooting on Monday night near the Imam Ali Mosque also claimed the lives of one policeman and four Pakistan nationals, while injuring 28 others. "Following the shooting incident reported in Muscat city on July 15, Foreign Ministry of Sultanate of Oman has informed that one Indian national has lost his life & another is injured," Embassy of India in Muscat posted on X Tuesday. "Embassy offers its sincere condolences & stands ready to offer all assistance to the families," it said. The three attackers were also killed by security forces during the incident in the al-Wadi al-Kabir area on Monday night, according to a statement. Pakistan said four Pakistanis were among those killed.

Nepal PM Oli to seek vote of confidence on Sunday

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's newly appointed Prime Minister K P Sharma Oli will take a vote of confidence in Parliament on July 21, as required by the Constitution, a media report quoted the chief whip of his party as saying on Wednesday. The 72-year-old veteran leader was sworn in on Monday as the Himalayan nation's prime minister for the fourth time. Prime Minister Oli decided to take a vote of confidence on Sunday, MyRepublica news portal reported, quoting Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) Chief Whip Mahesh Bertaulla. According to Nepal's Constitution, Oli needs to secure a vote of confidence from Parliament within 30 days of appointment, which he is likely to secure easily, as the minimum number to form a government in the 275-strong House of Representatives

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(HoR) is just 138. The leader of Nepal's largest communist party was appointed as prime minister on Sunday by President Ram Chandra Paudel to lead the coalition government with the Nepali Congress (NC), the largest party in Parliament, apart from other smaller parties. Oli succeeds Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost the vote of confidence in the HoR last week, leading to the formation of the new government. The CPN-UML Chairman now leads the new coalition govern-

ment that faces the daunting challenge of providing political stability in the Himalayan nation. Nepal has faced frequent political turmoil as the country has seen 14 governments in the past 16 years after the introduction of the Republican system. Within hours of Oli's swearing-in, three advocates — Deepak Adhikari, Khagendra Prasad Chhapagain and Shailendra Kumar Gupta — filed a writ petition in the Supreme Court of Nepal challenging his appointment arguing that it was unconstitutional and sought its annulment. The advocates argued that the president should call for forming a new government under Article 76 (3) if a government formed as per Article 76 (2) fails the floor test in the House of Representatives. The apex court has set July 21 as the date for a preliminary hearing in the case — the same day Oli will take the floor test in the Parliament.

UK's new govt announces legislation for 'national renewal'

AP ■ LONDON

Britain's new Labour Party government promised to calm the country's febrile politics and ease its cost-of-living crisis as it set out its plans for "national renewal" at the grand State Opening of Parliament on Wednesday. Stabilising the UK's public finances and spurring economic growth were at the center of Prime Minister Keir Starmer's legislative agenda, announced in a speech delivered by King Charles III. "My government will seek a new partnership with both business and working people and help the country move on from the recent cost of living challenges by prioritising wealth creation for all communities," the king said in a speech to hundreds of lawmakers and scarlet-robed members of the House of Lords. Starmer campaigned on a promise to bring bold change to Britain at modest cost to taxpayers. He aims to be both pro-worker and pro-business, in favour of vast new construction projects and protective of the

environment. The risk is he may end up pleasing no one. In a written introduction to the speech, Starmer urged patience, saying change would require "determined, patient work and serious solutions" rather than easy answers and "the snake oil charm of populism." The King's Speech is the centrepiece of the State Opening, an occasion where royal pomp meets hard-nosed politics, as the king donned a diamond-studded crown, sat on a gilded throne and announced the laws his government intends to pass in the coming year. Labour won a landslide election victory on July 4 as voters turned on the Conservatives after years of high inflation, ethics scandals and a revolving door of prime ministers. Starmer has promised to patch up the country's aging infrastructure and frayed public services, but says he won't raise personal taxes and insists change must be bound by "unbreakable fiscal rules." Wednesday's speech included 40 bills — the Conservatives' last speech had just 21 — ranging from house-

building to nationalising Britain's railways and decarbonizing the nation's power supply with a publicly-owned green energy firm, Great British Energy. The government said it would "get Britain building," setting up a National Wealth Fund and rewriting planning rules that stop new homes and infrastructure being built. Economic measures included tighter rules governing corporations and a law to ensure all government budgets get advance independent scrutiny. That aims to avoid a repetition of the chaos sparked in 2022 by then-Prime Minister Liz Truss, whose package of uncosted tax cuts rocked the British economy and ended her brief term in office. The government promised stronger protections for workers, with a ban on some "zero-hours" contracts and a higher minimum wage for many employees. Also announced were protections for renters against shoddy housing, sudden eviction and landlords who won't let them have a pet. The government promised more

power for local governments and better bus and railway services — keys to the "levelling up" of Britain's London-centric economy that for-

mer Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson promised but largely failed to deliver. Though Starmer eschewed large-scale nationalization of industries, the government plans to take the delay-plagued train operators into public ownership. The speech said the government "recognises the urgency of the global climate challenge" — a change in tone from the Conservative government's emphasis on oil and gas exploration. As well as increasing renewable energy, it pledged tougher penalties for water companies that dump sewage into rivers, lakes and seas. The speech included new measures to strengthen border security, creating a beefed-up Border Security Command with counter-terrorism powers to tackle people-smuggling gangs. It follows Starmer's decision to scrap the Conservatives' contentious and unrealised plan to send people arriving in the UK across the English Channel on a one-way trip to Rwanda. The speech also tackled an issue that

has foxed previous governments: reforming the House of Lords. The unelected upper chamber of Parliament is packed with almost 800 members — largely lifetime political appointees, with a smattering of judges, bishops and almost 100 hereditary aristocrats. The government said it would remove the hereditary nobles, though there was no mention of Starmer's past proposal of setting a Lords retirement age of 80. There was no mention of lowering the voting age from 18 to 16, though that was one of Labour's election promises. While much of Starmer's agenda marks a break with the defeated Conservative government of former Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, Starmer revived Sunak's plan to stop future generations from smoking by gradually raising the minimum age for buying tobacco. The speech confirmed that the government wants to "reset the relationship with European partners" roiled by Britain's exit from the European Union in 2020. It said there would be no change to Britain's strong sup-

port for Ukraine and promised to "play a leading role in providing Ukraine with a clear path to NATO membership." Wednesday's address was the second such speech delivered by Charles since the death of his mother, Queen Elizabeth II, in September 2022. He travelled from Buckingham Palace to Parliament in a horse-drawn carriage — past a small group of anti-monarchy protesters with signs reading "Down with the Crown" — before donning ceremonial robes and the Imperial State Crown to deliver his speech. Police said 10 members of an environmental activist group were arrested near Parliament over alleged plans to disrupt the ceremony. For all its royal trappings, it is the King's Speech in name only. The words are written by government officials, and the monarch betrayed no flicker of emotion as he read them out. "The king has zero agency in this," said Jill Rutter, senior research fellow at the Institute for Government think tank.



