

OPINION 6

HONOURING THE LEGACY OF BAL GANGADHAR TILAK

WORLD 8

3 CHILDREN KILLED, 5 INJURED IN UK STABBING

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY RISE FOR 3RD DAY ON

RAIPUR, WEDNESDAY JULY 31, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹3

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 13 Issue 208
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



MANU CLINCHES HISTORIC SECOND OLYMPIC MEDAL
11 SPORTS

Wayanad landslides leave trail of deaths, destruction

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Two humongous landslides that struck Mundakkai settlement in Wayanad district in Kerala's northern region in the wee hours of Tuesday claimed 123 lives and destroyed hundreds of houses. Rescue workers said the death toll could be more than what had been found by 6 pm on Tuesday. Torrential rain has been battering the State since Sunday morning, disrupting the normal life. This was officially confirmed by Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan on Tuesday evening during the media briefing. He said the death toll could increase as many bodies are buried under the earth and efforts are on to retrieve the bodies despite incessant rain and poor visibility.

"Two landslides struck Mundakkai at 2 am and 4 am respectively. The entire population was asleep and there was no possibility of them knowing the impending disaster. This is one of the biggest natural disasters seen by the State," said the Chief Minister. Vijayan said Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah had called him and offered all possible help. "But that would not be sufficient as the State alone cannot undertake the rescue and rehabilitation works on its own," lamented Vijayan. Wayanad district has been categorised as one of the most ecologically sensitive zones in the country by the Madhav Gadgil Committee appointed by the Union Government to study the

ground reality of the ecology of the district. The committee found that deforestation, uncontrolled quarrying and mining in the district have played havoc with the environment, contributing to the frequent landslides. Within hours of the landslides, the Central Government deployed National Disaster Response Force of the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Coast Guard to save the people who were trapped by the flood waters, soil and rocks. In addition to the residents of Mundakkai atop the high ranges, many holiday makers staying in the hundreds of high-end resorts in the region too have been trapped in the landslides. Indian Air Force have deployed two choppers from its Sulur base



Rescue operation underway following landslides triggered by heavy rain at Chooralmala, in Wayanad district, Kerala, on Tuesday PTI

for the rescue mission. According to the Defence PRO, a team of 43 personnel, led by the Second-in-Command from the 122 Infantry Battalion (TA) MADRAS, has been mobilised to aid in the ongoing rescue efforts. The team, comprising a Medical Officer, two Junior Commissioned Officers (JCOs), and 40 soldiers, is equipped to provide critical assistance in the affected area. Besides that, the Army's engineering group has reached Wayanad for rescue operations in the landslide-hit areas, the district administration said. Most of the persons who were drowned or got killed in the landslides were labourers and workers staying in the Laayams of tea and coffee plantations in the

district. According to environmentalists, Tuesday's disaster is yet another proof that the State administration has not learnt anything from past mistakes. Wayanad has no representative in Parliament as Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of Opposition who was elected from the constituency, gave it up immediately after the 2024 Lok Sabha poll to retain Rae Bareilly. Besides the dead bodies, the rescue teams came across mutilated parts of human bodies which were crushed by huge rocks and stones spewed with force by the landslides. At the time of going to the Press, only less than half of the dead bodies have been identified. **Continued on Page 2**



Rescue work underway after the Howrah-Mumbai Mail derailed near Badabambo, in Seraikela-Kharsawan district of Jharkhand, early Tuesday. At least two people were killed in the accident, according to officials PTI

Report blames coaching centre for Delhi horror

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

Days after three IAS aspirants died in rain-induced flood in the basement of Rau's coaching centre, an enquiry report by the Delhi Chief Secretary on Tuesday highlighted that the institute had completely blocked the drainage system and, unlike other similarly placed properties, had not constructed a barrier wall to prevent water from entering the building. Meanwhile, students continued to protest for the third consecutive day against the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Rau's management. One of the protesting students said ten IAS aspirants have started an indefinite hunger strike demanding compensation of ₹five crore to the victims' families. In his report to the Delhi Minister Atishi, Naresh Kumar has mentioned that the property users in the area have constructed ramps over the entire width of the plot, thereby blocking the entry of storm water during heavy rain into the existing drainage system for the sake of convenience. "The opening in the shape of the manhole over the drainage system has also been covered with finishing items, thus leaving no scope for cleaning of the drains. They have covered the existing, built up section



Students stage a protest after three civil services aspirants died due to drowning at a coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar area, in New Delhi on Tuesday Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

of drainage system by putting granites, marbles and kota stones," it stated. The report said the road from Shankar Road to Pusa Road is in saucer shape with the lowest point in front of the Rau's (IAS) Coaching Institute, where the incident happened. During peak rain, water accumulates in this stretch of 200 feet and whenever vehicles pass through this stretch there is a huge splash of water which aggravates the situation. "The plinth level of this property is also lower in comparison to the

adjoining properties," it stated. On the day of the incident, the gate of the institute broke down after a SUV car, whose driver has been arrested and sent to 14-day judicial custody, passed through the waterlogged area causing the pressure of water to break down the gate, causing the water to gush into the basement. The report said, "This coaching institute has completely blocked the drainage system and also has not taken additional safeguard to meet such eventualities. The parking access to the institute is directly

exposed to the road and in case of heavy rain water instead of going into the storm water drain enters the parking area." This is unlike the other similarly placed properties that have constructed a barrier wall which ensures that in case of heavy waterlogging in the area, the water may not enter into the parking area and basement. "There was no vigil on the part of security staff as a result water uninterruptedly crossed the parking area and entered into the basement and ultimately taking the precious life of three bright children," it said. Meanwhile, civil services aspirants and locals continued their protest outside Rau's coaching centre in Old Rajinder Nagar against the MCD and management of Rau's IAS Study Circle. "We will continue our protest against coaching centres which are not following rules and putting the lives of many students like us in danger," a protester Ayush said. He said a few police officers were advising students to go home and prepare for their exams. "We are planning to hold a candle march and start a hunger strike until all our demands are met," he added. **Continued on Page 2**

FM terms misleading Opp claims of Budget bias

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Tuesday approved ₹48.21-lakh crore Budget for 2024-25 of the Union Government. The lower House also approved the Budget of the Union Territories of Jammu and Kashmir with a voice vote. The Union Budget and Budget for J&K was passed by a voice vote by the Lok Sabha. The relevant appropriation Bills were also passed by the House. Replying to the debate, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said the fiscal deficit of the Central Government is proposed to be brought down to 4.9 per cent of the GDP during 2024-25 and further to below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26.

In her reply to the marathon debate and discussion on the Budget, Sitharaman termed misleading claims by Opposition leaders that if any State is not named in the Budget speech, then it does not get any budgetary allocation. She asserted that no State was being denied money. She recalled that in the past Budgets by the UPA Government also did not mention names of all States in their Budget speech. "I have been picking up on Budget speeches since 2004-2005, 2005-2006, 2006-2007, 2007-2008 and so on. The Budget of 2004-2005 did not take the name of 17 States. I would like to ask the members of the UPA Government at that time — did money not go to those 17 States? Did they stop it?" Sitharaman said. She was responding to comments by several Opposition members that the Budget has provided funds only to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh and nothing to other States. She also said the Government is complying with the fiscal deficit trajectory. It will bring down the deficit to below 4.5 per cent by 2025-26 from the targeted 4.9 per cent for the current fiscal. The deficit was 5.6 per cent in 2023-24. The Budget has provided substantial financial support of ₹17,000 crore to the Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir this year. It includes ₹12,000 crore towards financing the cost of J&K police. "That's the burden we want to take on our shoulders," Sitharaman said. The Finance Minister said that the government is working to realise its goal of building 'Viksit Bharat' by the year 2047. Sitharaman stressed that the FY25 Budget has not given lesser allocation to any sector compared to FY24 and no state is being denied any money. "Unemployment rate, for the age group of 15-59 years has actually come down for J&K, from 6.4 per cent in 2020-21 to 5.7 per cent in 2021-22 to 4.4 per cent in 2022-23," Sitharaman said. On agriculture the Finance Minister said, "Agriculture had ₹0.30 lakh crore in 2013-14, whereas now it has ₹1.52 lakh crore. It is 8,000 crores more than last year, which is 2023-24. Education and employment had ₹0.85 lakh crore allotted in 2013-14, whereas today it is ₹1.48 lakh crore, 23 per cent more allocation," she highlighted. **Continued on Page 2**

Train accident claims 2 lives in Jharkhand

PNS ■ JAMSHEDPUR

Two persons were killed and 20 others injured after at least 18 coaches of the Howrah-Mumbai Mail derailed in Jharkhand's Seraikela-Kharsawan district early on Tuesday. The accident occurred at 3:45 am near Barabambo, around 80 km from Jamshedpur, under the Chakradharpur Division of South Eastern Railway (SER). The railways have announced an enquiry into the train accident, another SER official said. "Two persons were killed and 20 injured as 18 coaches of the Howrah-Mumbai Mail derailed near Barabambo," said West Singhbhum Deputy Commissioner Kuldeep Chaudhary. He added that the "Howrah-Mumbai train hit the stationary goods train". Of these, 16 were passenger coaches, one power car and one pantry car, he added. Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren directed officials to expedite relief operations and help the injured people. The railways announced ₹10 lakh ex gratia for kin of each deceased, ₹5 lakh for those with major injuries, ₹1 lakh for those with minor injuries. According to the railway CPRO, rescue and relief operations have been completed. The passengers were sent to their destination by a special train from Chakradharpur at 12.15 pm, an official said. The SER cancelled a few express and passenger trains owing to the accident. These are the 22861 Howrah-Titlagarh-Kantabanji Express, 08015/18019 Kharagpur-Jhargram-Dhanbad Express, 12021/12022 Howrah-Barbil-Howrah Jan Shatabdi Express, 18109 Tatanagar-Itwari Express and 18030 Shalimar-LTT Express. Congress took a swipe at Railway Minister Ashwini Vaishnav after the train derailment in Jharkhand, saying since June the "Fail Minister" has "overseen three accidents" that have cumulatively cost 17 lives but there is "no accountability" in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's new India.

UP Govt passes stricter 'love jihad' law

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ LUCKNOW/NEW DELHI

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly on Tuesday passed the UP Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2024 that provides for a maximum punishment of life imprisonment, making the law stricter in cases of fraudulent or forced conversion. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Suresh Khanna introduced the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2024 in the House on Monday. The move, however, has drawn severe criticism from the Opposition. Earlier the maximum punishment provided for those found guilty of marrying a woman by deceiving and changing her religion was 10 years with a fine of ₹50,000. According to the new provisions, if any minor,



Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Khanna presents a supplementary Budget in the presence of Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and other members during the Monsoon Session of State Legislative Assembly at Vidhan Bhawan, in Lucknow, on Tuesday PTI

disabled or mentally challenged person, woman, or SC-ST individual is converted, the culprit will be punished with life imprisonment and a fine of ₹1 lakh. Similarly, mass religious conversion will also be punishable with life imprisonment and a fine of ₹1 lakh. Receiving funding from

foreign or illegal institutions will be punishable with imprisonment of up to 14 years and a fine of ₹10 lakh. If someone, with the intention of causing religious conversion, threatens any person with harm to their life or property, attacks or uses force, promises marriage,

lures, or trafficking a minor, woman, or person, they will be punished with up to 20 years of imprisonment. The punishment will not be less than one year and can be extended up to life imprisonment (until death). Apart from this, a fine will be imposed for the treatment and rehabilitation of the victim. The Bill also proposes that anyone can register an FIR in conversion cases. Presently, Section 4 of the Act says only a person who has been converted, his/her parents, brother, sister, or any other person who is related to him/her by blood, marriage, or adoption may lodge a first information report about the allegation of such conversion and no one else. Further, the Bill aims to add a new offence of receiving funds from foreign or illegal organisations for unlawful conversion purposes. Offenders will face jail terms ranging between 5 years and 14 years. **Continued on Page 2**

India to be third largest economy within five years, says Modi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Underlining that India is a beacon of growth and stability in a world facing high inflation and low growth, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said here on Tuesday the country is firmly on the path to becoming the world's third-largest economy within next five years. Making this assertion, he said global investors are eyeing India as an investment destination and exhorted the domestic industry to seize the golden opportunity to be part of the journey of 'Viksit Bharat'. Addressing a Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) post-Budget

conference on 'Journey Towards Viksit Bharat', Modi said wealth creators are the main driving force of the country's growth story at a time when India's policies, commitment, determination, decisions and investments are becoming the basis of global progress. "Today, the whole world is looking at India and you (industry). Policies of the Government and commitment and investment are becoming foundation of global development. Investors across the world are keen to come to India. World leaders are filled with positivity for India. This is the golden chance for the Indian industry and we should not lose

this opportunity," Modi said. Pointing towards the growing interest in India among global investors, the Prime Minister informed the industry about his call in the recent NITI Aayog meeting to State Chief Ministers for creating investor-friendly charters, bringing clarity in investment policies and creating a conducive atmosphere for investment. With high growth and low inflation, he said, India is a beacon of growth and stability in a world which is facing high inflation and low growth and other geopolitical challenges. India is growing at 8 per cent and the day is not far when the country will become the third-largest



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks during CII post-Budget conference in New Delhi PTI

economy globally from the current fifth position, he said. The Prime Minister exuded confidence that this feat of becoming the third-largest economy will be achieved in his ongoing third term. The Modi Government does not lack political will and will take all decisions keeping in mind 'nation first approach', he said. "The Commitment of 'Nation First' is reflected in the 5 trillion dollar economy goal, saturation approach, emphasis on Zero Effect-Zero Defect and pledge of Aatmnirbhar Bharat or Viksit Bharat," he said. The domestic industry, he said, should compete with the

Government to make India a developed nation by 2047 and also make it a global player in sunrise sectors. He also recalled various measures announced in the Budget, especially for promoting the MSME sector which creates crores of jobs. The Prime Minister said the government is highly focused on skill development and employment keeping in mind Industry 4.0 standards. India is home to 1.40 lakh startups employing lakhs of youth, and more than 8 crore people have started new business with the help of Mudra Yojana, Startup India and Standup India schemes. **Continued on Page 2**

BJP protests coaching centre tragedy

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi BJP leaders and workers on Tuesday staged a protest near Rajghat in central Delhi against the AAP government over deaths of three civil services aspirants at Rau's coaching centre. As a mark of protest, they covered their mouths with ribbons and also paid homage to the victims by observing a two-minute silence.

Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva stated, "The shameless statements made yesterday need to be understood by all. Until July 26, all AAP leaders were claiming that 90 per cent of the drains had been cleaned, while the BJP had been asserting from day one that the cleaning had not even begun. After the incident in Rajendra Nagar, AAP leaders have taken a U-turn."

Sachdeva claimed that AAP ministers lack the will to work and said, "On August 21, 2023, the Chief Secretary sent a proposal to the minister to focus on drainage management, the Master Drainage Plan, and complete desilting. However, Saurabh Bhardwaj sat on the proposal for five months and then returned it with a note." He added that the Chief Secretary resubmitted the file for approval on April 8, 2024, but it remains pending with Bhardwaj.

"Following the Mukherjee



Ranjan Dimri

Nagar incident, the Supreme Court directed the Delhi government to audit the buildings housing coaching institutes and PG accommodations. Sanjay Singh and Saurabh Bhardwaj should present that audit report. If they had been proactive, the students' lives could have been saved," Sachdeva stated.

New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj remarked that the issue is extremely sensitive and reveals the AAP government's lack of empathy. "Despite being in power for over a decade and making grand claims, they

have failed to manage a half-hour rain without flooding the city. On July 22 and 24, after heavy rains caused waterlogging, the local people of Rajendra Nagar repeatedly complained to the MLA and the municipal councillor," she said, adding that they were given assurances but no action was taken.

Chandni Chowk Praveen Khandelwal said, "AAP MPs were accusing Congress on Monday, but today the INDIA coalition members are protesting at Jantar Mantar in support of Kejriwal. This double stan-

dard is evident. The rules are clear; such a government should be dismissed immediately." Sachdeva alleged that the residents of Rajendra Nagar had been lodging complaints with their MLA and municipal councillor for days. "But if MLA Durgesh Pathak and councillor Aarti Chawla had heeded those concerns, this incident could have been avoided. The AAP, known for accepting commissions and bribes, is again trying to escape responsibility and refuses to accept any blame," he said.

AAP Councillor running illegal lodge for IAS aspirants: BJP

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla on Tuesday accused the AAP Councillor Arti Chawla of illegally running a lodge for IAS aspirants with no proper exit and entry in old Rajinder Nagar where three students died after rain water entered the basement of Rau's coaching centre in the area.