Britain's King Charles wears the Imperial State Crown on the day of the State Opening of Parliament at the Palace of Westminster in London, on Wednesday. AP/PTI

Islamic State attacks on track to double in Iraq and Syria: US

AP ■ BAGHDAD

The US Central Command said Wednesday that the Islamic State group is trying "to reconstitute" as the number of attacks in Syria and Iraq is on track to double those of the previous year. IS has claimed 153 attacks in both countries in the first six months of 2024, CENTCOM said in a statement. According to a US defence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity as he wasn't allowed to speak publicly on the matter, the group was behind 121 attacks in Syria and Iraq in 2023. "The increase in attacks indicates ISIS is attempting to reconstitute following several years of decreased capability," CENTCOM said. The announcement comes just after the 10-year mark since the militant group declared its caliphate in large parts of Iraq and Syria. At its peak, the group ruled an area half the size

of the United Kingdom where it attempted to enforce its extreme interpretation of Islam, which included attacks on religious minority groups and harsh punishment of Muslims deemed to be apostates. Militants also killed thousands of members of the Yazidi religious minority and kidnapped thousands of women and children, many of whom were subjected to sexual abuse and human trafficking. A coalition of more than 80 countries, led by the United States, was formed to fight IS, which lost its hold on the territory it controlled in Iraq and Syria in 2017 and in Syria in 2019, although sleeper cells remain in both countries and abroad. Iraqi officials say that they can keep the IS threat under control with their own forces and have entered into talks with the US aimed at winding down the mission of the US-led military coalition in Iraq. The talks come at a time of increased domestic tensions

over the US military presence. From October to February, an umbrella group of Iran-backed militias calling itself the Islamic Resistance in Iraq launched regular drone attacks on bases housing US troops in Iraq and Syria, which they said was in retaliation for Washington's support of Israel in the ongoing war in Gaza and were aimed at forcing U.S. forces to withdraw from Iraq. Those attacks largely halted after three U.S. soldiers were killed in a strike on a base in Jordan, near the Syrian border in late January, prompting US retaliatory strikes in Iraq. On Tuesday, two Iraqi militia officials said they had launched a new drone attack targeting the Ain al-Asad air base in Iraq. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to comment publicly. It was unclear whether the attack had hit its target. US officials did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Floods could sweep N Korean landmines across border, warns South Korea

AP ■ SEOUL

North Korean landmines could be swept into South Korea by flooding, South Korea's military warned Wednesday, after the North has recently placed tens of thousands of additional deadly explosives along the rivals' heavily fortified border. North Korea's minelaying is part of construction at the border that's been going on since April, which also includes adding anti-tank barriers and reinforcing roads. South Korea officials believe North Korea aims to boost its frontline security posture and prevent its soldiers and citizens from defecting to South Korea. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff told local reporters that flooding caused by summer rainfall could wash the mines over the border, adding that North Korea might also deliberately float mines downriver as a provocation. The contents of the briefing

were shared with The Associated Press. Concerns about possible North Korean provocation have deepened after Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, threatened new countermeasures Tuesday against South Korean civilian activists' efforts to drop leaflets over the north by balloon. North Korea has earlier responded by flying trash-carrying balloons toward South Korea, which have not caused major damage. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that North Korea's military has suffered "many casualties" from about 10 mine explosions and heat exposure during the intense border works. An estimated 2 million mines are believed to be strewn in and around the Korea's 248 kilometer (154 miles)-long and 4 kilometers (2.5 miles)-wide land border. Experts say both Koreas have poorly managed their mines and don't know exactly

how many they have planted or where they are. It's not unusual for wooden North Korean mine boxes to wash downriver in summer, causing deadly incidents in South Korea. A 2015 mine explosion blamed on North Korea maimed two South Korean soldiers and pushed the rivals to the brink of an armed conflict. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said it's also looking at other possible provocations by North Korea, such as firing across the border at incoming South Korean balloons. It said the South Korean military is strengthening its readiness to repel any potential aggression by North Korea. North Korea is extremely sensitive to South Korean activists' efforts to scatter anti-Pyongyang leaflets, seeing them as a threat its political system and a challenge to its ban on access to foreign news for most of its 26 million people, experts say.

Russia, Ukraine swap 95 prisoners of war each

AP ■ KYIV

Ukraine and Russia exchanged 95 prisoners of war each, officials in both countries said Wednesday, three weeks after their last swap and as part of what have been occasional agreements to send captured troops home. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the Russian Defence Ministry reported the exchange. The POW swap was the 54th since Russia launched a full-scale invasion of its neighbour in February 2022. Officials from the warring countries meet only when they swap their dead and POWs, after lengthy preparation and diplomacy. Neither Ukraine nor Russia discloses how many POWs there are in total. Zelenskyy said in a post on the Telegram messaging service that the United Arab Emirates had again brokered the agreements. The UAE has said it maintains friendly relations

with both Moscow and Kyiv. Zelenskyy posted photos of mostly gaunt servicemen with shaven heads and wrapped in Ukrainian flags standing in what appeared to be an open area of countryside. "No matter how difficult it may be, we are looking for everyone who may be in captivity. We have to return everyone," Zelenskyy wrote in the post. Among the released Ukrainians were some who had spent more than two years in captivity. They were captured in Mariupol, during Russia's early offensive in the Kyiv region and battles in the eastern Luhansk region, the country's Coordination Headquarters for POWs said. It said just over 3,400 people, both civilians and military, have returned from Russian captivity since the outbreak of the war. The Russian Defence Ministry said the freed Russian soldiers will be flown to Moscow for medical treatment and rehabilitation.

Kin of those killed in MH17 tragedy mark 10th anniversary

AP ■ MELBOURNE

Relatives of passengers killed when Malaysia Airlines Flight 17 was shot down over Ukraine gathered with officials at Australia's Parliament House on Wednesday to mark the 10th anniversary of the tragedy that claimed 298 lives. One of those relatives, Paul Guard, mostly blames the conflict raging in eastern Ukraine a decade ago for the missile attack that killed 38 Australian citizens and permanent residents including his parents, Toowoomba doctors Roger and Jill Guard. "I don't think anyone intended to bring down a passenger plane. So in that sense, I'm heartbroken that the conflict continues," Paul Guard told Australian Broadcasting Corp. "But I think that a lot of families would really have just liked an acknowledgement that what

happened was wrong and that Russia should not have been waging war," the son added. The conflict has since escalated into a full-scale war with Russia's invasion of its smaller neighbour in February 2022. The pro-Russia rebel-held border region from where a Soviet-era Buk surface-to-air missile was fatefully launched and the fields where much of the debris landed after the Boeing 777 disintegrated is now territory controlled by the Russian military. Moscow has repeatedly denied responsibility for MH17's destruction and refused to hand over two Russians and a Ukrainian convicted by a Dutch court in absentia in 2022 of murder. Russia continues to be pursued under international law by the Netherlands through in the European Court of Human Rights and by Australia and the Netherlands jointly through

the International Civil Aviation Organization Council, or ICAO, over its alleged role in bringing down MH17. Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told Wednesday's service she was "appalled" that Russia had withdrawn from the ICAO proceedings in June. "The case will continue and we will not be deterred in our commitment to hold Russia to account," Wong told the gathering that included foreign diplomats. "Today, on behalf of the Australian government, I recommit again to our collective pursuit of truth, justice and accountability for the outrages perpetrated on 17th July, 2014," she added. A commemoration is also planned in the Netherlands later Wednesday at a monument near Schiphol Airport, from where MH17 left on its way to the Malaysian city of

Kuala Lumpur. Australian Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus will represent Australia at that monument, were 298 trees were planted to commemorate each victim and sunflowers like those that grew at the crash site. He expected the Netherlands-Australia case against Russia to be back before the ICAO in October despite Moscow's withdrawal. "We won't let this go until we've brought Russia to account," Dreyfus said. The Netherlands was home to 196 victims. As well as Australia, victims also came from Malaysia, Indonesia, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany, the Philippines, Canada, New Zealand, Vietnam, Israel, Italy, Romania, the United States and South Africa. An international investigation initiated in the UN Security Council by the Netherlands,

Malaysia and Australia concluded that the Buk missile system that destroyed MH17 belonged to the Russian 53rd Anti-Aircraft Missile Brigade. The investigation concluded the missile was driven into Ukraine from a Russian military base near the city of Kursk and returned there after the plane was shot down. Tony Abbott was Australia's prime minister when MH17 was shot down. Abbott recalled on Wednesday that Russian President Vladimir Putin became physically aggressive when the Australian raised MH17 and the Ukraine conflict on the sidelines of an Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation leaders' summit in Beijing in 2014. Putin said through an interpreter that Ukrainians were all fascists, had brought down MH17 themselves and that Ukraine had no right to exist,

Abbott said. "Then as we were going back into the conference — and this was really quite an extraordinary thing — he suddenly turned, grabbed the elbows and tried to shake me and then pushed me away. And he said in English, where he's quite fluent: Look, you are not a native Australian but I am a native Russian, and pushed me away," Abbott told ABC. "I think what he was trying to say to me in his own rather blunt and brutal way was that how could I as a citizen of a settler society understand the blood and soil and mystical attachment that he had to every last inch of Mother Russia?" Abbott said. "So it was pretty obvious to me right back then what he was on about. I just think it's a pity that more wasn't done to arm up the Ukrainians in the meantime," Abbott added.

Setback for TikTok

London (AP) TikTok owner ByteDance can't avoid the bloc's crackdown on digital giants, a European Union court said Wednesday in a decision that found the video sharing platform falls under a new law that also covers Apple, Google and Microsoft. The EU's General Court rejected ByteDance's legal challenge against being classed as an online "gatekeeper" that has to comply with extra obligations under the 27-nation bloc's Digital Markets Act. The rulebook, also known as the DMA, took effect this year and seeks to counter the dominance of Big Tech companies and make online competition fairer by giving consumers more choice.

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD. (Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall Patiala-147001) Corporate Identity Number U40109PB2010SGC033313 (Contact No. 96461-17604, 96461-17659) Tender Enquiry No. 1685/EMC/O&M/PC-2563 Dated: 16-07-2024 Chief Engineer/ O&M (P&P Cell-II), GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat, invites E-tender for the Procurement of Lighting Spares (Year 2024-2025). Quantity as per NIT. For detailed NIT & tender Specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in from 16-07-2024 from 17:00 Hrs. onwards. Note: Corrigendum and Addendum, if any will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in GHTP-57/24 76155/12/3123/2023/35762 Dated CHD - 7/17/2024

ADB retains India's growth forecast at 7% for FY'25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday maintained India's GDP growth forecast at 7 per cent for the current financial year, citing that a rebound in agriculture is expected given above-normal monsoon projections. The ADB forecast comes a day after the International Monetary Fund revised upward its GDP growth projections for India to 7 per cent compared to 6.8 per cent projected in April. Last month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised upward its growth forecast to 7.2 per cent, from 7 per cent estimated earlier. The Indian economy is on track to grow by 7 per cent in FY2024 (ending 31 March 2025) and 7.2 per cent in FY2025 (next financial year), as projected in ADO April 2024, said the July edition of the Asian Development Outlook (ADO). The Indian economy logged a growth rate of 8.2 per cent for the financial year ended March 2024, as against 7 per cent in the previous fiscal



year. Services continued to expand robustly in Q4 of FY24, and the forward-looking services PMI is well above its long-term average, it said, adding, industry is also expected to grow robustly, driven by manufacturing and strong demand for construction led by housing, it said. "After muted growth in FY2023 (previous fiscal), a rebound in agriculture is expected given the above-normal monsoon projections. This is notwithstanding the slower advance of monsoon in June. A rebound in agriculture will be important to sustain growth momentum

in rural areas," it said. Investment demand continues to be strong, led by public investments and bank credit is fueling robust housing demand and improving private investment demand, it said. However, it said, export growth will continue to be led by services, with merchandise exports showing relatively weaker growth. The stronger-than-expected fiscal position of the central government could provide a further boost to growth, it said. However, the report said, this must be weighed against downside risks arising from

weather events and geopolitical shocks. With regard to inflation, ADO has also retained its forecast at 4.6 per cent for the current financial year and expects it to marginally decline to 4.5 per cent next fiscal. With regard to developing Asia's growth forecast, ADO said, it is revised up to 5 per cent in 2024 and maintained at 4.9 per cent in 2025. Growth projections remain broadly unchanged with respect to ADO April 2024, it said, adding, resilient domestic demand along with improved exports and manufacturing will support growth this year. The region's 2024 growth forecast has been marginally adjusted up by 0.1 percentage points due to upward revisions in the Caucasus and Central Asia along with East Asia, it said. Meanwhile, the inflation forecast for the region has fallen to 2.9 per cent in 2024, largely due to downward revisions in China and the Caucasus and Central Asia, which offset a slight increase in South Asia, it said.

Corporate funding in solar sector globally dips: Mercom

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Total corporate funding in the solar sector globally fell by 10 per cent to USD 16.6 billion in January-June 2024 due to uncertainties in major markets including the US, according to Mercom Capital. In the first half of 2023, the global solar energy sector attracted USD 18.5 billion of investment, the US-based research firm said in a report. "Total corporate funding, including venture capital/private equity (VC) funding, public market, and debt financing, in 1H 2024 totaled USD 16.6 billion compared to USD 18.5 billion raised in 1H 2023. The number of deals increased 9 per cent to 87 deals in 1H 2024 compared to 80 during the same period last year," the "Solar Funding and M&A Report" said. "This has happened because of uncertainties in major markets. The financing activity in the solar sector remains restrained despite tailwinds from the Inflation Reduction Act and favourable global policies," said Raj Prabhoo, CEO of Mercom Capital Group.