Poonawalla posted a video on X (formerly Twitter) from the site and said, "In Old Rajinder Nagar I am at property of AAP corporator Arti Chawla — it is barely 500 metres away from Rau's classes. See the violations in her own property — illegally running rooms for aspirant students who pay 18,000-25,000 rupees per room per month!" Talking about the living conditions of the student in the centre, he said, "No proper exit and entry. It's a death trap! She is herself doing business of 'Maut Ka Basement' and 'Maut Ka Kamra' — Running illegal commercial activities in building

— multiple violations but no action by Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) and Delhi Fire services (DFS)." He said that she has been missing since July 27, the day when the incident happened and alleged that it is a clear complicity with coaching classes. "Corporators, MLAs, MCD, fire department, officials, PWD — all are complicit in this criminal corruption and negligence. Atishi, Saurabh and Kejriwal must resign. Will they sack Arti Chawla?" he questioned.

Desilting files pending with Government: Naresh

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid the blame game between the Delhi Revenue Minister Atishi and Chief Secretary, Naresh Kumar has written to the Delhi government underlining that files are pending regarding desilting of the city's drainage system with the officials of government.

In the note, Kumar claimed that a report on the sewage issues of the city, dated March 15 this year is pending with Atishi. Stating that for three decades no Drainage Master Plan has been prepared for the city, he submitted a report to her on March 17.

"As no directions were received from the Minister (Water) on the report, the undersigned on March 17 requested the Minister to issue necessary directions on the report to the department concerned and DJB, so that further necessary action can be taken in this regard by all concerned. However, instructions from the Minister (Water) are yet awaited on the report," he stated.

The report also spoke about the unsatisfactory pace of desilting work in peripheral lines and internal lines, he added. Further he claimed that that pursuant to water logging in the city after high water-level in Yamuna river in the year 2023, multi-stakeholder meeting was

convened involving all drain owning agencies to deliberate on a comprehensive strategy for scientific drain management to avoid water logging and instances of flooding.

Explanation sought from Chief Secretary

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Irrigation and Flood Control (I&FC) Minister Saurabh Bhardwaj on Tuesday sought an explanation from Chief Secretary Naresh Kumar over his claim of pending decisions with Bhardwaj.

"Saurabh Bhardwaj on Tuesday called Additional Chief Secretary (I&FC) and Chief Engineer (I&FC) to understand which decisions are pending in this file. It was categorically told to the undersigned that no decision is pending on this file and after the approval dated March 14, the department went ahead with the recommendations," a statement said. "Therefore, the Chief Secretary is directed to clearly spell out what decision with respect to the file, which has been claimed as pending on the part of the Minister," it read.

INBRIEF

RECPDCL HANDS OVER NPTL TO TEECL
Gurugram: REC Power Development and Consultancy Limited (RECPDCL), a wholly owned subsidiary of REC Limited, the Maharashtra CPSU under the aegis of Ministry of Power and a leading NBFC, handed over a project specific SPV (Special Purpose Vehicle) viz, NERGS-1 Power Transmission Limited (NPTL) to M/s TechnoElectric & Engineering Company Limited (TEECL), formed for establishment of new 400 KV switching station at Bokajan in Assam and LILO (loop in and loop out) of both circuits of Misa — New Mariani 400 KV D/c line at Bokajan in Assam. TEECL emerged as the Transmission Service Provider (TSP) for the scheme through Tariff-based Competitive Bidding (TCB) process.

GNDU 11TH IN MDRA UNIVERSITY RANKINGS 2024
Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University (GNDU) has achieved an overall 11th rank among the top government universities in India in the India Today MDRA Best Universities Survey 2024. This all-time high ranking highlights GNDU's commitment to excellence in education, research, and holistic development of its students, in line with the National Education Policy (NEP). The India Today University Rankings evaluate institutions on criteria's including academic reputation, infrastructure, faculty quality, research output, and perception.

NFR BATS FOR ENERGY THROUGH SOLAR POWER PLANTS
Maligaon: Northeast Frontier Railway (NFR) in line with the policy of Indian Railways is steadily progressing to achieve the target of net zero carbon emission by the year 2030. In an endeavour to further minimize the dependence on fossil fuels, the NFR is adopting various steps to generate more and more green energy by installing Roof-Top Solar power plants in service buildings and other installations spreading across the zone. To meet the energy demand through renewable energy, NFR has generated 1.45 million unit of energy from renewable sources that results in saving ₹97.9 lakhs (approximately) during April-June, 2024. For non-traction energy consumption, an account of improved power factor, rebate on timely payment etc. NFR has also saved ₹66.7 lakhs (approximately) from April to June 2024.

MVA demands probe into Ajit's secret visits to Delhi to meet HM

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Tuesday demanded a probe into deputy chief minister and NCP (AP) president Ajit Pawar's ten secret visits to Delhi — that too in disguise and with assumed identities — to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah ahead of his joining the BJP-led MahaYuti government in Maharashtra in July last year. Linking a controversial disclosure by Ajit Pawar — who was the then Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in the Maharashtra Assembly -- about his secret visits to the national capital to meet Shah prior to his joining the MahaYuti government on July 2, 2023 to "national security", the MVA leaders demanded a thorough inquiry and stringent action against the current deputy chief minister.

The Opposition NCP (Sharad Pawar) Working President Supriya Sule and Shiv Sena

(UBT) chief spokesperson Sanjay Raut flagged the issue after a few regional television channels reported Ajit Pawar's informal disclosure wearing a cap and mask for his secret meetings with Shah before engineered a split in the Sharad Pawar-led united NCP and joined the Eknath Shinde government at the behest of the ruling BJP at the Centre. Ajitdada — as Ajit Pawar is known in the state political circles — had reportedly made the disclosure to a group of journalists in Delhi during the latter's visit to the national capital last week.

Tearing into Ajit Pawar, Supriya — who is Sharad Pawar's daughter — told media persons in Delhi: "I have read in newspapers that Ajit Pawar, who was then the LoP in the Maharashtra Assembly — that he used to fly to Delhi in disguise and that too with assumed names. I have ask him three to four questions sincerely. First, given that as a LoP in the Assembly, he

used to criticise the BJP in public and to meet Shah secretly, was he not compromising the interests of Maharashtra?"

"Secondly, the television channels have reported that he used to travel with assumed names. This is an issue of national security. If we have to fly anywhere we need an Aadhar card as proof. Here is a case where a Leader of the Opposition books his tickets with assumed names. During the checks at the airport, was the identity card shown by him matching with his actual? If Ajit Pawar does like this, even terrorists will do like this tomorrow," Supriya said.

"This is a national security issue. It is to be investigated as to how this security breach took place at Mumbai and Delhi airports and how Ajit Pawar travelled by the assumed identities. Even airlines need to be investigated. Who will take responsibility for this security lapse?" she asked.

Mamata raps Centre for railway mishaps

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday attacked the Narendra Modi Government for "gifting" Railway accidents "on weekly basis" in the name of development.

Hours after 18 coaches of Howrah-Mumbai Mail derailed in Seraikeela-Kharsawan district of Jharkhand killing two persons and leaving about 20 injured, Banerjee said railway accidents had become a regular affair adding, the present Government was "producing high sounding nothings in the name of development."

In a subsequent post on the X Banerjee wrote, "another disastrous rail accident! Howrah-Mumbai mail derails in Chakradharpur division in Jharkhand today early morning, multiple deaths and huge number of injuries is the tragic consequences." Banerjee who had before assuming the Chief Ministership of Bengal in 2011 been the Railway Minister on several occasions said, "I seriously ask: is this governance?



This series of nightmares almost every week, this unending procession of deaths and injuries on railway tracks: for how long shall we tolerate this? Will there be no end to the callousness of Government of India?"

Another Trinamool Congress and Bengal minister Firdhaul Hakim too slammed the Centre and the Indian Railways for investing only in Gujarat and nowhere else. "This is the third or fourth accident in a matter of a few weeks ... whose fault is this ... the people purchase tickets not to die but to reach their destinations safely ... lakhs of posts have been left vacant by the Indian Railways ... more so in the department of safety ... and the people are dying like animals," he said.

The BJP was quick to react wondering how many accidents occurred when Banerjee was at the helm of affairs. "I can count half-a-dozen accidents when Mamata Banerjee was the Railway Minister ... there were accidents at Sainthia, Banstala and many other places in which many people died ... whom will the TMC blame for those accidents," asked State BJP leader Pranoy Roy.

The Left on the other hand blamed the "anti-people" and "pro-rich" policy of the BJP Government for the recent spate of accidents. "This Government is planning to sell off the Indian Railways to private companies which is why it is making it economically viable by not appointing people ... and the people are dying in the process ... life of the common man has no value for this Government," said Sujan Chakrabarty CPI(M) central committee member.

The accident occurred at the wee hours of Tuesday near Barabambo, around 80 km from Jamshedpur, under Chakradharpur Division of the South Eastern Railway.

BJP for stopping infiltration, not dividing West Bengal: Adhikari

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Close on the heels of Mamata Banerjee charging the BJP for "hatching a conspiracy to partition Bengal to suit its own political needs," State Opposition Leader Suwendu Adhikari said, his party had no policy to bifurcate the State and that it only wanted a check on trans-border infiltration.

"The BJP has a clear stand ... we don't want a division of Bengal ... we only want the Government to take infiltration seriously to control the quickly changing demographic pattern which has become quite dangerous for the Hindu population of the State," Adhikari said.

"Infiltration has become a

major issue ... the indigenous Muslims are not a problem for Bengal ... it is the infiltrators including the Rohingyas who are entering this State and then migrating to the other parts of the country who are the real problems ... we want the Hindus safe," Adhikari said.

Adhikari's statement came close on the heels of the Chief Minister accusing the saffron outfit of playing divisive politics.

"During elections the BJP rakes up divisive issues ... they have hatched a conspiracy to divide Bengal ... but we will not allow that to happen," Banerjee on Monday told the State Assembly adding her party would resist all attempts to divide her State.

Wayanad-type disasters to recur till Government mends ways: Experts

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

A man-made disaster which Wayanad is the ideal word to describe the mishap that happened on Tuesday. Noted environmentalist Madhav Gadgil who headed the Western Ghats Ecology Expert Panel that studied the current status of ecology of the Western Ghats of which Wayanad is a part had designated more than 50 per cent of the region as belonging to the Ecologically Sensitive Zone 1 (ESZ-1) which means that the entire district is fragile and vulnerable to any kind of natural disasters.

The Kerala Government discarded the suggestions by the Gadgil Committee and turned a blind eye to the massive deforestation, quarrying and mining in Wayanad district. "Cash crops like tea, coffee, rubber and spice cultivation reigned supreme and the political parties that ruled the State gave away vast stretches of reserve forest lands to encroachers from Central Travancore and Northern Districts like Kasaragod and Kannur," said P K Ramachandran, former member of Rubber Board and a botanist of repute.

T P Kunhikkannan, economist-turned-environmentalist who has studied the topography of Wayanad from Ground Zero and has authored many books and research papers said that it was a cardinal sin to dis-

tribute the reserve forest lands as patta to encroachers. "The forest area/green cover has depleted beyond recognition and this is seen as the main reason for the landslides that is marauding the nature. Organized religions play havoc with the fragile ecology of Wayanad by peddling lies and half-lies about Gadgil Committee findings," said Kunhikkannan.

Both Ramachandran and Kunhikkannan were highly critical of the explosion in Resort Culture in the district. "The resorts that have mushroomed in Wayanad with the blessings of political parties have literally destroyed the district's beautiful landscape," pointed out Kunhikkannan.

According to John Peruvanthanam, who has dedicated his life in preserving the environment, said the cutting down of trees and levelling the hills have led to rain water percolating to the empty water pockets underneath the forests. "When the land could not take any more water, these pockets burst with stupendous force thereby causing death and destruction all around," said John.

Landslides occur in Kerala's High Ranges on a regular basis. The Kavalappara landslide that claimed more than 100 lives in 2019 and the one in Idukki that saw another hundred being swallowed by the mad flow of flood waters are still fresh in the minds of the people.

Report blames coaching centre...

From Page 1

Another student Satyam Singh said, "Our demands are immediate compensation for the family members of the victim from Rau's IAS Study Circle on moral grounds and strict action against those responsible for the safety and security lapse."

"Somewhere we had a brief hope that the administration will listen to us, we will be heard, heard by the UPSC coaching lobby, heard by the authority, but after four days we have come to a realisation that this protest is going nowhere," said a woman, who is on a hunger strike.

Heavy police deployment has been made in the area to maintain law and order. According to officials, Rau's IAS Study Circle was illegally using the basement of the building as a library. Locals have alleged that the drainage system in the area was heavily clogged with silt.

From Page 1

Hospitals in the district and Kozhikode wore pictures of heartrending scenes as the survivors scanned the dead bodies in search of their dear and near ones who disappeared in the mishap. Chief Minister Vijayan has sought the assistance of the global comity of nations for financial aid.

Wayanad landslides...

From Page 1

Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath had taken this initiative with the intention of curbing 'love jihad', a term coined by some Hindu outfits for alleged forcible conversion. An ordinance was issued for curbing forced conversion in November 2020 and later, after the bill was passed by both the houses of the Uttar Pradesh Legislature, the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act-2021 came into force.

Commenting on the bill outside Parliament, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said "What else do they have, they are not doing anything new. They are trying to divert the attention of the people through communal politics." The Supreme Court in May this year orally commented that the Uttar Pradesh 'anti-conversion' law in some parts may seem to be violative of the fundamental right to religion guaranteed under Article 25 of the Constitution.

Eye health camp organised

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

At a young age when teenagers enjoy their lives, Sanjana Chauhan a student of class eleventh thought about children from the underprivileged sections, who are not aware of the importance of eyecare and tend to neglect it. She initiated the campaign "Drishti" with one vision-to make eyecare available to one and all.

Through this initiative, people's eyes were tested, spreading awareness about the impor-



tance of eyecare. In addition, free spectacles and medicines will be distributed to them.

India to be third...

From Page 1

Referring to the much-praised PM Package worth Rs 2 lakh crore in this year's budget, he said it will benefit more than 4 crore youth.

"PM Package is holistic and comprehensive. It is interlinked with end-to-end solutions. It aims to make India's manpower and products globally competitive in terms of quality and value," he said.

Modi also touched upon the Internship scheme introduced to enhance skill and exposure for the youth, thereby boosting their chances of employment, while at the same time incentivizing those generating employment on a large scale, he said. Therefore, he said, the government has announced incentives in EPFO contribution.

Observing that the manufacturing ecosystem has transformed in the last 10 years, he said, Make in India and simplification of FDI rules in various sectors along with multi purpose logistics parks, PLI for 14 sectors are some of the measures taken in the past.

The Budget has announced plug-and-play investment-ready investment parks for 100 districts of the country, he said, adding, these 100 cities will become new hubs of Viksit Bharat.

The prime minister underlined some points in the budget such as increased allocation for nuclear power generation, Digital Public Infrastructure for agriculture, Bhu-Aadhar card for providing number to land parcels of farmers, Rs 1,000 crore venture capital fund for space economy, Critical

Mineral Mission, and upcoming auction of offshore blocks for mining. These new announcements will open new avenues of progress, he said.

Highlighting that opportunities are being created, especially in the sunrise sectors, he said, there is a need to make a name in the semiconductor value chain to play a crucial role in the future and therefore, the government is laying emphasis on promoting the semiconductor industry.

He also touched upon encouraging electronics manufacturing, especially during the present era of mobile manufacturing revolution.

Noting that the clean energy initiatives in this year's budget are being highly discussed, the prime minister said that in today's era, both energy security and energy transition are equally important for the economy and ecology.

"Our industries and entrepreneurs have always shown their commitment to the development of the country," he said expressing confidence that they will play a key role in making India a global player in all the sunrise sectors.

Pointing out that the nation is moving forward with the resolutions of Viksit Bharat, he said 25 crore people have risen out of poverty in the last 10 years, and emphasized the government's efforts to increase ease of living and boost quality of life.

Modi also drew a comparison with the Budget of the previous government and Budget presented during his government.

Ramen Deka to be sworn in as C'garh Guv today

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Ramen Deka will take oath of office and secrecy as the Chhattisgarh Governor here on Wednesday morning. Deka arrived on Tuesday and was given a guard of honour at the state hangar. He was welcomed by senior leaders including the Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai.