Besides, high interest rates, an uncertain rate trajectory and timeline, increasing trade barriers, supply chain challenges, concerns about the US presidential election's impact on the sector, and constantly evolving trade policies have created an unpredictable and uncertain climate. This has slowed down development, investments, and decision-making, he added. In the first half of 2024, the global VC funding activity decreased 29 per cent with USD 2.7 billion raised in 29 deals compared to USD 3.8 billion from 33 deals in the first half of 2023. In India, independent power producer AMPIN Energy

Transition secured funding of up to USD 35 million from responsAbility. While Ecozen and SolarSquare raised USD 30 million and 4.2 million in funding rounds to accelerate expansion and meet working capital needs. The global debt financing activity in the first half of 2024 reached USD 12.2 billion in 50 deals, a 53 per cent increase compared to 1H 2023 when USD 8 billion was raised in 33 deals. In this space, Jakson Green in India obtained a sustainable trade facility of USD 7.1 million from HSBC India and Husk Power Systems secured a USD 4 million investment in debt financing from Electrifi.

Cabinet to soon decide on IPEF's clean, fair economy agreements

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet will soon take a decision on the commerce ministry's proposal to seek approval for signing of 14-member IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity) bloc's agreements on clean and fair economy, an official said. Last month in Singapore, 13 IPEF bloc members signed these agreements, while India stated that it would ink the deals after getting domestic approval. The official said the commerce ministry has sent both pacts to the cabinet secretariat and soon the cabinet will take it up for approval. Agreement on a clean economy intends to accelerate efforts of IPEF partners' towards energy security and transition, climate resilience and adaptation, GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions mitigation; find/develop innovative ways of reducing dependence on fossil fuel energy; promote technical cooperation, workforce development, capacity building, and research collaborations.

Exposure to India's infra sector helps LIC, SBI outshine peers

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shares of state-owned behemoth Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) have outperformed rivals like HDFC Life and ICICI Prudential Life as it placed bets on India's growth sectors, including infrastructure, while the private sector concentrated bet on tech, consumer and consumer-related BFSI companies. LIC's stock has gained nearly 79 per cent from Rs 620 on June 18, 2023, to Rs 1,109.15 at the closing on Tuesday, according to stock exchange data. In contrast, HDFC Life gave a negative return, if Tuesday's closing price of Rs 646.55 on the BSE is compared to Rs 666.55 a year back. ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Co delivered a return of 12 per cent, considering its stock price rise from Rs 582 on June 18, 2023, to Rs 654.10 on June 16, 2024. Over the past one year, SBI



Life Insurance shares have risen from Rs 1,314 to Rs 1,621.20, delivering a return of 23 per cent. Capital market analysts said insurance companies make money in two ways - charging premiums for policies and then investing the premiums into assets. It is the latter that generates the bigger delta in profits, thus impacting value creation and managing risks. Global majors, including Warren Buffet-owned Berkshire Hathaway, have been successful due to their ability to make superior investments. Most Indian insurance companies are yet to

capitalise on the emergence of the country's infrastructure sector, analysts said. Indian insurance companies have concentrated investments in the BFSI, IT, and consumer sectors - all of which have been underperformers in the recent past. Only 8-10 per cent of their investments are in the infrastructure sector. This is far less when compared to global standards. Large global insurance companies -- such as Allianz, Nippon Life Insurance, and MetLife, and other insurers like Berkshire Hathaway -- have much larger exposure ranging from 15 to 30 per

cent to the infrastructure sector, analysts noted. Over the past few years, global insurers have been increasingly considering infrastructure investments as 'core' investments as the stable and long-term cash flows of infrastructure assets naturally align with the liabilities of insurers. Additionally, infrastructure assets have defensive characteristics of high barriers to entry, strong pricing power, structural growth, and predictive cash flows, and listed infrastructure can provide investors with inflation-protected income and solid capital growth. For India, a strong government focus on the sector with large spending, supporting initiatives and encouraging policies, and improving governance, the infrastructure industry has come off-age. This has helped the infra sector to outperform all other sectors, according to analysts.

They said the high focus on retail loans, and the strategic reluctance to look at infrastructure for growth opportunities is proving detrimental for the shareholders of such companies. SBI, with its higher exposure to the infrastructure sector, has seen its stock gain 48 per cent in the year (from Rs 592 to Rs 880.95 on Tuesday), while those of its private counterparts HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank have gained only in the range of (-) 3 per cent to 24 per cent. Kotak and HDFC Banks with negligible exposure to the infrastructure sector are the worst performing, with their shares giving a negative return, stock exchange data showed. Kotak Mahindra Bank shares were at Rs 1,895 on June 18, 2023, and closed at Rs 1,805.20 on Tuesday. HDFC Bank closed at Rs 1,619.20 on BSE on Tuesday, down from Rs 1,679 a year back.

Alphacorp to invest ₹350 cr to develop luxury housing project in Gurugram

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Realty firm Alphacorp will invest Rs 350 crore to develop a luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan amid strong consumer demand. Without divulging the name of the partner, Alphacorp said it has tied up with an entity that owns two land parcels of nearly 2.4 acre each, located in Sector 15, Part 2, Gurugram. "We will develop a total of 200 apartments on these two land parcels," said Santosh Agarwal, Executive Director and CFO of Alphacorp. On one parcel of 2.38 acre, the company has launched luxury high-rise project 'Alphacorp SKY1' comprising 100 units. The price is Rs 5 crore per unit. The project on the second plot will also be launched in the next 2-3 months. When asked about the project cost, Agarwal said the total



investment is estimated at Rs 350 crore excluding land cost. He said the investment will be funded through internal accruals and bank loans, if necessary. "Gurugram, regarded as the Millennium City, exemplifies rapid infrastructure growth and dynamic urban development. This bustling hub attracts a diverse range of residents, businesses, and investors," Agarwal said. The demand for luxury housing has been very strong

in Gurugram in the past two years, he said. Since its inception, Alphacorp has developed integrated townships, luxurious condominiums, corporate hubs, retail centers, and industrial parks across the National Capital Region (NCR), Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, and Gujarat. Agarwal said the company has developed around 12 projects so far while six projects are being constructed.