"Sai is very simple and approachable. He is working diligently to develop Chhattisgarh while paying attention to economically and socially backward communities," he added. He added: "Both Russia and the United States are currently experiencing differences, but India maintains friendly relations with both nations and is actively working towards peace." Sai praised the outgoing



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Governor. "The experience of working with Harichandan has been excellent. He has carried out his constitutional duties with utmost dedication and provided continuous guidance for the development of the state."

Two Maoists with Rs 25 lakhs bounty surrender in Kabirdham

STAFF REPORTER KABIRDHAM

Two Maoists carrying a cumulative bounty of Rs 25 lakh in three states surrendered to security personnel on Tuesday in Kabirdham district of Chhattisgarh. Laxman Madkam alias Dinesh and Bhima alias Ashok Anil turned themselves in, citing disappointment with Maoist leaders, Kabirdham Superintendent of Police Abhishek Pallava said. Dinesh was a member of the Vistara Platoon Number 2 as well as Boramdev Area Committee of the outlawed Maoist outfit. He carried a bounty of Rs 10 lakhs announced in Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra. He was involved in seven incidents of Maoist violence in Kabirdham and four acts of violence in Khairagarh-



Chhuikhadan-Gandai districts of Chhattisgarh. Bhima was the People's Liberation Number 2 member under Company Number 1 of Battalion Number 1. He carried a collective reward of Rs 15 lakhs announced by the same three states. Bhima was involved in digging roads, felling trees to block roads and putting up Maoists posters and banners.

C'garh climber honoured for conquering Europe's highest peak

STAFF REPORTER BILASPUR

Bilaspur Collector Awanish Sharan on Tuesday honoured climber Nisha Yadav for conquering and hoisting the tricolour on Mt. Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe. Mount Elbrus, a dormant volcano in Russia, is Europe's highest summit, at 5,642 metres (18,510 ft) above sea level. Yadava said the

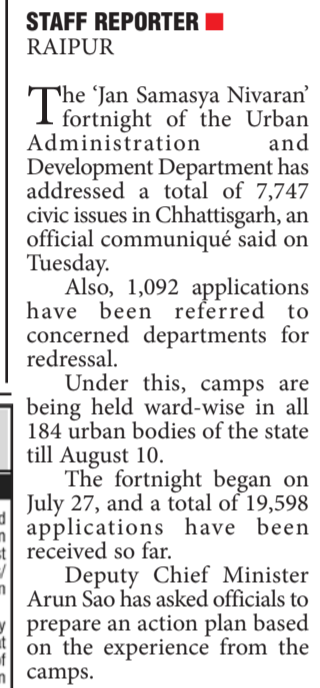


accomplishment was the result of two years of hard work. She proceeded towards her goal on the night of July 13 and reached the summit at 9 a.m. the next day. She thanked Collector Sharan for the assistance she had received for her climb. Yadav has also conquered Gorichen Glacier at 22,500 feet in Arunachal Pradesh, Kedarkantha at 12,500 feet in Uttarakhand and other summits in the country.

Jan Samasya Nivaran' resolves 7,747 issues

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

The 'Jan Samasya Nivaran' fortnight of the Urban Administration and Development Department has addressed a total of 7,747 civic issues in Chhattisgarh, an official communiqué said on Tuesday. Also, 1,092 applications have been referred to concerned departments for redressal. Under this, camps are being held ward-wise in all 184 urban bodies of the state till August 10. The fortnight began on July 27, and a total of 19,598 applications have been received so far. Deputy Chief Minister Arun Sao has asked officials to prepare an action plan based on the experience from the camps.



The camps address local civic problems such as ration cards, national family assistance, old age pension, social security pension, birth-death certificates, building construction licences, no objection certificates, transfers, self-employment cases, and other issues. The facility to pay taxes is also available.

Chhattisgarh's fifth 400 kV power sub-station to be set up in Kunkuri

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh's fifth 400 kV (kilovolt) power sub-station will come up at Kunkuri in Jashpur district. The double-circuit 400 kV power transmission line is one of the most powerful electrical installations in the entire power system; at a frequency of 50 Hz, it generates an intense magnetic field. Jashpur Collector Dr Ravi Mittal has allotted 18.20 acres of land in Harradand of Kunkuri block to the Chhattisgarh State Power Distribution Co Ltd (CSPDCL) to establish the sub-station, a state government spokesperson said. Divisional Engineer of CSPDCL N R Bhagat said with this construction, there



will be a radical improvement in the power supply system in the district. He said that at present the power supply is through a 132 kV line from the sub-station located in Bilaspur. Due to the long distance, technical problems have been disrupting the supply besides low voltage issues. The sub-station will also facilitate smooth power supply to the neighbouring state of Jharkhand. Besides, 176 new additional transformers have been installed in the district to improve the power system. Bhagat said the district has received approval for additional 274 transformers to improve the power system in the district. Of these, 176 have been installed.

Union Bank of India Appendix-IV POSSESSION NOTICE (Rule - 8 (1))

South East Central Railway E-Tender Notice



Motivated by the district administration, farmers in Dantewada in Chhattisgarh are cultivating rice with the modern Sri-method. A target of sowing 600 hectares has been set up along with encouraging the use of green manure in 1,200 hectare of land.

Six arrested for stealing 22 two-wheelers

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Tuesday arrested two workers in connection with the theft of 22 two-wheelers in the capital city. Suraj Yadav, Prakash Yadav alias Raja, Kishan Yadav, Pawan Sahu, Durgesh Sahu and Hitendra Sahu have been taken into custody, Raipur Additional Superintendent of Police (Urban) Lakhan Pawar Patle said. Three of them were nabbed when they were looking for customers to sell a stolen motorcycle. The police seized 15 motorcycles, seven scooters and a two-wheeler engine from them.



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No rethink to allow investment from China: Commerce Minister

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal on Tuesday said there has been no rethink on the government's stand on allowing Chinese investment and the views expressed in the Economic Survey do not represent the government's views.



Replying to supplementaries in the Lok Sabha, Goyal said the government scrutinises Chinese investments and its stand in this regard has not changed. During the Question Hour, Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi alleged that India has become dependent on China and quoted the Economic Survey, saying it supported getting foreign direct investment (FDI) from the neighbouring country. Goyal hit back at the Congress, saying under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) rule, India had become dependent on neighbouring countries. "Under the Congress, imports increased from USD 4 billion to USD 40-45 billion, which is more than 10 times. In our term, the increase is only 2-2.5 times. We took steps to make India self-reliant," the minister said. "I am making a direct allegation against the UPA.... Their name has changed, it is now the INDI Alliance..." he said. "We

UPA Govt refused 50% profit on cost in MSP, says Chouhan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan on Tuesday said the previous UPA government had refused to boost 50 per cent profit on cost to farmers in the minimum support price for crops, as based on the formula suggested by the M S Swaminathan Commission.



During the Question Hour in the Lok Sabha, Congress MP Deepender Hooda asked a supplementary question related to the farmers' protests of 2020-21 and said around 750 farmers lost their lives during the agitation. He asked if the government is considering providing jobs to the next of kin of those who lost their lives during the year-long protests at Delhi's borders against three contentious farm laws of the Centre that have since been repealed. Chouhan said the question was not related to the main question, which was on issues faced by farmers. "The government is totally committed to farmers' welfare," he said. "The agriculture minister alleged that the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had refused to implement the recom-

mendations of the Swaminathan commission that had suggested 50 per cent profit to farmers on their cost. "The Swaminathan commission report came in 2006 and it said 50 per cent profit on cost should be added for calculating the MSP for crops. Their government had denied it. I have documents.... Their minister, Kantilal Bhuria, had said 50 per cent profit cannot be given. Sharad Pawar was the agriculture minister, he had also said it cannot be given," Chouhan said. He placed a cabinet note of the UPA government, led by Manmohan Singh, on the table and said the Centre then had refused to accept the suggestions of the Swaminathan commission, saying a mechanical linkage between the MSP and the cost of production would distort the market.

SC throws out pleas for review of VVPAT verdict

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has dismissed a petition seeking review of its April 26 verdict that rejected the pleas for complete cross-verification of votes cast using the Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) with Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT). Terming the suspicion about manipulation of the EVMs "unfounded", the apex court had on April 26 rejected the demand for reverting to the old paper ballot system, saying the polling devices were "secure" and they eliminate booth capturing and bogus voting.

A plea seeking review of the verdict came up for consideration in-chambers before a bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Dipankar Datta. "We have carefully perused the review petition, as also the grounds in support thereof. In our opinion, no case for review of the judgment dated April 26 is made out. The review petition is, accordingly, dismissed," the bench said in its order passed on July 25. VVPAT is an independent vote verification system which enables electors to see whether their votes have been recorded correctly.

SUPREME COURT NEWS

NAWAB GETS BAIL

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to NCP leader Nawab Malik on medical grounds in a money laundering case. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma took note of the submissions of a counsel, appearing for the former Maharashtra minister, which he was suffering from various ailments. The top court said medical bail to Malik will be valid till disposal of the regular bail plea pending before the Bombay High Court.



RANJAN'S BAIL PLEA DISMISSED

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday dismissed former Ranchi deputy commissioner Chhavi Ranjan's bail plea in a case related to the sale of army land in the Jharkhand capital. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and S C Sharma said it was not inclined to interfere with the Jharkhand High Court order rejecting the bail in October last year.

BAIL TO TMC LEADER MONDAL

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday granted bail to Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Anubrata Mondal, who was arrested by the CBI in a cattle smuggling case. A bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Satish Chandra Sharma granted the relief to Mondal after noting that the trial in the matter would take time and he has been in jail for two years.



UDDHAV FACTION PLEA TO BE HEARD ON AUGUST 7

New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Tuesday said it will hear on August 7 a plea of the Uddhav Thackeray faction challenging Maharashtra Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar's order declaring the Shiv Sena bloc led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde as the 'real political party' after its split in June 2022. The Speaker had also dismissed the disqualification petitions of the Thackeray faction against CM Shinde and his supporting MLAs.



Centre mulls regulatory framework for acupuncture within country: Nadda

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In a move that is likely to bring relief to acupuncture practitioners across the country, the Centre is considering the establishment of a regulatory framework for the 3,000 year-old practice. This proposed mechanism aims to enhance accessibility and promote evidence-based practices within the country. Despite acupuncture's official recognition by the Government in February 2019, the lack of clear regulatory guidelines has impeded its independent practice. The courts from time to time have echoed concern in the matter, with the Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court instructing the Tamil Nadu Government last year to ensure that acupuncture is practiced by registered medical practitioners and not as an independent system of medicine until the final guidelines from the Apex Committee are approved.



The Madurai bench passed the order while disposing of a plea filed in 2016, by the President of the All Tamil Nadu Acupuncture and Alternative Medical Association Trust, seeking to forbar the police from interfering with the practice of acupuncture by their members. However, with Union Health Minister J P Nadda confirming on Tuesday that the Government is actively reviewing the apex committee's recommendations, practitioners in the sector can

now look forward to formal recognition. Nadda highlighted that a thorough consultation involving multiple departments, including the Ministry of AYUSH, has been completed. Nadda explained that based on the Standing Committee of Experts' recommendations, acupuncture was recognised as a mode of therapy. In 2018, the Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) advised that acupuncture could be considered an independent healthcare

Rahul, Priyanka to visit landslide-hit Wayanad

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra will visit landslide-hit Wayanad on Wednesday morning, party sources said. Landslides hit the hilly Wayanad district on Tuesday, leaving 57 people dead. The landslides triggered by heavy rainfall, which occurred early on Tuesday, have left a trail of destruction in its wake, with several houses destroyed, water bodies swollen and trees uprooted. The ACA's recommendations encompass proposed curricula for certificate, degree, and diploma courses in acupuncture, a template for regulatory rules, and suggestions for treatment reimbursement. To ensure effective implementation, the committee has recommended that the government establish a regulatory mechanism to create a supportive environment for acupuncture practice as a recognised healthcare system.



ations are underway. The former Congress chief expressed deep anguish over the loss of lives in the massive landslides near Meppadi in Wayanad. "My heartfelt condolences go out to the bereaved families who have lost their loved ones. I hope those still trapped are brought to safety soon," he said in a social media post. "I have spoken to the Kerala chief minister and the Wayanad district collector who assured me that rescue operations are underway. I have requested them to ensure coordination

"My heartfelt condolences and prayers are with all those who have lost loved ones. I hope and pray that everyone is brought to safety as soon as possible," she said. "I urge the government to take immediate action to expedite relief and rescue operations and request UDF workers to step forward to do all they can to be of support and comfort to all those affected by this tragedy," Priyanka Gandhi said in a social media post. Speaking in the Lok Sabha later, Rahul Gandhi demanded the Centre extend all possible support for the rescue and rehabilitation of those affected. Raising the issue during Zero Hour, he also sought enhanced compensation to the next of kin of those killed in the landslides and restoration of vital transport and communication lines. Rahul Gandhi won Uttar Pradesh's Rae Bareilly and Kerala's Wayanad seat this time but decided to represent Rae Bareilly in the Lok Sabha. Priyanka Gandhi is slated to contest the bypolls in Wayanad whenever they take place.

SC pulls up Centre for indecision on OROP, imposes fine

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court came down heavily on the Centre on Tuesday for failing to take any decision for years on the pension payable to retired regular captains of the army in accordance with the One Rank One Pension (OROP) scheme and imposed a fine of Rs 2 lakh on it. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and R Mahadevan gave one last opportunity to the Centre till November 14 for resolving the anomalies with regard to the pension of such retired officers under the scheme. It said the cost of Rs 2 lakh shall be deposited in the welfare funds of the Army and warned the government that if the decision is not taken by November 14, it will direct for enhanced pension by 10 per cent to the retired regular captains. It listed the matter for further hearing on November 25. Appearing in the court on behalf of the Centre, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhatti said six anomalies have been pointed out by the Kochi bench of the Armed Forces Tribunal (AFT), which needs to be rectified, but the government is yet to take a stand in the matter. The bench said, "For how many years will this go on? Either you pay an enhanced pension by 10 per cent or we are imposing a cost on you. We wanted a decision to be taken, but you have not taken it. This matter came up in 2021 but still no decision has been taken." Bhatti said the government cannot take a piecemeal decision, it has to look at the issue



holistically and consider all the six anomalies as the decision may affect others. "All I can do is tender my apology. Please give us one more chance, we will take a decision in this regard. We will file an affidavit in this regard. Give us three months' time, we will take a decision," the additional solicitor general said. The bench initially refused to give any further time to the Centre and accept any affidavit and said it will direct an enhanced pension to these retired officers. Justice Khanna said, "What is this? If the government is not taking a decision, I cannot do anything. This does not give solace to these officers. They are retired captains. They have no say. They have no access to you people. Either you start paying 10 per cent more or pay the cost. The choice is yours." As soon as the bench started dictating the order for enhanced pension for the retired captains, Bhatti asked it to kindly impose a cost because that will serve equity better than enhanced pension. The bench then gave time till

November 14 to the government as a last opportunity but imposed a cost of Rs 2 lakh on it, saying the amount has to be deposited in the welfare fund of the armed forces in four weeks. On July 23, the top court had noted that the regional bench of the AFT had passed an order on December 7, 2021 according to which the government was to take a decision on the pension payable to the retired regular captains, noticing that there was an anomaly that required to be resolved for the implementation of OROP. The Centre has challenged the AFT order and arrayed 13 retired regular captains as a party to the dispute. The bench noted that this court has repeatedly adjourned the matter to enable the appellant government to take a decision on the pension of the retired regular captains. "In these circumstances, we are inclined to impose exemplary costs and also direct that the regular captains will get pension enhanced by 20 per cent from the date the OROP scheme is applicable. However, as a last opportunity to enable the appellant to

obtain instructions, re-list on July 30," the bench had said in its July 23 order. The root of the dispute lies in the OROP scheme introduced by the Centre in 2015. Under the scheme, the rate of pensions for past retirees were fixed at par with that for the current retirees of the armed forces. However, certain anomalies crept in the pension tables for captains and majors for the lack of proper data of the officers in the ranks of regular captains and majors since the minimum current rank of retirement to attain pensionable service is lieutenant colonel. The Ministry of Defence appointed a One Man Judicial Committee (OMJC) to recommend the resolution of this anomaly in 2016 but no decision was taken by the ministry on the matter after that. Subsequently, the Kochi Bench of the AFT directed the ministry to resolve the anomaly based on the OMJC's recommendations in a time-bound manner. However, the Centre challenged the AFT order in the Supreme Court.

Defence Ministry inks MoU to set up three testing facilities under UPDIC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Ministry of Defence on Tuesday here inked a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to set up three state-of-the-art testing facilities under the Uttar Pradesh Defence Industrial Corridor (UPDIC), officials said. Giving details, they said under the MoU, one facility will be established in Lucknow in Mechanical & Material (M&M) domain, and two in Kanpur - one each in Unmanned Aerial System (UAS) and Communications domains. The MoU, under the Defence Testing Infrastructure Scheme (DTIS), was exchanged between senior officials of defence ministry and Uttar Pradesh Expressways Industrial Development Authority (UPEIDA) in New Delhi. The DTIS was launched by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in May 2020, with an outlay of Rs 400 crore, to set up state-of-the-art testing facilities in collaboration with private industry and Central/State Government, promoting indigenous defence production, reducing imports and enhancing self-reliance. To provide impetus to the defence and aerospace sectors within the Defence Industrial Corridors, seven testing facilities were approved - four in Tamil Nadu and three in Uttar Pradesh. While the MoU to establish three testing facilities in



UPDIC has been signed today, the agreement to set up three facilities under the Tamil Nadu Defence Industrial Corridor in the domains of UAS, Electronic Warfare and Electro Optics in Chennai was inked on July 20. The DTIS provides up to 75% government funding as 'Grant-in-Aid', with the remaining 25% funded by the Special Purpose Vehicle (SPVs), comprising Indian private entities and State/Central Governments. For the M&M facility, MIDHANI is the lead SPV member, with some private sector companies being the consortium members. Hindustan Aeronautics Limited and Bharat Electronics Limited are the lead SPV members in the UAS and Communications testing facilities respectively. Upon the completion of the project, these facilities will provide advanced testing equipment and services to both government and private entities, with revenue reinvested to enhance testing capabilities and processes, thereby giving a boost to Aatmanirbharta in defence.

Delhi Govt, top cop get NHRC notices over deaths of IAS aspirants in coaching centre



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The NHRC has issued notices to the Delhi Government, city police chief and municipal commissioner in connection with the deaths of three civil services aspirants in the basement of a coaching centre here. It has sought a detailed report from them in two weeks. The Delhi Chief secretary has also been asked to get a thorough survey done to ascertain the exact number of such institutes and coaching centres running in violation of the prescribed norms across Delhi. Every detail of such institutes, including complaints pending against them and action taken by the department concerned, is to be mentioned in the report, a statement issued by the NHRC said. The NHRC said it has "taken suo motu cognisance of media reports that three stu-

dents drowned in the flooded basement library of a prominent civil services coaching centre in Delhi on July 27". The news reports indicated that many complaints regarding waterlogging were made to the authorities, but "no action was taken". Expressing serious concern over the incident, the commission observed that the contents of the news report indicate negligence on the part of the authorities concerned. The commission also took cognisance of the death of another civil services aspirant in Delhi's Patel Nagar area. It has been noted that a few days back, reportedly in another incident of authorities' negligence, another civil services aspirant died due to electrocution while crossing a waterlogged street. The commission has taken suo motu cognisance of it, the statement said.

Only Centre can raise quota limit by removing 50% cap: Uddhav

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shiv Sena (UBT) chief Uddhav Thackeray on Tuesday said the state lacks the power to remove the 50% cap on reservations, asserting that only the Centre has the authority to raise the ceiling limit through Parliament. Thackeray slammed the Eknath Shinde-led government over the vexed Maratha reservation issue and demanded deliberations with various sections to find a solution through mutual understanding instead of holding discussions only with politicians. "The state does not have the right to increase the limit of reservations. It can be resolved in Lok Sabha. My MPs will back it (if any law is proposed to increase the 50% cap)," the former chief minister told reporters. "Everyone must go to Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and he should decide (on resolving the reservation issue). Whatever it is (the decision), we will accept it," he said. Thackeray said the ruling party must clarify whether it wants to hurt the (interests of) Other Backward Classes, citing the High Court's stay on the Bihar government's decision to raise quotas to 65 per cent. The former chief minister said Marathas won't get justice till incumbent rulers



(Shiv Sena led by Shinde, BJP, and NCP headed by Ajit Pawar) continue to be at the helm of affairs. Thackeray said the former ally (BJP) has changed and become "brutal". "This brutal tendency must be destroyed in Maharashtra and the country," he said while responding to a query on allegations raised by former state home minister and NCP (SP) leader Anil Deshmukh against Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis. Deshmukh had claimed an

"intermediary" had visited him when he was the home minister in the previous MVA government on behalf of Fadnavis, who was the opposition leader, with affidavits implicating then CM Uddhav Thackeray and ministers Aaditya Thackeray, Ajit Pawar and Anil Parab. Fadnavis has denied these charges. Thackeray called for rehabilitating residents of Dharavi slum sprawl, undergoing redevelopment, in the same locality and not elsewhere in the city.

Four killed in lightning strikes in Jharkhand



PTI ■ RANCHI

At least four people were killed and four others were injured in separate incidents of lightning strikes in Jharkhand's Ranchi district on Tuesday, an official said. Three persons were killed in Mandar block and one in Chanhoo block, he said. Mandar Circle Officer Rajendra Das said that one death each was reported in three villages — Cambo, Tilta and Baski — in Mandar police station area, around 30 km from Ranchi. "Four others, who were injured in lightning strikes, hail from Cambo village. They were referred to Ranchi's Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences for better treatment," he said. Das said that lightning struck them when they were sowing paddy in their fields. A 30-year-old woman was killed in a lightning strike in Lundri village in Chanhoo police station area, another official said.

Rajasthan schools to commemorate Article 370 abrogation, Congress condemns move

PTI ■ JAIPUR

The Rajasthan Education Department's academic calendar for new session in state government schools has sparked a political debate as it proposes to celebrate abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and birthday of Hindutva ideologue Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Article 370 of the Constitution, which granted special status to the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir, was abrogated on August 5, 2019. Congress state president Govind Singh Dotsra criticised the BJP-led state government's decision, terming it as a "shameless" move to serve political interests. The secondary education department calendar, Shivira Panchang, also proposes to observe Savarkar's birthday on May 28. "Congress opposes this politicisation of education and imposing its divisive ideology on students," Dotsra said. The calendar, which was released on Sunday, also features Surya Namaskar Diwas on February 4, Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Jayanti on February 7, Mother's Day-Father's Day on February 14, and Subhas Chandra Bose Diwas, also referred to as Desh Prem



Diwas, on January 23. Earlier, the primary school education department had published its annual calendar on July 9, incorporating the celebration of the Ram temple consecration. After taking charge of the office on February 26, School Education Minister Madan Dilawar had criticised the historical portrayal of figures like Savarkar and Maharana Pratap, arguing that previous narratives unjustly glorified the Mughal emperor Akbar. He had alleged that Savarkar's role in the freedom struggle was wrongly written in history. Congress spokesperson

Swarnim Chaturvedi also condemned the new calendar, saying it is an attempt to politicise education and propagate Hindutva ideology. The school education minister's approach lacks focus on education, instead it is intended towards teaching students about Savarkar, who apologised to the British instead of fighting against them, Chaturvedi alleged. BJP spokesperson Mukesh Pareek defended the calendar and accused the Congress of indulging in appeasement politics. Pareek asserted that the BJP's intention is to educate students about influential

leaders like Savarkar and Maharana Pratap so that they can be inspired by them. "The BJP government will ensure that students take inspiration from the lives and roles of great leaders like Maharana Pratap and Savarkar," he said. The secondary education department calendar also encourages students' participation in school activities. It includes initiatives, such as "No Bag Day" on the second and fourth Saturdays, and celebration of national events, such as Independence Day, Republic Day and Gandhi Jayanti.

Unauthorised hawkers a mammoth problem; need proactive measures: HC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Unauthorised hawkers and vendors on public roads and footpaths were a mammoth problem, the Bombay High Court said on Tuesday, calling for proactive measures from the authorities. A division bench of Justices M S Sonak and Kamal Khata said its concern was that nobody should suffer. "No one should suffer...Public should not suffer...Shop owners should not suffer...Hawkers with a legal and valid license should also not suffer," the court said. Last year, the high court took suo motu (on its own) cognisance of the problem of illegal and unauthorised hawkers and vendors in the city. The Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) and the Maharashtra government on Tuesday submitted their affidavits, informing the court about steps they have taken against unauthorised hawkers and vendors and what they propose to do to ensure the problem does not recur. BMC's counsel, Anil Singh, submitted that as per earlier directives from the court, 20 areas in the city were identified, and regular vigilance was kept to ensure hawkers do not set up their stalls without authorisation. The court said time and place management would help. "The problem is mammoth.



Hence, there have to be some proactive measures," the bench said. Senior counsel Gayatri Singh, appearing for the hawkers union, told the court that hawkers and vendors who hold valid licences are also forcibly removed by the civic authorities. To this, the court said, "We understand that you (hawkers holding legal licences) have your own set of difficulties. Whoever has permission should be given full protection. The ones who don't have permission overwhelm everybody else." The bench directed the union to file an affidavit and posted the matter for further hearing on Thursday. The BMC, in its affidavit, said daily checks are carried out in all wards to ensure no hawkers puts up stalls without the requisite permissions. An area of 150 meters around suburban railway stations is kept hawker-free, it said, adding that hawking zones have been earmarked in certain places.

Cong to counter BJP-JD(S) foot march over MUDA scam with public meetings

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said the ruling Congress has planned to organise public meetings to counter the opposition BJP-JD(S)' foot march over the alleged Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA) site allotment scam. The two opposition parties have decided to hold a foot march from Bengaluru to Mysuru from August 3 to 10 in protest against the alleged fraudulent allotment of sites to land losers by MUDA, including to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi, and demanding his resignation. Reiterating that the police will not give permission to the foot march, but also won't stop them, the Minister, however, warned action against any activities in violation of law. Parameshwara, who met Siddaramaiah on Monday night ahead of his Delhi visit today, accused the opposition of indulging in "false propaganda and spreading information that is far from truth." "We (Congress) will also make efforts to inform the people as to what the truth is. We will inform truth to the people a day before they start spreading lies, we will inform the people whether it is in Mandya, Bidadi, Ramanagara, Mysuru -- as to what the truth is by organising meetings (on August 2)." With police permission



denied for the foot march, BJP state President B Y Vijayendra on Tuesday said the opposition will not be cowed down. "... If they (govt) try to suppress it, it will reach some level that is unimaginable. This government cannot stop us." Reacting to a question on this, Parameshwara said: "Let's see what happens. If they threaten the government, is the government weak? Is the Karnataka government so weak? I have said that we will not give them the permission, but we will also not stop them." "It is their right to protest, let them do it, but if anything is done in violation of law, naturally the police will do their duty to protect the law. I'm not saying that they will

violate the law. In case such things happen we will do our duty to protect the law. There is no need for them to threaten us or for us to threaten them," he said. Asked if members of the opposition will be arrested or booked for holding 'padayatre' (foot march) without permission, the Minister said: "Let them do their 'padayatre', didn't we do it when they (BJP govt) did not give permission to us earlier? We will not do such things (book cases or arrest), we will file FIR in case they violate law, if not why should we do it? no one will do it unnecessarily." Denying any wrong doing, the Chief Minister has said MUDA had legally allotted 14 residential sites to his wife in

lieu of illegally acquiring her land. The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where MUDA developed a residential layout. Under the controversial scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts. BJP leaders have claimed that the MUDA "scam" is of the magnitude of Rs 4,000 crore to Rs 5,000 crore. The Congress government on July 14 constituted a single member inquiry commission under former High Court Judge Justice P N Desai to probe the MUDA 'scam'.

Karnataka to identify Bangladeshi illegally staying in State, deport them: Home Minister



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Home Minister G Parameshwara on Tuesday said Bangladeshi nationals illegally staying in the state will be sent to detention centres and necessary action will be taken to deport them. His statement came a day after BJP leader and former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai said the illegal stay of Bangladeshi nationals in Bengaluru poses a threat to both the state and the nation. Parameshwara said the police will identify those who come to Karnataka from Bangladesh. "If they don't have valid documents like passport, visa, they will be arrested immediately and sent to detention centres; after that, we will inform Bangladesh High commission or Ambassador, about the arrest of their nationals and seek

their permission to deport them," Parameshwara told reporters here in response to a question. The Minister took a dig at BJP leader B Bhaskar Rao, a former Bengaluru Police Commissioner, over his reported statement that it has not been possible to deport Bangladeshi nationals as they enjoy political support. "During his tenure as Commissioner it was not possible for him to do it, we are doing it now," Parameshwara said. "We are tightening the law and order situation in the state, whoever it is, will not allow them to go against the law," he said. Parameshwara also said that police crack down on Bangladeshi nationals illegally staying in the State has been taking place on a regular basis.

Himachal: Footbridge, makeshift sheds washed away in flash flood triggered by cloudburst in Kullu

PTI ■ SHIMLA

A footbridge and three makeshift sheds, including a liquor shop, were washed away following a flash flood triggered by a cloudburst in Tosh Nallah in Himachal Pradesh's Kullu district, officials said on Tuesday. The incident took place in the Tosh area of Manikaran early in the morning and no loss of life was reported, Deputy Commissioner Kullu Torul S Raveesh said, adding that a team has been sent to the spot to assess the situation. "Our appeal to the people is to stay away from rivers and rivulets and do not make temporary structures near nallahs," she said. The deputy commissioner said that construction



activity is prohibited during the monsoon and strict action would be taken against anyone defying the norms. The local meteorological

office has issued an 'orange' alert for heavy to very heavy rain accompanied with thunderstorms and lightning in seven districts of the state on Wednesday and Thursday.

The Met has also sunded a 'yellow' alert for heavy rain at isolated places on August 2 and 3. Monsoon activity is likely to intensify with widespread precipitation in the next four to five days, it said. Spells of heavy to very heavy rainfall are likely to occur at one or two places in the districts of Una, Bilaspur, Hamirpur, Kangra, Mandi, Shimla and Sirmour on Wednesday and Thursday, the weather office said. It also cautioned of possibility of landslides and flash floods in vulnerable areas of Kullu, Solan, Sirmour, Shimla, and Kinnaur districts, and damage to plantations and standing crops, vulnerable structures and 'kutcha' houses due to strong winds

and waterlogging in low-lying areas. Meanwhile, light rainfall was witnessed in a few parts of the state. According to Meteorological Centre, Shimla, Sarahan and Rohru recorded 12 mm of rainfall since Monday evening followed by Sangrah (10 mm), Jogindernagar (8 mm), Sainj (6.5 mm), Manali (6 mm), Rampur (5.8 mm), Dharamshala (5.4 mm) and Gohar (5 mm). Official data recorded until Monday evening showed rain-related incidents have claimed 62 lives in the past one month since the onset of monsoon on June 27. The state has suffered losses to the tune of Rs 425 crore in the ongoing monsoon, according to the state emergency operation centre.

Horticulture policy being drafted, expected to be ready by September: Arunachal Minister

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh Agriculture Minister Gabriel Denwang Wangshu on Tuesday said that a state horticulture policy is being drafted and is expected to be ready by September this year. Wangshu, who also holds the Horticulture, Diary Development and Fisheries portfolios, said that the horticulture policy was among the 24 major initiatives announced by the Pema Khandu government after returning to power in the state this year. "The target for framing the state horticulture policy is September this year and drafting of the policy is under process," the minister told reporters here. "One of the objectives of the policy is to provide a roadmap

for the state's self-reliance in producing disease-free and high-quality planting materials (QPM) through certified nurseries and plant tissue culture," he said. The comprehensive policy will guide the government's decisions, plans and programmes for achieving the desired output and outcome, Wangshu added. The minister said that the horticulture department is also preparing an action plan for providing incentives to large cardamom farmers for increasing production. He said Arunachal Pradesh is soon expected to become the top producer of large cardamom in the country, replacing Sikkim from the position. Three large cardamom nurseries are being developed at Khonsa in Tirap district,

Metengliang in Anjaw and Mariyang in Siang district with technical and financial support from Kozhikode-based Directorate of Arecanut and Spice Development (DASD) and the Union Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare Ministry. He said the government has taken steps to address the issue of quality planting materials in the state. "The department has established the Kiwi Research & Development Centre (KRDC) at Ziro in Lower Subansiri district and Orange Research & Development Centre (ORDC) at Balek in Lower Dibang Valley district under the State Horticulture Research and Development Institute (SHRDI)," he said. A plant tissue culture laboratory at the state horticulture farm at Shergaon in West Kameng district is at an advanced stage of completion.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Taking on the dragon

S Jaishankar admits strained relations with China but rules out third-party mediation

In what can be construed as a candid admission by External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, he has categorically stated that relations between India and China are not on an even keel. His recent statement underscores the ongoing diplomatic tension between India and China. Even earlier he had said that China is a bigger economy, implying that we should think twice before acting against China. The Minister's assessment of the current state of the India-China relationship highlights the challenges that persist despite various diplomatic efforts and high-level engagements. One of the key aspects of Jaishankar's statement was his firm rejection of third-party mediation in resolving the disputes with China. The Foreign Minister emphasised that India prefers to handle its issues with China bilaterally, without external intervention. This stance aligns with India's long-standing policy of managing its international relations directly. Jaishankar's comments reflect India's approach to maintaining sovereignty and autonomy in its foreign policy.