Sebi's proposal on new asset class for high risk takers looks promising: Experts

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi's proposal for introducing a new asset class for high-risk profile investors can help them gain access to a newer set of strategies including long-short equity fund and inverse Exchange-traded Fund (ETF). The new asset class is aimed at bridging the gap between mutual funds and Portfolio Management Services (PMS) in terms of flexibility in portfolio construction. The Sebi's consultation paper floated on Tuesday on 'new asset class' and creating a structure for differentiated, higher risk strategies looks very promising, Radhika Gupta, MD and CEO of Edelweiss Mutual Fund said. "India is finally opening up to different investment products, styles and approaches. Passive, factor, inverse ETFs, alts and more. There is no single way to invest," she added. In its consultation paper, the regulator said the new asset class will provide a regulated product with features like SIP (Systematic Investment Plan), higher risk-taking capability, and a higher ticket size, to meet the needs of the emerging category of investors. The regulator suggested a minimum investment of Rs 10 lakh for the new asset class, which could be permitted to invest in derivatives for purposes beyond just hedging and rebalancing. This higher threshold will deter retail investors from investing in this product, while attracting investors, with investible funds between



Rs 10 lakh and Rs 50 lakh, who are being drawn to unauthorised and unregistered portfolio management service providers," the regulator said. "Sebi's consultation paper for introducing new product classes with higher investment minimum than mutual funds and more freedom to invest can help investors gain access to a newer set of strategies like Long-short equities, inverse ETFs, etc which can help them express specific views on the market," Kaustubh Belapurkar, Director - Manager Research of Morningstar Investment Research India, said. Long-short equity fund seeks to deliver returns by taking long and short positions in equity and equity-related instruments. For example, the fund may be bullish on the automobile sector and bearish on the IT sector and may invest in both these sectors by going long on the automobile sector and short on the IT sector. Inverse ETF aims to generate returns that are negatively correlated to the returns of

the underlying index. Dezerv Co-Founder Sandeep Jethwani said higher-risk profile investors can now access regulated opportunities without the high minimum thresholds of PMS and AIF or resorting to unregulated structures that bode really well for the protection of wealth that India creates. This new asset class is poised to leverage the exponential growth expected in managed assets (MFs, PMSs and AIFs) in the next 5-7 years, he added. Sebi believes that over the years, a notable opportunity for a new asset class has emerged between mutual funds and PMS in terms of flexibility in portfolio construction. "The absence of such an investment product appears to have inadvertently propelled the investors of this segment towards unregistered and unauthorised investment schemes. Such schemes often promise unrealistically high returns and exploit the investors' expectations for better yields, leading to potential financial risks," it added.

Goa targeting new markets for tourism through global trade fairs, says Minister

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa is looking forward to tap new and emerging markets through participation in global trade fairs after international tourism was affected due to the Russia-Ukraine war and other problems, minister Rohan Khaunte said on Wednesday. During COVID-19, the international footfall in Goa was only 33,000, which has now increased to 4.5 lakh for this particular year (calendar year), Tourism Minister Khaunte said in the state assembly. Responding to a question raised by Goa Forward Party MLA Vijai Sardesai in the assembly, he said after the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception about tourism in the state is changing, taking it away from beaches. Sardesai said Goa spent Rs 63 crore in the last four years (on various events), including Rs 29.84 crore to promote the state within the country. Former chief minister late Manohar Parrikar had emphasised on the pre-audit of roadshows and that accountability parameters should be framed, he said. Khaunte said after the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism department in 2022 decided to change the perception of Goa "beyond beaches" as earlier the impression about the coastal state was only about its beaches and party life. "We needed to see that quality people come in. Since 2021-22, Goa tourism board headed by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant discussed



about the emerging markets and tapping of new markets," he said. "Problems with the UK market and the Russia war impacted international tourism to a big extent," the minister said, adding the Israel military campaign (in Gaza) also resulted in a dip in the number of tourists from that country. "We had to ensure that we tap the emerging markets like South East Asia, South Asia, the US, UAE and Germany," he said. The state tourism department participated in the WTM (World Travel Mart) London, ITB, Berlin, IITF and other events, Khaunte said. "We are presenting ourselves to the world through these events where players from the emerging markets also come," he said. Earlier, only Goa used to participate in these events but now Ladakh and states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka are attending the international marts, he noted. "During the events, we have serious B2B and B2C trade meetings. The minutes are placed before an empowered committee before we decide the next course of action," he added.

Govt should rationalise customs duty in Budget to boost domestic manufacturing, says ICC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has suggested the government to rationalise customs duties in various sectors including steel, solar battery, aluminum, and lithium cells in a bid to boost domestic manufacturing. The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget for financial year 2024-25 on July 23. ICC President Ameya Prabhu said protective measures are needed for the growth of domestic industry in sectors including steel, solar battery, aluminum, and lithium cells. "There is a need for rationalization of customs duty in these specific sectors in a holistic manner. Huge potential is there to boost domestic manufacturing and make India a global hub for manufacturing," Prabhu said. He added that levies on raw materials impact domestic players particularly the downstream firms. He also asked for correction in inverted duty structure by cutting down duty on mixed petroleum gas from 5 per cent to 2.5 per cent. "To boost domestic manufacturing, there is a need to increase duty on polymers - polyvinyl chloride, polyethylene terephthalate, polypropylene and polyesters to 10 per cent. This will help in reducing import dependency and will drive India towards self-sufficiency in the

petrochemical manufacturing segment," Prabhu said. Talking about the importance of the aluminium foil sector, the President said the domestic industry has been facing severe losses as there is anti-dumping duty on raw materials whereas the finished goods are not subject to any duties on imports from China. "This dual effect has resulted in extensive net losses to the companies that have made significant investments into this industry," Prabhu noted. On the taxation side, the chamber has suggested setting up a commission to review the Income Tax Act 1961 in its entirety and simplify the provisions. "This is an old Act. Every year in the Budget, amendments are made which has made this Act complex to understand. These amendments have resulted in many anomalies which in turn have given rise to a large number of legal cases," the chamber has said. Prabhu further recommended the government not to impose tax on dividends. He added that during his tenure so far the ICC has spread its wings further nationally and internationally and become a truly world-class chamber. "We have opened 25 chapters globally in countries including New Zealand, the US, Europe, Australia, Korea and Middle East nations," he said.