By ruling out third-party mediation, India is signalling its intention to address its differences with China through direct dialogue and negotiation. This position underscores India's commitment to resolving disputes through established diplomatic channels while rejecting external influence that might complicate or hinder the process.

Prime Minister Modi had personally taken a keen interest in resolving the issue but to no avail. Chinese Premier Xi was invited and given a grand welcome but that did not break ice and the tension on borders continued. In the complex web of geopolitics, India has drifted closer to the US which wants to use India to

contain Chinese influence, naturally much to the consternation of China. The Chinese unease is reflected in its actions on the border which had remained peaceful from 1962 to 2017 when the Doklam incident happened. India-China relations are complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical, political, economic, and strategic factors. The two countries share a long border. The most notable conflict occurred in 1962 when the Sino-Indian War broke out over border disputes in the Aksai Chin region. Ironically trade relations between the two countries have grown despite border disputes. China is one of India's largest trading partners. However, recent years have seen border skirmishes and strategic rivalries. In recent years, the relationship has been marked by both cooperation and contention. The Doklam skirmish in 2017 was a prominent example of border tensions. The confrontation occurred in the Doklam plateau, an area disputed between China and Bhutan. Additionally, the 2020 clashes in the Galwan Valley further highlighted ongoing tensions. Despite these challenges, India and China have continued to engage diplomatically and economically. Both nations must recognise the importance of managing their differences while pursuing mutual benefits, given their significant roles in the global economy and regional geopolitics.

PICTALK



Clouds hover over the hill town of Shimla

Kolkata's healthcare transformation into world-class medical facilities

Over the past two decades, Kolkata's medical facilities have transformed significantly, reducing the exodus of patients to Chennai and Vellore

The hordes of medical pilgrims filling up berths in Coromandel Express and Madras Mail have thinned substantially over the years, as Kolkata's private healthcare sector scrambles to make up for lost time. Kolkata was not always best served in matters of healthcare, and for patients with serious ailments and often with not-so-serious conditions, Chennai, Vellore or Mumbai were the default destinations. It was also a matter of perception as most Kolkatans believed they would receive superior care in outstation hospitals only.

However, the healthcare landscape in Kolkata has been undergoing a paradigm shift over the past two decades, riding the tailwinds of private sector initiatives, as the bed count continues to soar. The availability of able doctors was never a problem in the city and now that the pool of healthcare experts has increased significantly with a steady reverse traffic of medical practitioners coming back from the NHS in the UK and other advanced countries' health systems to cater to the growing demand



back in their hometown. Over time, the city has gradually regained its confidence in its private hospitals seeing that they aren't short of modern facilities and latest equipment anymore. The faith is beginning to trickle back, ounce by ounce, and the Coromandel isn't as packed with south-bound patients as before. Of course, it hasn't happened overnight, and there is still a long way to go. Kolkata's progress in terms of private sector participation is in sync with the national scenario as analysts say between 2016 and now, the country's healthcare industry has grown at a CAGR of 22% and the Centre's allocation of Rs 90,658.63 crore for the sector in the interim Budget for 2024-25 reflects this uptrend. However, restora-

tion of faith in any service, not the least healthcare delivery, takes a lot of commitment and meticulous planning. After all, like any other customer, a patient has a retail choice and can switch allegiance if expectations are not met.

It is well known that a big and significant milestone in this medical makeover of Kolkata was the unveiling of the Rabindranath Tagore International Institute of Cardiac Sciences in 2000 by Narayana Health Group's Founder, Dr. Devi Shetty. This set the ball rolling and many other world class hospitals started their services in Kolkata. It was the flagship venture of the founder which he started in his favourite city, Kolkata.

The journey began over two decades ago with a single speciality hospital and has grown into a network of four super-speciality hospitals in Kolkata. Now Kolkata can boast of super-speciality tertiary care, these facilities offer over 35 specialities such as Cancer Care, Mother & Child Care, and Orthopaedics. The healthcare sector in India, serving a vast population of

In 1921, Mahatma Gandhi's visit to the Nellore district marked a significant moment in India's freedom movement. He inaugurated the Satyagraha Ashram in Pallepadu and delivered significant speeches at the Town Hall and V.R. College. At the Rebala Lakshmi Narasa Reddy Town Hall, he unveiled a portrait of his political mentor, Bal Gangadhar Tilak, emphasizing Tilak's profound patriotism and leadership, which galvanized the freedom movement. Gandhi extolled Tilak's legacy, invoking the ideals of "Swaraj" (self-rule) and characterizing the Non-Cooperation Movement as an act of 'self-purification'. He urged contributions to the "Tilak Swaraj Fund", established in 1920, to support educational institutions, Khadi promotion, and Swadeshi efforts. It was a successful mobilized mission. July 23, 2024, marked the 168th birth anniversary of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, also revered as "Lokmanya" and "The Lion of Maharashtra".

This is for his dual role, as a freedom fighter and social reformer. His impact has also been underscored by notable figures, such as British journalist Valentine Chirol who termed him "the father of Indian unrest," while, Jawaharlal Nehru hailed him as "the father of the Indian revolution" and Mahatma Gandhi recognized him as "the Maker of Modern India." A distinguished Sanskrit scholar and thinker, Tilak was also a visionary leader. Sri Aurobindo, in his collection of Tilak's writings and speeches, emphasized Tilak's transformative influence on the Indian National Congress, reshaping it from its occidental characteristics to embrace mass participation in the freedom struggle.

In "The Intellectual Biography of Bal Gangadhar Tilak" published in the 'Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Science', Raj Hans Ojha, contends that "The story of Tilak is the story of India's Swaraj, of the Indian National Congress, coming to its adulthood, and of the rise of Indian masses for the first time in quest of 'Home Rule' and 'Independence' Lokmanya Tilak believed that "Swaraj is the foun-

ation and not the height of our future prosperity. We have to build a new nation, develop a new character, live the principles, which we advocate, faith in spiritual values, love of country and tolerance for views from which we differ." Tilak's intellectual contributions were many. His works such as, "The Orion and Research into The Antiquity of The Vedas" (1893) and "The Arctic Home of Vedas" (1901), complemented his political activism. Despite his devotion to independence, he expressed a preference for academia, a path cut short by his untimely death on August 1, 1920, at age 64. His educational contributions are equally noteworthy.

He co-founded institutions like the 'New English School', the 'Deccan Society for Education', and 'Fergusson College', and presented a comprehensive educational blueprint to the Hunter Commission (1882 & 1919). Bal Gangadhar Tilak was a strategist, transcending the roles of an idealist and philosopher, and his multifaceted contributions continue to resonate in India's historical and educational landscape. As a formidable journalist, Tilak was renowned for his fearless and impartial stance in his weekly publication, 'Kesari'. He championed a rigorous

Honouring the legacy of Bal Gangadhar Tilak



RAJDEEP PATHAK

As the nation commemorates Tilak's 168th birth anniversary, we reflect on his profound influence on the independence movement and his contributions as a reformer



HE WAS AMONG THE FIRST MAINSTREAM POLITICAL LEADERS IN INDIA TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT "THE NATION THINKS NOT WITH THE BRAIN BUT WITH AN OVERHEATED HEART. IT IS ONLY IN THE THROES OF TUMULT THAT NATIONS ARE BORN"

approach to journalism, asserting that 'Kesari' would boldly address all issues, resisting the prevailing trend of appeasing the British and embodying its namesake's courage. Bal Gangadhar Tilak also leveraged his paper 'Mahratha Advocate for the People, drawing upon Hindu scriptures and the Bhagavad Gita to support his arguments.

His profound contributions as a patriot, scholar, and politician had a significant impact on Mahatma Gandhi, who, in a March 4, 1905, article, lauded Lokmanya's scholarship, particularly his astronomical findings that traced Indian scriptures to over 10,000 years old, recognizing him as a luminary whose intellectual influence extended beyond national borders. Bal Gangadhar Tilak was imprisoned in 1908. He strongly believed that "There are higher powers that rule the destiny of things and it may be the will of providence that the cause I represent may prosper more by my suffering than by my remaining free." Gandhi and Tilak had great mutual respect for one another.

In his reflections in The Indian Opinion, Gandhi praised Tilak for his readiness to endure suffering for the cause of India's freedom. While they were ideologically different in their thoughts and actions, both

Lokmanya Tilak and Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi fought for one cause, which was 'freedom'. Mahatma Gandhi maintained a profound respect for Tilak's contributions and acknowledged his unparalleled influence and the reverence he commanded among the masses. In his tributes and public statements, Gandhi consistently lauded Tilak's selfless service, burning patriotism, and magnetic leadership. Tilak's mantra, "Swaraj is our birthright, and I shall have it", resonated deeply with Mahatma Gandhi, who adapted it to his philosophy of truth and non-violence, and thus, Tilak's assertive nationalism blended with Gandhi's principles of peaceful resistance. Mahadev Desai, recalls Mahatma Gandhi's views on Lokmanya Tilak, which he expressed on 24 July 1934 at Cawnpore (Kanpur today), in one of the meetings. Mahatma Gandhi said: "If Tilak Maharaj taught us that 'swaraj is our birthright', he also taught us that 'selfless service' is the key to win it. Selfless service may have been in existence before Tilak came, but he was who systematized it." Tilak's life was a demonstration of this great ideal of Karma Yoga.

(The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

UNAUTHORISED PG MUSHROOMING

Madam — Paying guest accommodations (PG) for women have made headlines following the brutal murder of a woman in one such facility located in a posh Bengaluru locality. It is crucial to take strict action against unauthorized PGs. The police argue that without a formal complaint, securing PGs is not inherently their responsibility, and this claim is understandable. Nonetheless, increased patrolling in sensitive areas where these accommodations are situated should not be overlooked. Thus, the responsibility for ensuring the safety and security of female residents falls on the PG owners. It is alarming to note that many PGs in India lack security guards. Security personnel should undergo frisk searches seeking entry into PGs. The importance of a biometric fingerprint system for all entrants cannot be overstated. Additionally, providing kitchens that prepare hygienic food is essential to prevent women from frequently venturing out for meals, enhancing their safety. Troublemakers such as hawkers and beggars should be kept at bay. Regular presence and unwavering supervision by the owners at the PGs can significantly boost residents' morale. Overall, a collective commitment is vital.

Ganapathi Bhat | Akola

USE OF TRIBALS IN THE SCHOOL NAMES

Madam — The Madras High Court has strongly criticised the Tamil Nadu government for using the term "Tribal" in the names of government schools. This issue arose with schools in the Kalvarayan Hills being named "Government Tribal Residential School." The court rightly observed that this terminology is inappropriate, especially for a secular government. The use of caste or community names in school titles is astonishing and deemed unacceptable by the court.

The court emphasised that labeling a school as a "Tribal School" could stigmatise the children attending it, making them feel their school is inferior to others. This could lead to an inferiority complex among the

Grand spectacle of Paris Olympics



The Paris Olympics 2024 have begun, filling the city with excitement and drawing visitors from around the world to witness this grand sporting event. While the Olympic games promise thrilling spectacles, Paris offers many other activities to enrich your visit. If you're a food enthusiast with a penchant for history, indulge in iconic Parisian bites

that offer a delightful journey through time and taste. Wander through charming streets and savor culinary delights that are integral to Parisian culture. For those seeking unique experiences, venture beyond the usual tourist spots and discover offbeat attractions that provide a different perspective on the city.

Additionally, Paris offers various free activities that allow you to enjoy the city's charm without breaking the bank. From serene parks to historical landmarks, there's no shortage of cost-free ways to immerse yourself in the Parisian ambience. Lastly, don't miss out on the must-see attractions that define Paris. Iconic sites such as the Eiffel Tower, the Louvre, and Notre-Dame Cathedral are timeless treasures that captivate visitors.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

students. Caste and community play a significant role in the political arena as vote banks.

The caste system is deeply entrenched in government policies and programs, leading to reverse discrimination. The principle of "all are equal in law" is often neglected, with reservation in education and employment based on caste. Some states have defied the Supreme Court's directive to limit reservations to 50 percent, extending them to over 75 percent, which adversely affects merit. If some communities feel deprived of fair representation in education and employment, the government may consider pro-rata reservations for all communities as a solution.

KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

THE ROLE OF GOVERNORS

Madam — Since independence, our country has undergone significant changes. While we have adopted many new governance systems, we still retain some from our colonial past. One such legacy is the role of governors acting as representatives of the President in all states, a practice that

continues unchanged. Recently, the Supreme Court agreed to consider separate petitions from opposition-ruled Kerala and West Bengal. These petitions allege that the respective governors refused to assent to bills passed by their assemblies. This is not an isolated incident; similar cases have been brought before the Hon'ble Supreme Court numerous times. West Bengal, for example, claimed in its petition that the Governor had withheld assent to eight bills. I believe the position of governors has never been impartial in this country.

The office has become increasingly politicized; a study found that between 1950 and 2015, only a quarter of governors completed a five-year term, with 37 percent serving less than a year. Defying traditions, governors are typically appointed by the ruling party without consulting the elected state government, leading to strained relations between federal and state governments.

Jang Bahadur Singh | Jamshedpur

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FIRST COLUMN

CURIOUS MINDS ENGINEER CHANGE

Mental re-engineering can infuse life with renewed vigor and purpose



RAVI VALLURI

Often, conventional and commonplace way of thinking only results in clambering the ladder. A person leading a ho-hum existence cannot re-engineer his/her personality. Tale of an old man Aeon's ago, lived an elderly gentleman who in the winter of his life decided to embark on a spiritual journey to transfigure his personality. The pater now embarked on the spiritual sojourn and enrolled in a monastery. Upon completing his tutelage, armed with various nuances of Zen teachings, he left for his small town. He stepped out of the portals of the temple of knowledge and involuntarily slipped into a rivulet. "Oh, the old monk falls in the river!" chortled some young tutees.

He was to dramatically declare that the re-engineering processes and techniques he acquired had enabled him to accommodate water into himself and not the other way around. "We are shaped by our thoughts, we become what we think. When the mind is pure, joy follows like a shadow that never leaves," said Gautama Buddha. The thought process, thinking patterns, building blocks of thought, organised thinking and goal direction are five keys to re-engineer the mind to metamorphose and refashion our lives. An ingenious individual to re-engineer his life has to change the existing pattern. He should begin by identifying the problem. In the swaths of his mind, such a process represents and delineates the problem; as he/she is mindful and discerning, solutions and a set of sub-goals are outlined. The quick-witted individual then selects the balm for the misadventure and executes it with precision.

The human mind is now brim-full of ideas and it is time to evaluate the outcome and once again rethink and redefine problems and arrive at new solutions. It was the time of Sakhyia Muni Gautama Buddha when an animated group of denizens were involved in a rambunctious argument about Divinity and various religions. In sheer exasperation, they arrived at the feet of Lord Buddha. The Compassionate and Enlightened One smiled and ruminated for a while. Lord Buddha then asked his disciples to arrange for an elephant and for four persons to be blindfolded. And so, it happened that the first of the blindfolded persons felt the elephant's leg and exclaimed that God appeared as a pillar. The second person



touched the elephant's tummy and opined that Almighty God was a wall. The third gentleman stroked the elephant's ear and observed that God was a piece of cloth. The fourth man grazed the tail and described that God was a piece of rope. Once again, the group of four was engaged in a raging debate on the form of Almighty God. After the exercise was completed, Buddha asked the assembled disciples and citizens. The four blindfolded individuals felt the same elephant, but provided varying answers, so what could be the correct answer? The episode just proved that no one individual or thought process is complete. One should always be prepared to accept that one might be correct in parts and that other streams of thought could be complementary. Techniques for training the spiritually inclined can re-engineer their lives by undertaking the bouquet of courses imparted by the Art of Living, or pursue Vipassana; attempting to mutate their minds through the practice of yoga, pranayama and meditation. Others have a logical bent of mind and charter a different path.