PwC for extension of beneficial tax regime for new manufacturing firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tax consultancy firm PwC has urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to extend the beneficial tax regime for new manufacturing companies and introduce a comprehensive tax amnesty scheme for cases related to Customs. Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget for 2024-25 on July 23. "I think the Make in India is the first thing which comes to mind, and you will recall that in 2019, the government introduced a 15 per cent rate for new manufacturing companies, which lapsed on March 31, 2024. "I think that is one extension, which is being expected, and the expectation is also that instead of giving a year-on-year extension if we can look at the block period, say for the next five years because shifting a manufacturing is a big decision and the corporates may take time before making a decision and make it viable, feasible and that's the first bit," said Sandeep Puri, Partner, Price Waterhouse & Co LLP. Section 115BAB of the Income Tax Act offers a concessional tax rate of 15 per cent for new domestic manufacturing companies. Initially, this benefit was available for companies set up and registered after October 1, 2019, and commencing production by March 31, 2023, which was later extended to March 31, 2024, to account for delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

IOA chief PT Usha chides WFI ad-hoc panel for exclusion of Antim's coaches in long list

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IOA President P.T. Usha on Wednesday came down heavily on the ad-hoc panel that managed the suspended WFI, saying the committee did not do due diligence and missed out on giving the names of wrestler Antim Panghal's coaches in the long list...



members. The IOA President also took an indirect dig at SAI for not being attentive enough. "It is strange that the responsible authorities, who approved the long list of athletes, coaching and support staff, did not deem it fit to recommend the inclusion of Bhagat Singh or Heera or Vikas."

Can Indian wrestlers deliver in Paris or medal-winning trend under risk

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Indian wrestlers have delivered a medal every single time at the Olympics since the 2008 Beijing edition. Success in four consecutive editions has enhanced the status of wrestling as a prime Olympic sport in the country.



(Left to right): AMAN SEHRAWAT (Men's freestyle 50kg); VINESH PHOGAT (Women's 50kg); ANTIM PANGHAL (Women's 53kg); ANSHU MALIK (Women's 57kg); NISHA DAHIYA (Women's 68kg) and REETIKA HOODA (Women's 76kg)

body got suspended but finally when UWW lifted its suspension, things began moving. Only one male and five female wrestlers qualified for the upcoming edition. There is hope, but doubts too.

seem to have a plan B. At this stage, planning against each rival is key. His biggest threats are Higuchi and Uzbekistan's Gulomjon Abdullaev.

Spain, the weight relaxation was 2kg but that won't be the case in Paris. ANTIM PANGHAL (Women's 53kg): The firebrand wrestler from Hisar was first to lock a Paris Olympics quota.

and the smooth transition to senior events. Injuries have troubled her and she is one of the best bets in Paris for India. Quick movement on the mat to go with an aggressive game style is Anshu's biggest strength.

has managed to surprise quality rivals with her aggressive game style. She is seasoned and her fearless approach is her biggest strength. Not having the exposure of competing at big events consistently is her weakness apart from losing steam in the fifth-sixth minute of the bout.

everything in the first four minutes of her bouts and if an up-and-down bout lasts the distance, she gives away points easily. Handling nerves on debut will also be key. REETIKA HOODA (Women's 76kg): Reetika has the capability to surprise her rivals. She is not exactly unknown in the circuit but can prove to be a tough nut to crack even for experienced wrestlers due to her explosive strength.

Express yourself in Paris: Kapil's advise to Olympics-bound Indian athletes

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Former India skipper Kapil Dev, on Wednesday, advised Olympic-bound Indian athletes to express themselves fearlessly at the mega-event starting July 26 and hoped that the country would hit double digit mark on the medals tally.



one day," he said. "We just need good sponsors to promote the game. Without sponsors nothing is possible. In 5 years time we should reach there," added Kapil, who is the ambassador of TGCL and also plays in the league.

Asian Paralympic Committee appoints Deepa Malik as representative for South Asia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's first woman Paralympic medalist Deepa Malik has been named sub-regional representative for South Asia by the Asian Paralympic Committee (APC). This appointment, which was confirmed during the 34th Executive Board meeting of the APC, signifies a significant step forward for gender diversity and athlete-centric leadership in para-sports.



now is also a right time to take a step forward in taking the lead in contributing to this one big family," Malik said. "It's time for me to represent India at a bigger level and contribute to the collective growth of parasports and 'inclusion through sports' at large," she added.

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Suryakumar holds 2nd spot, Jaiswal make gains in ICC T20I batting rankings

PTI ■ DUBAI

The big-hitting Suryakumar Yadav is the highest placed Indian at second spot, while young opener Yashasvi Jaiswal occupies the sixth position in the ICC T20I batting rankings issued on Wednesday.

Ruturaj Gaikwad has dropped a place to the eighth position in the 'T20 batters' list, which was updated following India's recent 4-1 series triumph over Zimbabwe.

Jaiswal was the big winner following his 141 runs in the series as he rose four places, behind No.1 ranked batter Travis Head of Australia and Suryakumar. Shubman Gill, who led India against Zimbabwe in the absence of senior players and was the leading run-scorer of the series with 170 runs from five innings, moved up a whopping 36 places to 37th. No Indian features in the top 10 of the T20I bowlers rankings. Axar Patel, who was rested for the Zimbabwe series, dropped four places to 13th spot. Fast bowler Mukesh Kumar



and spinner Washington Sundar also made upward movements. Mukesh, who scalped eight wickets from three games, has gained 36 places to rise to 46th spot. Washington, who picked up eight wickets in five matches, has risen 21 spots to 73rd rank.

England's Adil Rashid is leading T20I bowlers' chart ahead of South Africa's Anrich Nortje and Wanindu Hasaranga of Sri Lanka. In the T20I all-rounders' rankings, India's Hardik Pandya dropped four places to sixth while Axar slipped one rung to 13th.

Washington (41st) and Shivam Dube (43rd) have risen by eight and 35 places to 41st and 43rd spots respectively. Sri Lanka's Hasaranga continues to top the all-rounders' list ahead of Australia's Marcus Stoinis and Zimbabwe skipper Sikandar Raza.



Roshni scores hat-trick as Hockey Jharkhand wins

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Hockey Jharkhand thrashed Assam Hockey 13-0 in the women's category with the young Roshni Aind (24th, 32nd, 33rd) scoring a hat-trick in the 2nd Hockey India Junior Men & Women East Zone Championship here on Wednesday. The other goal-scorers for the winners at the Netaji Subhas Eastern Centre were captain Rajni Kerketta (11, 27), Barwa Purnima (31, 46), Mundu Sukarmani (46, 56), Parwati Topno (21), Pinki Kumari (29), Hemrom Leoni (43) and Apuriya Soreng (59). Hockey Association of Odisha too scored a lopsided 11-0

win against Hockey Bihar with Kachhap Rimjhim (20, 21, 31, 36) scoring four goals. Najiya Khatun (8, 34), Marandi Rajina (38), Khushi Kumari (44), Sugandha Sonam (49, 50), and Kumari Sharda (57) too were on target. Hockey Bengal defeated Manipur Hockey 8-3 with Lalitanchhungi (4, 39, 49, 56), Shanti Horo (6, 33), and Lalpeksangi (23, 24) on target. For Manipur Hockey, Tanu Shorenangbam (26), Devi Mutum Priya (41) and Devi Shaishram Ritu (48) scored the consolation goals. In the men's section, Hockey Association of Odisha defeated Manipur Hockey 7-0

with Rohit Kullu (14, 60), Sunil Lakra (22), Deepak Pradhan (28, 50), Premdayal Giri (41) and Deonath Nanwar (47) on target. Hockey Jharkhand crushed Hockey Bihar 9-0 with Abhishek Tigga (6), Jolen Topno (20, 59), Rohit Pradhan (21), Roshan Ekka (37), Ghuran Lohra (38), Adisan Minj (42), Faguwa Horo (44), and Dodray Sandeep (53) scoring the goals. Hockey Bengal registered a 5-1 win over Assam Hockey. Karan Shaw (2, 23, 39) led the goal-scoring efforts for the winners while Prince Gabriyal Dhan (28) and Bishnu Paswan (34) too scored a goal each.



England great Lucy Bronze joins Chelsea from Barcelona

AP ■ LONDON

England defender Lucy Bronze joined Chelsea from Barcelona on Wednesday on a two-year deal. Five-time Champions League winner Bronze completed her move to the Women's Super League (WSL) champion after two years with Barcelona. "To know I'm a Chelsea player still feels a little bit surreal. It's obviously a club I know so much about and have done for such a long time," she said. "I'm really excited to be back in England. My family are so excited as well to get to more of my games."

Analysis: Tiger Woods playing all the majors, but for how much longer?

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

Tiger Woods is playing all four majors for the first time since 2019, which at the start of the year would have been cause for great optimism. The results paint a different picture. He set a Masters record by making his 24th consecutive cut at Augusta National. And then he was gone by the weekend at the PGA Championship and the U.S. Open. He hasn't broken par since a 69 in the second round of the 2022 PGA Championship, and he needed that simply to make the cut.

His performance is starting to raise questions of how much longer he will play - how much longer he should play - to avoid lasting memories of a great champion slapping it around. Leave it to Colin Montgomerie to put those thoughts into words found in a Times of London interview ahead of the British Open, when he said at one point, "What the hell is he doing?" The entirety of what Montgomerie told the Times: "I hope people remember Tiger as Tiger was, the passion and the charismatic aura around him. There is none of that

now. At Pinehurst he did not seem to enjoy a single shot and you think, 'What the hell is he doing?' He's coming to Troon and he won't enjoy it there, either." Woods already has enjoyed one aspect of his stay at Royal Troon. That came Tuesday when he was asked about Montgomerie's comments. Woods relishes a chance to push back on criticism, particularly when the source is someone known for never winning a major. "Well, as a past champion, I'm exempt until I'm 60," Woods said, speaking to his time at the British Open. "Colin's not. He's not a past champion, so he's not exempt. So he doesn't get the opportunity to make that decision. I do." It brought up memories of an Open tradition some 20 years ago. Stewart McDougal was the press officer at the time, and he would ask Open champions who came into the press center to sign the table. At the end of the week, McDougal auctioned off the table for charity. Montgomerie came in one day, saw all the signatures on the table and reached for pen. "I'm sorry, Colin," McDougal told him. "It's only for Open champions."



Poor Monty. The questions are fair enough, but there is something to be said about golfers being able to decide when their time is done. And given all that Woods has done in the game, it's probably not the best idea to show him the door no matter what numbers he is posting. His 82 in the third round of the Masters was his highest in a major.

The 78 on the Old Course two years ago in what likely will be his final time at St. Andrews. He still draws the biggest crowd and generates the loudest buzz. And two numbers worth remembering are four and 15. He had four surgeries on his lower back, the last one to fuse his spine, and two years later he won his 15th major at the Masters. Another number worth noting is 59

- the age of Tom Watson when he was an 8-foot par putt away from winning the British Open at Turnberry in 2009. The year before, Greg Norman was 53 when he had the 54-hole lead at Royal Birkdale. Courses for the U.S. Majors might be getting too big for the 48-year-old Woods, whose body is held together by hardware. But there is something about links golf that is timeless. "The older you get, the less you can carry the golf ball," Woods said. "But over here, you can run the golf ball 100 yards if you get the right wind and the right trajectory. ... You can play on the ground. You can burn it on the ground with a 1-iron, 2-iron, 3-wood, whatever. "I think that's one of the reasons why you see older champions up there on the board because they're not forced to have to carry the ball 320 yards." Woods always will be linked with Augusta National because of his watershed win at age 21 when he won the 1997 Masters by 12 shots, and it is the major he has won the most times. But for all his power as a younger man, no one hit irons like Woods. The flight of his shots was ideal for the links golf. It still is. Woods showed up Tuesday wearing shorts, with a black compression

sleeve covering his right leg. That was a clear reminder that age isn't as big an issue as health. Woods has been forthright in explaining his dilemma. His body won't allow him to play a full schedule, and when he shows up at the majors, he has to deal with competitive rust. He could play more and risk not playing where it matters. That's something he will have to sort out. And it was telling that the PGA Tour created an exemption category exclusively for him to play in the \$20 million signature events by adding him to the field - he wouldn't be taking a spot away from another player. How much he plays next year will be worth watching. In the meantime, Woods has been at Royal Troon since Sunday. He has high hopes. Maybe they are unrealistic based on the scores he is posting, but they are his hopes. "There is a time for all sportsmen to say goodbye, but it's very difficult to tell Tiger it's time to go," Montgomerie said. "Obviously, he still feels he can win. We are more realistic." The truth is probably somewhere in between. But perhaps Woods still feels he can win because unlike Montgomerie, he has done it before.

The 32-year-old right-back won the European Championship with England in 2022 and was a losing finalist at last year's World Cup. She won three Champions League titles with Lyon and two more with Barcelona. Bronze won eight league titles in England, France and Spain with Liverpool, Manchester City, Lyon and Barcelona. She was runner-up for the Ballon d'Or award in 2019 and named FIFA Best Women's Player of the Year in 2020. "Lucy will bring leadership to the group. She is a serial winner and a versatile defender. She has lots of experience and a winning mentality which we feel will fit well into the squad," Chelsea general manager Paul Green said. Chelsea has dominated women's soccer in England and is the five-time defending WSL champion. It was managed by Emma Hayes before she left for the United States Women's National Team at the end of the season.