They need to develop a passion, take up a sport, and read inspirational literature among other things. But it is elemental and foundational to re-engineer the mind and thought processes at regular intervals to live life with gusto.

(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)

Balanced budget reflects Modi's vision of 'Vikasit Bharat'



K S TOMAR

PM Modi's "self-reliant India" vision is central to the 2024-25 Union Budget. It boosts domestic production, supports SMEs, and fosters innovation to reduce import dependency

Prime Minister Modi's vision of a "self-reliant India" (Atmanirbhar Bharat) is a recurring theme in the budget. This vision emphasizes self-sufficiency in critical sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology. The budget outlines measures to boost domestic production, support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and encourage innovation. These initiatives are designed to reduce import dependency and create a robust, self-sustaining economy. At the same time, the budget reflects Modi's understanding of India's interconnectedness with the global economy. The focus on enhancing India's export competitiveness, attracting foreign direct investment (FDI), and participating in global value chains underscores the dual approach of strengthening domestic capabilities while engaging with the global market.

This balanced approach is crucial for India to navigate the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly complex global economic landscape. The Union Budget, a cornerstone of the country's economic planning, may serve as a reflection of the government's strategic priorities and vision for the future. It is being billed as a path-breaking foundation of Reforms for the next 5 years. According to some experts, under the leadership of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, the budget has been targeted to foster economic growth, address social inequalities, and position India as a key player on the global stage. The latest budget unveiled amidst a backdrop of global economic uncertainty, showcases a balanced approach, combining domestic development with an international outlook.

CHALLENGES BEFORE FM

In light of the 2024-25 Union Budget, the BJP-led central government faces scrutiny over its dealings with opposition-ruled states, which allege discrimination in fund allocation and policy implementation. Experts say that Central Schemes and Fund Allocation; The Budget reveals a 15% increase in allocations for flagship schemes such as the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana (PMAY) and Ayushman Bharat. However, opposition states argue that their share of these funds does not reflect their proportionate needs. For instance, Tamil Nadu has claimed that despite a significant allocation under PMAY, delays in fund release and implementation hinder effective utilization. The central government's response involves reiterating the equitable distribution based on various factors, but opposition states view these explanations sceptically. Implementation Issues; Critics point to inefficiencies in scheme implementation as evidence of discrimination. The opposition-ruled states have raised concerns about delays and insufficient execution of these schemes.

The central government needs to ensure that these funds are utilized efficiently and that implementation is monitored closely to address these grievances. Political Dynamics; Allegations of political bias also come into play. Opposition leaders argue that central agencies are used to target political rivals, exacerbating feelings of discrimination. With the BJP's political rivals accusing it of manipulating central resources, the government must navigate these complex political dynamics carefully.

STEPS TO ADDRESS THE CONCERNS



THE BUDGET REVEALS A 15% INCREASE IN ALLOCATIONS FOR FLAGSHIP SCHEMES SUCH AS THE PRADHAN MANTRI AWAS YOJANA (PMAY) AND AYUSHMAN BHARAT. HOWEVER, OPPOSITION STATES ARGUE THAT THEIR SHARE OF THESE FUNDS DOES NOT REFLECT THEIR PROPORTIONATE NEEDS

To mitigate allegations of discrimination, the central government should adopt multiple strategies which include Enhanced Transparency; Provide detailed reports on fund allocations and expenditures to ensure transparency and address concerns of inequitable distribution. The focus should be on the efficient and timely execution of central schemes, particularly in opposition-ruled states, to demonstrate commitment to equitable development. The Centre must engage in regular discussions with opposition state governments to address grievances and ensure that their concerns are heard and addressed. A Balanced Approach for Sustainable Growth; The Indian Union Budget, under the leadership of Modi, presents a balanced blueprint for growth, combining a focus on domestic development with a strategic international outlook. The emphasis on infrastructure, healthcare, education, and financial inclusion reflects the government's commitment to inclusive growth.

At the same time, the focus on global partnerships, defence manufacturing, and renewable energy highlights India's aspirations to be a key player on the world stage. Domestic Positives: A Focus on Inclusive Development; The budget's primary focus is on inclusive growth, ensuring that the benefits of economic development reach all sections of society. A significant allocation has been made towards infrastructure development, including roads, railways, and digital infrastructure. This not only promises to create jobs but also lays the groundwork for long-term economic resilience. The emphasis on renewable energy and green technology is another forward-looking aspect, aligning with global trends towards sustainability. Healthcare and educa-

tion have not received substantial attention. The substantial increase in funding for public health infrastructure is a must, especially after the lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, investments in education, particularly in digital and vocational training, will equip the younger generation with skills for the future job market. This focus on human capital development is critical for sustaining economic growth in the long term. The government's commitment to financial inclusion continues with initiatives to expand the reach of banking and financial services to rural areas. This effort is crucial for integrating rural populations into the formal economy, enhancing their economic opportunities, and reducing regional disparities. Moreover, targeted welfare schemes for farmers, women, and marginalized communities underscore the government's intent to address social inequalities and ensure a more equitable distribution of resources. Extreme evidence of a discriminatory approach exhibited in the union budget estimates for 2024-24 pertains to the allocation of Rs 11,500 crore for flood mitigation to Bihar whereas Himachal as well as Uttarakhand faced unprecedented catastrophe in July/August 2023 which suffered extensive damages to the tune of over Rs 12,000 crore and Rs 4,000 crore respectively but figures have not been mentioned in the budget.

Himachal government is in a quandary as 550 lives were lost and rehabilitation of lakhs of hapless people had been undertaken by the state government by making provision of Rs 650 crore hence expected a liberal Special Package from the union finance minister who preferred to just give an assurance about financial assistance to the state but no allocation

of the budget. Inordinate delay in the announcement of a "Special Package" had affected relief and rehabilitation works though the state demanded immediate help of Rs 9,042 crore from the centre in Aug 2023. Chief Minister, Sukhvinder Singh Sukhu regretted the apathy of the centre which gave nothing for one year. The finance minister skipped Punjab also which witnessed devastation owing to heavy rains and floods in 21 out of 23 districts and damages were more than Rs 1,680 crore. About 70 lives were lost and the state government has been demanding financial assistance which has been ignored in this budget. Contrary to it, Bihar has been chosen for special treatment and the finance minister allocated Rs 11,500 crore for flood mitigation which is being interpreted as a Reward for helping BHP to form a government after its reduced strength in Lok Sabha. Experts say that Bihar has been India's most flood-prone state with 76% of the population of north Bihar living under recurring threat of devastating floods for decades hence it deserves a special package but not by ignoring other states that suffer an identical natural disaster every year. As India navigates the challenges of a post-pandemic world, the budget's provisions for economic resilience, social equity, and environmental sustainability provide a solid foundation for future growth. Modi's vision of a self-reliant India resonates throughout the budget, offering a roadmap for the country's economic and strategic aspirations. This holistic approach, balancing domestic priorities with international engagement, positions India well for a sustainable and prosperous future.

(The writer is a political analyst and senior journalist based in Shimla; views are personal)

How persistence and empathy can cure tuberculosis

Tuberculosis is a 'curable infectious disease linked to inequities, it is therefore crucial to invest in partnerships that address these disparities with empathy

A year ago 20-year-old Tahira was convinced she was going to die. A fever that refused to go accompanied by a persistent cough, a loss in appetite and extreme weakness had confined her to the bed for months. Her husband, a rickshaw puller, had neither the means nor the time to take her to a doctor. It was only when her brother came to visit her in Kolkata and saw her failing health that he decided to take matters into his own hands. He brought Tahira back with him to her natal house in Seemapuri, Delhi. This decision was to save her life. Around this time, Humana People to People India (HPPPI), a not-for-profit, was reaching out with information and guidance on tuberculosis (TB)



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

as a part of their Project LEAD (Leveraging Educating, Advocating to Disrupt TB transmission). Working in close coordination with the government's National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP), LEAD focussed on the oft-ignored and overlooked marginalized communities living in low-grade urban slums, the homeless and migratory population in four cities, Delhi, Mumbai, Howrah and Hyderabad.

Persistence Pays When LEAD field officer Shanti met Tahira, she immediately knew what had to be done. First, she was taken for a chest X-ray. When it showed Tahira presumptive for TB, sputum microscopy was conducted which confirmed TB. Once this became clear, the diagnosis was reconfirmed through the WHO-recommended molecular test via the Cartridge-Based Nucleic Acid Amplification Test (CBNAAT) and drug susceptibility test via Line Probe Assay (LPA) provided free at the government GTB Hospital. The drug susceptibility test is done to ensure that the TB bacteria (Bacillus Mycobacterium Tuberculosis), that infects a person is not resistant to the medicines they are treated with.

Realising there was no time to waste, Shanti quickly enabled her registration on Ni-Akshay, the government's NTEP real-time patient management web system, so that her card could be made and her treatment started the same day. As a trained worker, Shanti knew time was of the essence and treatment adherence critical. So, for the next six months, Shanti would become Tahira's shadow. She kept a watchful eye and followed up doggedly with 40 visits to ensure Tahira didn't miss out or falter in sticking to the drug regimen. Her persistence paid off when Tahira tested negative a couple of months ago and is now completely cured. The Techno CATTB being an infectious disease, early detection and



treatment is vital especially as it spreads when persons with the illness expel the bacteria into the air, mostly by coughing. Here is where technology can play a role. Cough Against TB (CAT) an innovative application AI-powered cough-sound-based screening tool to assess the likelihood of pulmonary TB developed by Wadhvani AI, resulted in a 10.8% presumptive rate and a positivity yield of 15.6%.

One of the important outcomes of using CAT was its detection of asymptomatic cases, which otherwise would have been missed. While technology has been an enabling tool, the real success of screening over 600,000 individuals, identifying 3,182 people with TB (PwTB), and supporting 98% of them in Delhi with treatment adherence has been due to the commitment and compassion shown by the women field workers. The project findings at the end of the one-year project indicate that the female field officers proved to be more effective than their male counterparts in TB awareness and screening because of their empathy. A Human Touch How a human touch can make all the difference was seen in Tahira's

case. Shanti's support to Tahira during her challenging treatment journey was not just by counselling but also through food ration supplements every month through her contacts with an NGO. Additionally, she also linked her to NTEP's Ni-Akshay Poshan Yojana, the government scheme to provide Rs 500 per month for PwTB to buy food. Deploying women now cured of TB as activists and field workers have also worked wonders to reach out to those who fall through the cracks. They know what it means to live with TB and the societal stigma that have to face. Their determination to help others in similar situations has boosted early detection and treatment. It is a known fact that those most at risk are people residing in poorly ven-

tilated and overcrowded conditions, suffering from malnutrition and diseases and with limited access to healthcare. Project LEAD has shown that women field officers are more successful in persuading TB screening and treatment adherence among the vulnerable and marginalized because of their understanding and sensitivity. TB researchers Dr Anurag Bhargava, Dr Madhukar Pai and Dr Madhvi Bhargava reiterate that TB is a "curable" infectious disease linked to inequities, it is even more imperative to invest in more partnerships that bridge these inequalities with empathy.

(The author is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)

3 children killed, 5 injured in UK stabbing

PTI ■ LONDON

A nine-year-old girl died on Tuesday in the “ferocious” stabbing incident in Southport, north-west England, taking the death toll to three after two children – girls aged six and seven – were killed on the spot.

Five others continue to fight for their lives as Merseyside Police detectives question a 17-year-old male arrested on suspicion of murder to try and establish the motive behind the attack at a children’s dance workshop at Hart Street on Monday.

The police force on Tuesday reiterated the incident is “not currently being treated as terror-related and we are not looking for anyone else in connection with it”. In its update on the investigation, Merseyside Police said the third child died as a result of injuries sustained in the knife attack in the early hours of this morning.

Eight other children suffered stab wounds during the attack, five of whom remain in a “critical condition”. Two adults are also in critical condition after



being injured during the incident.

“A name has been shared on social media in connection with the suspect in the incident in Southport. This name is incorrect and we would urge people not to speculate on details of the incident while the investigation is ongoing,” the police statement said, concerning the suspect who remains in custody.

The children, aged between six and 11 years, were attending a summer holiday workshop themed around singer Taylor Swift’s music.

“A 17-year-old male from Banks in Lancashire, who was born in Cardiff (Wales), has been arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder and has been taken to a police station where he will be interviewed by detectives,” Merseyside Police Chief Constable Serena Kennedy told reporters, giving details of what she said was a “ferocious” attack.

“It is understood that the children were attending a Taylor Swift event at a dance school when the offender, who was armed with a knife, walked into the premises and started to

attack those inside. We believe that the adults who were injured were trying to protect the children at the time they were attacked,” she said. “As a mum of two daughters, and the nanna of a five-year-old granddaughter, I cannot begin to imagine the pain and suffering the families of the victims are currently going through and I want to send them our heartfelt condolences and sympathies,” she added.

The royal family, including King Charles, Queen Camilla and the Prince and Princess of Wales, issued statements expressing their shock and sadness at the “utterly horrific” incident.

“We send our most heartfelt condolences, prayers and deepest sympathies to the families and loved ones of those who have so tragically lost their lives and to all those affected by this truly appalling attack,” reads the King’s message.

On a personal note, Prince William and Kate Middleton said that as parents they “could not begin to imagine” what the families of the children were going through.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer said the whole country had been “deeply shocked” by the attack.

“I know I speak for everybody in the whole country in saying our thoughts and condolences are with the victims, their families, their friends and the wider community. It’s almost impossible to imagine the grief that they’re going through and the trauma that they are going through,” he said.

Opposition Leader Rishi Sunak also expressed his shock over the “horrendous attack” and thanked the emergency services for their response. Singer Taylor Swift has said the knife attack at a dance workshop themed around her music which left three children dead and nine more injured has left her “completely in shock”.

Posting on Instagram, the star said she was “at a complete loss” for how to convey her sympathies.

She said the “horrendous trauma inflicted on everyone who was there” had left her at a “complete loss for how to ever con-

vey my sympathies to these families.”

Meanwhile, flowers, notes and cards expressing an outpouring of grief have been piling up at the site of the attack, a community centre used regularly by the locals including for mother and child events.

The local Labour MP, Patrick Hurley, said the community was waking up in “shock and grief” after the brutal stabbings and that a vigil is planned for Tuesday night in support of the victims and their families and friends.

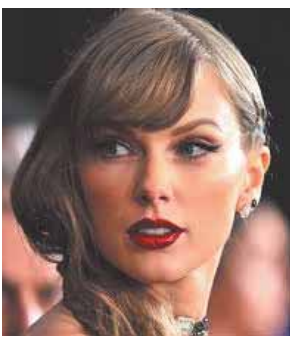
Several witnesses described horrific scenes as a knifeman launched the attack, with bleeding children seen on the street as they ran out of the community centre to flee the attacker.

Horror-struck and screaming parents were seen rushing about, with locals trying to help the injured children. The dance class is believed to have been fully booked with 25 young children in attendance.

A police cordon remains in place around the scene at Hart Street in Southport, a seaside town north of Liverpool – referred to as Merseyside.

Taylor Swift ‘in shock’

AP ■ LONDON



British police say a third child has died after a stabbing at a kids’ yoga and dance class. The 9-year-old girl died on Tuesday. Two girls aged 6 and 7 previously died following Monday’s attack in Southport, northwest England.

Five children and two adults are in critical condition in hospitals.

A 17-year-old boy has been arrested and is being questioned by police.

Police were questioning a suspect and working Tuesday to understand what motivated a 17-year-old boy to attack children at a Taylor Swift-themed dance and yoga class, leaving two dead and six in critical condition.

A total of nine children and two adults were hurt in the rampage in Southport in northwest England. Both adults and six of the children were in critical condition in local hospitals.

Swift said she was “completely in shock” and still taking in “the horror” of the event. “These were just little kids at

a dance class,” she wrote on Instagram. “I am at a complete loss for how to ever convey my sympathies to these families.”

A 17-year-old boy was arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder.

Local people left flowers and stuffed animals in tribute at a police cordon on the street lined with brick houses in the seaside resort near Liverpool – nicknamed “sunny Southport” – whose beach and pier attract vacationers from across northwest England.

Witnesses described scenes “from a horror movie” as bloodied children ran from the attack just before noon on Monday.

Venezuelan opp says it has proof its candidate defeated Maduro

AP ■ CARACAS

As thousands of people demonstrated across Venezuela, opposition candidate Edmundo Gonzalez on Monday announced that his campaign has the proof it needs to show he won the country’s disputed election whose victory electoral authorities handed to President Nicolas Maduro.

Gonzalez and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado told reporters they have obtained more than 70 per cent of tally sheets from Sunday’s election, and they show Gonzalez with more than double Maduro’s votes.

Both called on people, some of whom protested in the hours after Maduro was declared winner, to remain calm and invited them to gather peacefully at 11 am Tuesday to celebrate the results.

“I speak to you with the calmness of the truth,” Gonzalez said as dozens of supporters cheered outside campaign headquarters in the capital, Caracas. “We have in our hands the tally sheets that

demonstrate our categorical and mathematically irreversible victory.”

Their announcement came after the National Electoral Council, which is loyal to Maduro’s ruling Unites Socialist Party of Venezuela, officially declared him the winner, handing him his third six-year term.

In the capital, the protests were mostly peaceful, but when dozens of riot gear-clad national police officers blocked the caravan, a brawl broke. Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters, some of whom threw stones and other objects at officers who had stationed themselves on a main avenue of an upper-class district. A man fired a gun as the protesters moved through the city’s financial district. No one suffered a gunshot wound.

The demonstrations followed an election that was among the most peaceful in recent memory, reflecting hopes that Venezuela could avoid bloodshed and end 25 years of single-party rule. The winner was to take control of an economy

recovering from collapse and a population desperate for change. “We have never been moved by hatred. On the contrary, we have always been victims of the powerful,” Maduro said in a nationally televised ceremony. “An attempt is being made to impose a coup d’état in Venezuela again of a fascist and counterrevolutionary nature.”

“We already know this movie, and this time, there will be no kind of weakness,” he added, saying that Venezuela’s “law will be respected.”

Machado told reporters tally sheets show Maduro and Gonzalez received more than 2.7 million and roughly 6.2 million votes respectively.

“A free people is one that is respected, and we are going to fight for our freedom,” Gonzalez said. “Dear friends, I understand your indignation, but our response from the democratic sectors is of calmness and firmness.”

Venezuelans vote using electronic machines, which record votes and provide every voter a paper receipt that shows the candidate of their choice.

Voters are supposed to deposit their receipt at ballot boxes before exiting the polls. After polls close, each machine prints a tally sheet showing the candidates’ names and the votes they received.

But the ruling party wields tight control over the voting system, both through a loyal five-member electoral council and a network of longtime local party coordinators who get near unrestricted access to voting centres. Those coordinators, some of whom are responsible for handing out government benefits including subsidised food, have blocked representatives of opposition parties from entering voting centres as allowed by law to witness the voting process, vote counting and, crucially, to obtain a copy of the machines’ final tally sheet.

Electoral authorities had not yet released the tally sheets for each of the 30,000 voting machines as of Monday evening. The electoral body’s website was down, and it remained unclear when the tallies would be available.

British Pakistani radical preacher jailed for life

London (PTI):

Anjem Choudary, a radical Islamist preacher with dual British and Pakistani nationality, was on Tuesday jailed for life with a minimum term of 28 years behind bars by a UK court for directing a terrorist organisation.

Choudary, 57, had been found guilty at Woolwich Crown Court of directing Al-Muhajiroun (ALM) and encouraging support for the proscribed organisation through online meetings.

Sentencing him at the same court to a prison term means he would be in his 80s by the time he can seek parole.

Justice Mark Wall told Choudary his behaviour was of the “highest culpability.”

“Organisations such as yours normalise violence in pursuit of an ideological cause. They drive wedges between people who would otherwise live together in peaceful co-existence,” said Judge Wall.

During a six-week trial which concluded last week, the jury heard how Choudary helped found ALM in 1996 and spent nearly 30 years running its operations under dozens of different names.

ALM was first proscribed, or banned, by the UK in 2006 under the name Al Ghurabaa. In 2010, ALM was included in the ban as an alternate name.

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) said Choudary was still acting as its leader as late as July 2023, when he was arrested, making online speeches to a US-based offshoot called Islamic Thinkers Society (ITS).

That group was infiltrated by undercover law enforcement officers in the US, who were present at online lectures in 2022 and 2023. The court heard that Choudary said he viewed being called an extremist as a “medal” during lectures.

Choudary was released early from a five-year sentence for inviting support for the Islamic State (ISIS) terror group in October 2018 under licence conditions that prevented him from using the internet until July 2021. But within days of the conditions expiring, he began issuing press releases on WhatsApp and Telegram from his home in Ilford, his trial heard.

Following a joint investigation by the Metropolitan Police, the New York Police Department, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, he was arrested and charged with terrorism offences.

Harris worse than Biden: Trump

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Former president and Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump has called his likely Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, a “worse candidate” than President Joe Biden, who she replaced more than a week ago.

“I think she (Harris) is the worst candidate than him (Biden). She is far more radical left,” Trump told Fox News host Laura Ingraham in an interview on Monday, his first after Harris, 59, became the presumptive nominee of the Democratic Party.

Harris officially declared her candidacy after incumbent President Biden withdrew from the race for a second term on July 20. She is expected to be officially declared as the presidential candidate by the Democrats next month.

“I thought she was a little younger. I mean, she’s 60 years old. I didn’t realise she was 60. She’s talking a big game. But her game is pretty bad. She was the border czar. She’s trying to pretend that she wasn’t,” Trump said. “She was for defunding the

police. She was for open borders. She was for having anybody come in. Now I notice that they’re actually saying they want to have immunity for everybody that came into the country, and they want to have citizenship,” Trump alleged, asserting that giving citizenship to everybody would destroy the country.

“It’s in such bad shape. Our country has never been in a position like this. In addition to which we could end up in a third world war. We have 20 million people that have come into the country. I would say by now 20 (million) is probably going over that number,” he said.

Trump reiterated his allegations that the Democratic establishment staged a coup against Biden.

“They staged a coup against the president of the United States. They went to him and told him ‘You are leaving. You are way down in the poll. Seventeen points, I think,’ he said. “It’s like you’re in a fight with somebody, and you’re really winning, and they take him out and they put somebody else in. Nobody ever heard of this before,” he added. “This is a coup. They took him.

They said even though you got 14 million votes, you’re out. And he said ‘I am not going out... They took him out. He was losing badly, so they took him out. He wants something to say. He’s sitting there with nothing to do, nobody to talk to. They threw him out. This was a coup, the first one of the president of the United States,’” Trump said.

Trump also said that while he “probably” will debate Harris, he “could also make a case” to avoid a face-to-face confrontation with her, CNBC News reported.

After the interview’s broadcast, the Harris for President campaign said Ingraham practically begged Trump on Fox News to commit to debating Harris.

“Why won’t Donald Trump give a straight answer on debating Vice President Harris? It’s clear from tonight’s question-dodging: he’s scared he’ll have to defend his running mate’s weird attacks on women or his own calls to end elections in America in a debate against the vice president,” said Harris for President spokesperson Ammar Moussa.

“Vice President Harris will be on

the debate stage (on) September 10th. Donald Trump can show up, or not,” Moussa said.

Donald Trump seems to be backing away from his earlier commitment to debate Vice President Kamala Harris, questioning the value of a meet-up and saying he “probably” will debate but he “can also make a case for not doing it” – prompting her campaign to say he’s “scared.”

Trump, in an interview with Fox News Channel that aired Monday night, was pressed several times about committing to debating Harris before giving a squishier answer than he had in recent days.

The Republican former president had been willing to debate President Joe Biden when Biden was the Democratic nominee after months of suggesting that the president was not mentally up for the matchup – or the presidency.

But after Biden dropped out of the race and Harris became poised to be the Democratic presidential candidate, Trump has been questioning the terms of the original debate he agreed to with Biden.

Despite rising tension, Beirut airport remains operational

AP ■ BEIRUT

Fears of an escalation in the simmering conflict between Hezbollah and Israel have prompted some airlines to cancel flights to Lebanon, but business appeared to be proceeding as usual Tuesday at the Beirut airport, where many travellers greeted the warnings with a shrug.

Hadi Sharqawi, 24, a Lebanese student in Italy, arrived Tuesday after two days of flight cancellations, to spend a month and a half with his family as he normally does in the summer. He is from the town of Kharayeb, which is in southern Lebanon although relatively far from the border where clashes have been ongoing for 10 months.

“As far as the threats, they didn’t influence me at all to not come to Lebanon,” Sharqawi said. “Even if there are threats, we will still come.”

Seventy-one-year-old Mohammad Mokhaled, from the southern town of Jarjouh,

who was waiting to pick up his daughter Tuesday, agreed. “We are not scared of the situation, because we are used to this,” he said. “We hear airstrikes regularly and the breaking of the sound barrier, and it doesn’t affect us.”

Lebanon is bracing for a retaliatory strike from Israel after a missile hit a soccer field in the town of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-annexed Syrian Golan over the weekend, killing 12 children and adolescents.

Israel accused the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah of carrying out the strike, to which Hezbollah issued a rare denial.

Even before the deadly incident, rhetoric and fears of a full-blown conflict had been intensifying, but it has had relatively little impact on the summer tourist season, during which tens of thousands of Lebanese working or studying abroad typically come to visit their families, filling up restaurants and beach clubs.

Israel and the Lebanese militant group have traded near-daily strikes since the war in Gaza erupted on Oct. 7 following Hamas’ surprise attack on southern Israel.

The Beirut airport reported that 406,396 passengers arrived in June compared to 427,854 arrivals in the same period in 2023, a decrease of 5 per cent. It also recorded 300,362 departed the country in June, compared to 280,366, an increase of 7 per cent.

Amal Ahmadih, 23, was leaving Tuesday to return to Qatar, where she works in a restaurant, after a vacation in Lebanon. Ahmadih said she was leaving as originally scheduled and had not pushed up her flight due to security concerns.

“Honestly everyone was telling me that the situation was not good but I wanted to come to see my friends and my family,” she said. “Whatever happens, at the end of the day, this is my country.”

Taliban disavows many Af diplomatic missions abroad

AP ■ ISLAMABAD

The Taliban on Tuesday disavowed many Afghan diplomatic missions overseas, saying it will not honour passports, visas and other documents issued by diplomats associated with Afghanistan’s former Western-backed administration. It’s the Taliban’s latest attempt to seize control of diplomatic missions since returning to power in 2021.

Many Taliban leaders are under sanctions, and no country recognises them as Afghanistan’s legitimate rulers. The country’s seat at the United Nations is still held by the former government that was led by Ashraf Ghani, but the Taliban wants it. In a statement posted to social media platform X, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said documents issued by missions in London, Berlin, Belgium,

Bonn, Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy, Greece, Poland, Australia, Sweden, Canada and Norway are no longer accepted and the ministry “bears no responsibility” for those documents. The documents affected include passports, visa stickers, deeds and endorsements.

The ministry wrote that people in those countries will need to approach embassies and consulates controlled by the Taliban’s Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan government instead. “All Afghan nationals living abroad and foreigners can visit the IEA political and consular missions in other countries, other than the above-mentioned missions, to access consular services,” it said.

The Taliban did not immediately respond to questions.

One Afghan national living in London, Asad Mobariz,

expressed disappointment and frustration with the decision. The master’s student called it unfair and impractical to expect Afghans in affected countries to travel abroad for consular services.

“This decision disregards our needs and places an undue burden on us,” he told The Associated Press. “These services are crucial for my ability to travel, work and maintain my legal status in the UK.”

The decision would create immense hardship for the Afghan population in Europe and lead to increased financial strain and potential legal issues for those unable to access consular services locally, he said.

Another Afghan national, Adnan Najibi, who lives in Germany, said discrediting embassies was unlikely to benefit the Taliban. “I live in a small town with a rela-

tively low population; however, I still see that there are hundreds of Afghans living here,” Najibi said. “If someone previously obtained an Afghan passport, marriage certificate or any other document in a day, it may now take weeks or even longer.”

In March 2023, the Taliban said they were trying to take charge of more Afghan embassies abroad.

Their chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, said the administration had sent diplomats to at least 14 countries. The new developments mean the closest available Afghan embassies are likely to be in Spain and the Netherlands.

In October, they stressed that they were working with Taliban authorities in Kabul after the Taliban suspended consular services at the embassies in London and Vienna over their “lack of transparency

and cooperation.”

Some countries retain an active diplomatic mission in Afghanistan, including Pakistan and China. Also on Tuesday, the UN mission in Afghanistan said local intelligence officials in May forcibly closed the office of a women-led nongovernmental group for allowing some of its female employees to physically report to work.

The NGO was allowed to reopen days later after signing a letter saying it would not allow women employees to come to the office, according to the mission’s latest report on human rights in Afghanistan. The report did not disclose the location for “protection reasons.”

Restrictions on women and girls are a major obstacle to the Taliban gaining official recognition as the country’s legitimate government.

Taiwan president urges democracies to unite at gathering of foreign lawmakers

AP ■ TAIPEI/ TAIWAN

Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te welcomed what he called the “largest-ever” delegation of foreign lawmakers to Taiwan and said Tuesday it showed the importance of democracies uniting, even as Beijing pressured members of the delegation not to visit.

“This demonstrates the support and the value various other countries place on Taiwan,” Lai said. “It also sends an important message to democratic countries around the world. Maintaining democracy requires unity, and we must protect democracy together.”

Lai made his remarks at a conference in Taipei held by the

Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC), a group of hundreds of lawmakers from dozens of countries concerned about how democracies approach Beijing.

Beijing views the self-governed island democracy of Taiwan as part of its territory and has been urging its threats to annex it by force if necessary.

Lai’s party, the Democratic Progressive Party, doesn’t seek independence from China because he believes that Taiwan is already a sovereign nation.

Beijing sees Lai as a separatist and refuses to speak with him. China has ramped up pressure against the island since Lai took office in May, sending ships and planes on a large

military drill to show displeasure at his inauguration. That comes after years of Beijing’s pressure on Taiwan – which has been ruled by the DPP for three terms now – on diplomatic, military and economic fronts.

Lai said at the conference that Taiwan would work with other democracies to protect democracy from “the threat of authoritarian expansionism.”

“China’s threat to any country is a threat to the whole world,” Lai told attendees.

China “uses diplomatic kidnapping, economic coercion, internet attacks, and spreading false and fake things to continuously muddle matters and seek to undermine regional peace and stability.”

US boosts alliance with the Philippines with \$500 mn funding

AP ■ MANILA

Washington's top diplomat and defence chief announced USD 500 million in military funding on Tuesday to boost Philippine defences and progress on a proposed military intelligence-sharing pact as both allies renewed their concerns over China's continuing aggressive actions in the region. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin met with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr, who has fortified Manila's decades-old treaty alliance with Washington as hostilities between Philippine and Chinese forces flared since last year in the disputed South China Sea. Marcos hailed "very open" communication lines between

Washington and Manila, adding that the two countries' treaty alliance and key issues in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region "are continuously examined and reexamined so we are agile in terms of our responses". Marcos has underscored the need for a US military presence for Asian stability and peace. After meeting their Philippine counterparts later, Blinken and Austin announced the USD 500 million military funding to help in an ongoing modernisation of the Philippine military and coast guard and boost security collaboration amid shared concerns over China's assertive actions. "Both of us share concerns and many other countries in the region share concerns, as well, about some of the actions that

the People's Republic of China has taken, escalatory actions in the South China Sea, the East China Sea," including "coercive methods", Blinken said in a joint news conference. He renewed a warning that the US would help defend the Philippines if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under attack in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea. The US officials also offered condolences over the dozens of deaths wrought by typhoon-worsened monsoon rains in recent weeks and announced an additional USD 1 million in aid for the victims and to help devastated communities recover. The visit came the week after the Philippines and reached a temporary arrangement to prevent clashes around the Philippine-occupied Second

Thomas Shoal like the violent faceoff between their forces on June 17. Philippine forces transported food and other supplies and a fresh batch of navy personnel Saturday to Manila's territorial outpost at the shoal without a confrontation were reported for the first time since last year. But the Philippines would continue strengthening its territorial defence with the assistance of the US and other friendly military powers and build new security alliances, Philippine Ambassador to the US Jose Manuel Romualdez said. "The non-confrontational resupply and rotation is purely temporary. The People's Republic of China will not stop and we are determined just as well," Romualdez told The

Associated Press. The USD 500 million in US military financing would include funding for reinforcing the Philippine navy's capability. About USD 125 million would be used for construction and other improvements in parts of Philippine military bases to be occupied by US forces under the 2014 Enhanced Defence Cooperation Agreement, Romualdez said. With strong support in Congress, US military funding may double next year "depending on our capacity to absorb it", Romualdez said. Progress in negotiations on a proposed military intelligence-sharing pact, the General Security of Military Information Agreement was announced by Austin, who

said that the accord may be signed later this year. The agreement, similar to ones Washington has forged with other allied countries, would allow the US to provide high-level intelligence, more sophisticated weapons, including missile systems, and access to satellite and drone surveillance systems to the Philippines with an assurance that such intelligence and details about sophisticated weapons would be closely kept secret in a highly secured manner to prevent leaks, two Philippine officials told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the issue publicly. Philippine efforts to obtain sophisticated weapons from the US military in the past have been hampered by the lack of

such an intelligence deal. In his meeting with Blinken and Austin, Marcos alluded to the intense political divisions in the US ahead of the presidential elections this year. "I'm a bit surprised considering how interesting your political situation has become back in the States, but I'm glad that you found the time to come and visit with us," Marcos said. Meanwhile, Romualdez said that US support to the Philippines would "absolutely" not change regardless of who becomes America's next president. Numerous countries have expressed concerns about the implications of former President Donald Trump returning to the White House in January after President Joe Biden withdrew and threw his support to Vice President

Kamala Harris. "Both Republicans and Democrats are in full agreement for the Philippines," he said, adding that both sides have given assurances of continued support to Manila. Marcos approved last year an expansion of the US military presence in four more Philippine military camps under the 2014 defense agreement, and the largest war drills between Filipino and US forces have been staged under his administration, drawing opposition and alarm from China, which said that increased deployments of American forces would endanger regional peace and security. The Philippines has responded that it has the right to move to safeguard its territorial interests and national security.