Scottie is adjusting to links golf and his role as best player in the world

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

The first stage of Scottie Scheffler's rise to the top of golf felt like warp speed. He went from No. 15 in the world to No. 1 in the span of five tournaments, and that was before he won the Masters for the first time. Now he's on a level not seen since Tiger Woods was in his prime. Scheffler is not the biggest draw at the British Open, not with Woods in the field. Rory McIlroy remains a big attraction, especially in the U.K., and he comes into Royal Troon as a sentimental favorite from his sad collapse in the U.S. Open and going 10 years without a major. But any conversation at the final major of the year starts with Scheffler, a heavy favorite as he has been in every major this year. And that has taken him time to fully appreciate his status in the game. "I never really thought of myself as anything but a golfer," Scheffler said Tuesday. "I was never trying to be famous. I didn't want to be a celebrity or whatever. I just wanted to become a good golfer and get the most out of myself. It's brought me this far, so I continue to just try to keep my head down and put in the work that got me here and just continue to practice and hopefully continue to get better." His six PGA Tour victories before the calendar turned to July are the most since Arnold Palmer in 1962. Someone pointed out to Scheffler that Palmer's seventh victory that year was a claret jug he won at Royal Troon. He wasn't sure how to react to that except to shrug his



shoulders and say, "Yeah, that would be great." "I love the history of the game, and there's certain things that I know and certain things that I don't. That was something that for some reason I just never stumbled across," he said, searching for the right answer. "So I had no idea that that was a thing." The British Open figures to present his biggest test. Scheffler is still relatively new to links golf - everything about his rise to No. 1 is new - having played this style in 2021 for the first time. He has learned to adjust the flight of his ball since links turf creates a little more spin on certain shots. The greens can be slower. Bunkers are to be avoided. He is a two-time Masters champion, missed a U.S. Open playoff by one shot at The Country Club and was runner-up in the PGA Championship at Oak Hill. But he has never seriously contended in golf's oldest championship. Even so, the love of the links is there. He went to the J.P. McManus Pro-Am in Ireland a few years

ago and took side trips to Lahinch and Ballybunion. He began this trip across the Atlantic Ocean by skipping the Scottish Open at The Renaissance Club - links style, but not links turf - and going to Turnberry with Sam Burns for a match with their caddies, both good players. "A tremendous amount of fun," he said. And then it was time for work at Royal Troon, the links renowned for having the longest hole (the 623-yard sixth) and shortest hole (the 123-yard eighth) in the British Open rotation. Most peculiar about Troon is that the outward nine - typically with at least a wee breeze at the players' back - has two par 5s and measures 3,539 yards. The inward nine with the wind in the face has one par 5 and is 3,846 yards. "It's basically a tale of two nines on this course," McIlroy said. "You feel like you have to make your score on the way out and then sort of hang on coming in." McIlroy has far more experience on links golf - and a

claret jug to show for it from his victory at Royal Liverpool in 2014 - but it still takes time to adjust because "you play 11 months of your golf every year in very different conditions." Players also are preparing for weather described as "mixed," a gentle way of saying it probably won't be terribly pleasant for most of the week. Sunshine gave way to spells of rain on Tuesday, and that was before lunch was served. PGA champion Xander Schauffele might be the second-most consistent player in golf behind Scheffler - nothing but top 20s in his last 10 starts and 51 cuts in a row - and has acquired a taste for less-than-pleasant conditions, particularly in the Open. "If the weather gets really bad, you just have to take the bunkers out of play and really try and plot your way around," he said. "It doesn't have to be super pretty. Just kind of place the ball around the property and really just try and get it in the hole in as few shots as possible." That's what Scheffler has been doing all year. Along with winning the Masters for the second time and The Players Championship, his other four wins have come in signature events against the strongest fields - on long courses and short, dry conditions and soft. And with that has come a level of notoriety - the bizarre arrest at the PGA Championship certainly contributed - he wasn't expecting but has come to appreciate. "Being out here playing in front of great crowds and having them scream your name and holler when you make putts and be truly rooting for you is a great feeling," he said.

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

Jon Rahm felt like one of the most popular players when he arrived at Royal Troon, even if it had nothing to do with him or with his golf. Spain is on quite the run at the moment. Carlos Alcaraz won Wimbledon on Sunday for his second Grand Slam title of the year, right before Spain defeated England in the European Championship final. It's the latter that made the Scottish fans celebrate the Spaniard. No one in these parts likes to see England win anything. "Played all 18 holes, and I think I got more congratulations for something that I didn't do than I ever have in my life," Rahm said Tuesday. "I don't know what they've done, but anytime anybody plays against the English national team, every other country in Europe just unifies against them." "I think because we've heard 'It's Coming Home' so many times the last few years that nobody wants to see it come home at this point." Throw in Sergio Garcia winning his first LIV Golf event at Valderrama, and Rahm

Jon hoping to ride Spanish momentum to end drought



would like nothing more than to extend Spain's run of winners. Mostly, he needs it for himself. The major championship season ends

with the British Open, and Rahm has been a no-show. He was the reigning Masters champion when he left for the Saudi riches of LIV Golf last December and he still hasn't won. His last victory was the Masters some 15 months ago. He barely made the cut at the Masters. He missed the cut at the PGA Championship. And he didn't even get to play the U.S. Open because of a foot infection. "Last year from the Masters on I didn't really play my best," Rahm said. "Ryder Cup was the only resemblance to maybe the early part of the year. But Nashville and last week (LIV events), I felt closer to getting to a higher level of golf where maybe there isn't as many thoughts on my process. Maybe I'm playing a little bit more freely and seeing the ball flight that I want to see more often." "I'm getting much closer to what it might have been early last year."

US women's soccer team fights the heat, plays to a draw against Costa Rica in final Olympic tune-up

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The heat was on for the U.S. Women's soccer team's final exhibition tune-up game before the Paris Olympics, with sweltering temperatures in the air and plenty of chances to score. The goals did not come in a 0-0 draw against Costa Rica on Tuesday night, just the second time - and first since 2015 - the U.S. Did not win its last game before a major tournament. But the match showed the Americans could handle the kind of high temperatures that could await later this month. "The last two games have been insane," defender Casey Krueger said, referring to back-to-back exhibition games before the team's cross-



Atlantic flight. "I feel like this is going to be even hotter, so if we can play in this, it gives us confidence going into France, for sure." It was 98 degrees Fahrenheit (37 Celsius) at kickoff after Washington tied the hottest day on record in the nation's capital at 104 (40C) hours earlier. It was still 94 (35C)

when the match was over. Coach Emma Hayes figured it would be a nice test for her players, given the forecast for nearly this level of heat during upcoming games in Marseille later this month. "That's added value," Hayes said Monday. "It's perfect preparation. It's pretty hot down there, so this is a great opportunity for us to experience what we're going to face." It played a role in Rose Lavelle being a precautionary late scratch because of leg tightness in warmups. "No risks," Hayes said afterward. "She was a bit tight in her groin and I took no risks. ... I want to go into the Olympics with everybody available." Korbin Albert replaced Lavelle

in the starting lineup in the game taking place on a worn down field torn up by recent football, soccer and rugby matches and attended by 18,972 fans. Players either criticized the field or offered up no comment. "The corners, there's no secret that it was definitely like I was kicking into dirt," forward Mallory Swanson said. "It was fine. Sometimes that's just the way it is going to be, and I think this team has always overcome adversity." The U.S. generated plenty of chances throughout - 26 shots total and 12 on goal - and was repeatedly denied by Costa Rica goalkeeper Noelia Bermudez, who was arguably one of the best players on the field.