Imran Khan hints willingness to talk with army

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's beleaguered former prime minister Imran Khan on Tuesday signalled willingness to hold talks with the powerful army after finding himself at a blind alley due to scores of cases slapped on him, his wife and senior party leaders. While talking to journalists inside the Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi on the sidelines of a hearing of a case against him, Khan, 71, expressed his desire for dialogue with the military, clarifying that he never accused the establishment but offered constructive criticism. The cricketer-turned-politician likened the military to a spoiled child in a household, explaining that just as a wayward child is critiqued, the military was criticised and that criticism is the essence of democracy. The Express Tribune reported. This comes as Khan's wife Bushra Bibi was on Tuesday named as a suspect in 11 cases, including the attack on the army headquarters on May 9 last year. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder also approached an Anti-Terrorism Court and sought bail in 12 cases linked

to last year's May 9 riots. The Pakistan Army, which has ruled the coup-prone country for years, has wielded considerable power in matters of politics, security and foreign policy. Khan, who is currently on judicial remand in all the cases, claims that there is no recovery to be made from him. He argues that the cases are based on malice and are a form of political retaliation against him. The May 9 riots in 2023 were triggered nationwide after Khan was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in a 190-million-pound corruption case. He faces over 200 cases and has been in jail since August last year. Khan has been imprisoned at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi for almost a year upon his conviction in multiple cases. His wife Bushra Bibi is also jailed along with him. When questioned about his recent statements suggesting a desire to reconcile with the military despite previously leveling accusations against it, Khan emphasised he never made accusations, only criticisms. He insisted that no one should teach them that the military has never made mistakes.

B'desh to ban fundamentalist Jamaat following unrest

PTI ■ DHAKA

The Bangladesh government on Tuesday decided to ban the Jamaat-e-Islami following the deadly nationwide students' protests over quotas in government jobs, accusing the fundamentalist party of exploiting the movement that left at least 150 people dead. The development to ban the Jamaat-e-Islami from Wednesday comes a day after a meeting of the ruling Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League-led 14-party alliance passed a resolution that Jamaat, an ally of former prime minister Khaleda Zia Bangladesh National Party (BNP), must be banned from politics. "God willing... the decision (of banning Jamaat) will be announced tomorrow," Law Minister Anisul Haq told newsmen at his office on Tuesday, adding it would be an "executive order" that will ban the Jamaat-e-Islami, a party founded in 1941 in undivided India under British rule. The students, who waged protests during the anti-quota movement, said they had no link to the violence while evidence was there that Jamaat, its student wing Islami Chhatra Shibir, former prime minister Khaleda Zia's Bangladesh National Party (BNP), and militant party of its students front, Chhatra Dal, carried out the mayhem, the minister claimed.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's ruling Awami League's (AL) general secretary Obaidul Quader, meanwhile, said the government would thoroughly examine legal aspects before banning Jamaat-Shibir to block any possible legal loophole, which could be exploited by "this extremist group" to engage in politics in Bangladesh. For the sake of the country, the 14-party alliance has decided to ban Jamaat-Shibir to eliminate anti-national evil forces, Quader said. Quader, also the Road Transport Minister, said that Jamaat and BNP used students as "shields" during the movement while "the government is aware of the sources of their instructions, incitements, and funding." Violence gripped Bangladesh for almost the entire of July when the protests that had started in universities and colleges earlier this month, quickly turned into a widespread agitation against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government's policies. The government called in the army to quell protests against job quotas after the unrest left at least 150 dead and several thousand people, including policemen, wounded and major government installations damaged. Meanwhile, the ruling Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League-led 14-party alliance leaders held a meeting with Hasina in the chair and



Military personnel stand guard in front of a large cutout portrait of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the national mourning day, declared by the Bangladesh government to remember victims of the recent countrywide deadly clashes, in Dhaka, Bangladesh, on Tuesday, July 30. AP/PTI

Mourning for 150 people killed in violence

Dhaka (PTI): Bangladesh on Tuesday observed a national day of mourning for the 150 people killed in the recent anti-government violence, amid calls for the unconditional release of six coordinators of the quota reform movement within 24 hours. It was on Monday that the Bangladesh government, for the first time, officially acknowledged that 150 people were killed across the country during the students' unrest over the quota system. Nationwide mourning was observed today recalling those who were killed during the quota reform movement. On this day, black badges were worn and prayers were organised in all mosques. Besides, special prayers will be offered in all temples, churches and pagodas across the country, media reports said. Violence gripped Bangladesh for days when the protests that had started in universities and colleges, quickly turned into a widespread agitation against Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her government's policies. The government called in the army to quell protests against job quotas after the unrest left several thousand people, including policemen, wounded and major government installations damaged.

China reports 7 more deaths from torrential rains; toll rises to 22

Beijing (AP): Torrential rains have left at least seven people dead and three others missing in southeastern China, state media said on Tuesday, raising the death toll from a tropical storm to 22. All the deaths have been in Hunan province. Heavy rains have been falling on eastern Hunan for days as Tropical Storm Gaemi moved inland after making landfall at typhoon strength in neighbouring Fujian province on the Chinese coast. Four deaths and three missing people were reported in four villages in Xixing city, the official Xinhua News Agency said. The rain has damaged hundreds of homes in the city and prompted the evacuation of more than 11,000 people, Xinhua said. The bodies of three other missing people were found in a vil-

lage in a nearby city, state broadcaster CCTV said in an online report. They were victims of a sudden mudslide caused by the rain, according to CCTV. The seven deaths are in an area south of a summertime tourist region where a mudslide killed 15 people and injured six others after barreling into a homestay house Sunday morning. Elsewhere in Hunan, the rains breached dikes on two sections of the Juanshui River on Sunday in Xiangtan county, and more than 3,000 people were evacuated, Xinhua said. One of the breaches had been resealed on Monday afternoon. Tropical Storm Gaemi also brought heavy rain to northeastern China and North Korea, swelling the Yalu River, which divides the two countries.

Pak ex-PM seeks bail in 12 terrorism cases

PTI ■ LAHORE/ISLAMABAD

Jailed former prime minister Jand Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) founder Imran Khan has approached an Anti-Terrorism Court here seeking bail in 12 cases linked to last year's May 9 riots, a media report said on Tuesday. The 71-year-old former cricketer-turned-politician's legal team, led by lawyer Salman Safdar, has filed the petitions, the Express Tribune reported on Tuesday. Khan, who is currently on judicial remand in all the cases, claims that there is no recovery to be made from him. He argues that the cases are based on malice and are a form of political retaliation against him. The petitions request the court to grant post-arrest bail in these cases. Recently, the Lahore High Court (LHC) provided major relief to Khan by declaring his physical remand in several

May 9 cases null and void. LHC division bench comprising Justices Tariq Saleem and Anwarul Haq had passed the order on petitions filed by Khan challenging the ATC's decision to approve his physical remand in the cases related to the May 9 violence. After hearing the arguments of the prosecutor general and Khan's counsel, the LHC set aside the anti-terrorism court's decision to grant his physical remand noting that he will remain in judicial custody in these cases. The May 9 riots in 2023 were triggered nationwide after Khan was arrested by the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) in a 190-million-pound corruption case. He faces over 200 cases and has been in jail since August last year. Khan has been imprisoned at the high-security Adiala Jail in Rawalpindi for almost a year upon his conviction multiple in cases. His wife Bushra Bibi is

also jailed along with him. Though Khan had secured bail on his conviction was set aside, he has not been released. Khan was arrested on August 5 last year after his conviction in the first Toshakhana corruption case filed by the Election Commission of Pakistan. Since then, he has been kept in jail in various cases. The PTI believes he is being arrested in more cases at the behest of the powerful military establishment to make sure that he does not come out of jail. BUSHRA BIBI NAMED AS SUSPECT IN 11 CASES Bushra Bibi, the wife of Imran Khan, has been named as a suspect in 11 cases, including the attack on the army headquarters on May 9 last year, the Rawalpindi district police informed the Islamabad High Court on Tuesday. The Rawalpindi police presented a report in the IHC, pro-

viding details of the cases filed against 49-year-old Bushra, who has been incarcerated in the Adiala Jail of Rawalpindi along with her husband. The court had ordered authorities to provide details of the cases registered against her. During the hearing, the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) prosecutor also submitted a response according to the court's order, revealing that four cases have been registered against her with NAB, including three in Rawalpindi and one in Lahore. Though Rawalpindi and Islamabad police and NAB submitted their responses, the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) and Balochistan police have not come up with the details of the cases against Bibi. The IHC issued fresh notices to the FIA and Balochistan police to come up with details by Monday and adjourned the case until then.

Gunmen open fire on vehicle carrying UN staff in Pakistan, no casualties

Dera Ismail Khan (AP): Unidentified gunmen opened fire on a bulletproof vehicle carrying local staff working for a UN development agency in Pakistan's volatile northwest bordering Afghanistan on Tuesday, but no one was harmed, police said. The attack on the vehicle of the United Nations Office for Project Services happened in Dera Ismail Khan, a district in the Khyber, said Abdul Salam, who is the district police chief there. He said all the people were traveling in the vehicle are safe. Salam said police have launched a search to trace and arrest those involved in the assault. No one immediately claimed responsibility and the Pakistani Taliban in a statement said they were not behind the

attack. Pakistan has witnessed a surge in militant attacks, mostly in the northwest, in recent years. Authorities have blamed the Pakistani Taliban for such previous attacks on security forces and civilians. The insurgents, known as Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan or TTP, are a separate group but are an ally of the Afghan Taliban. The group has been emboldened since the Afghan Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021.

How two Syrians in Rome using hummus to aid war refugees and help migrants integrate

Rome (AP): A pair of Syrians have created a community that provides support to migrants and vulnerable people in Rome, by sharing the flavours of a homeland torn by civil war. Founded in 2018 as a "humanitarian catering service", HummusTown was originally aimed at raising funds for families and friends in Syria. It has since grown into a successful small business that has shifted from sending remittances to helping new migrants integrate in Italy, all the while gaining a steady following on Rome's gastronomic scene. As the Syrian war continued to rage, Shaza Saker, a long-time UN employee living in Rome, and Joumana Farho, who was working as her cook, wanted to find a way to help people at home. Farho, 48, brought her "divine" cooking, while Saker,

49, networked. "I told her: Let's start inviting people over for dinner... and whatever we make out of these dinners we'll just send to Syria," Saker said. "My house had become a bit of, you know, a restaurant, a home restaurant. But it was fun. We felt useful." The non-profit that started with 45,000 euros (USD 48,670) raised through crowdfunding now employs 13 full-time and 10 part-time staff at its kitchen kiosk near Rome's train station and a small bistro, with plans to open a restaurant. The expanded group now also organizes cooking classes, cultural events and summer aperitifs, as well as catering for events in the Italian capital. Each month, they donate food to the homeless and last year they raised 40,000 euros for victims of the earthquakes that struck Syria on February 6,

2023 with the loss of thousands of lives. As more refugees arrived in Rome, the two shifted their focus to providing Syrian asylum-seekers with work and a support network, eventually expanding their mission to all vulnerable people, including Italians. They include Mayyada al-Amrani, a Palestinian woman who fled Gaza with her eldest daughter, who is getting treatment for cancer. She spends her days rolling traditional spiced rice into grape leaves, working alongside four other cooks of Syrian and Palestinian origin. While she is able to earn money to help support herself and her daughter in Italy, she worries about her five other children back in Gaza, the youngest not yet 9 months old. "They are surviving," she said. "They struggle and suffer mostly from (lack of) water."

White House says no need to restrict 'open-source' AI

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The White House is coming out in favor of "open-source" artificial intelligence technology, arguing in a report Tuesday that there's no need right now for restrictions on companies making key components of their powerful AI systems widely available. "We recognize the importance of open systems," said Alan Davidson, an assistant secretary of the US Commerce Department, in an interview with The Associated Press. As part of a sweeping executive order on AI last year, President Joe Biden gave the US Commerce Department until July to talk to experts and come back with recommendations on how to manage the potential benefits and risks of so-called

open models. The term "open-source" comes from a decades-old practice of building software in which the code is free or widely accessible for anyone to examine, modify and build upon. However, open-source AI development involves more than just code and computer scientists differ on how to define it depending on which components of the technology are publicly available, and if there are restrictions limiting its use. The report is the US government's first to delve into a tech industry debate between developers such as ChatGPT-maker OpenAI advocating closing off their models' inner workings to guard against misuse, and others, such as Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg, who have lobbied for a more open approach they say favors inno-

vation. "A year ago, there was a strong narrative about risk and long-term concerns about AI systems being too powerful," said Davidson, administrator of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. "We continue to have concerns about AI safety, but this report reflects a more balanced view that shows that there are real benefits in the openness of these technologies." The NTIA's report says "current evidence is not sufficient" to warrant restrictions on AI models with "widely available weights." Weights are numerical values that influence how an AI model performs. But it also says US officials must continue to monitor potential dangers and "take steps to ensure that the government is prepared to act if heightened risks emerge."

'Russia-North Korea defence deal is risky for the world'

Seoul (AP): Australia's foreign minister said on Tuesday the recent defence deal between North Korea and Russia was "destabilising" and "risky for the world," after she visited the tense border village shared by North and South Korea on Tuesday. In June, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a pact stipulating mutual military assistance if either country is attacked, deepening worries about the expanding ties between the countries. The US and its partners have steadfastly accused North Korea of supplying much-needed conventional arms to Russia for its war in Ukraine in return for military and economic assistance. "I also want to say something about the security pact between North Korea and Russia. And say again, this is destabilising. This is risky for the world and

again we say Russia is behaving in ways which are not conducive to peace but are escalatory," Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong told reporters.

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Sensex, Nifty rise for 3rd day on gains by Tata Motors, HDFC Bank

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty eked out gains in volatile trade to settle at record high levels on Tuesday, extending their gaining streak to the third day on the back of buying in Tata Motors and HDFC Bank.

The 30-share BSE Sensex closed higher by 99.56 points or 0.12 per cent at 81,455.40 - its all-time closing high - with 16 of its components advancing and 14 ending lower. The index opened higher and jumped 459.43 points or 0.56 per cent to hit an intra-day high of 81,815.27. The NSE Nifty edged up 21.20 points or 0.09 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,857.30. During the day, it surged 135.65 points or 0.54 per cent to 24,971.75. The index hit a low of 24,798.65. "The domestic market ended flat, due to by-profit-booking at higher levels. However, the expectation of dovish comments from the US Fed and BoE in the upcoming policy meetings this week is



supporting the optimism," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services said. Despite heavy volatility, the combined market valuation of all BSE-listed companies hit the USD 5.50-trillion (Rs 460 lakh crore) milestone for the first time. From the Sensex pack, Tata Motors, NTPC, Bajaj Finserv, Power Grid Corp, Titan, Asian Paints, IndusInd Bank, Maruti Suzuki India and Tata Steel were among the biggest gainers. Sun Pharmaceuticals, ITC,

Hindustan Unilever, Bharti Airtel, UltraTech Cement and Reliance Industries were among the laggards. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge jumped 0.88 per cent and the midcap index climbed 0.27 per cent. During the day, both indices hit their all-time high level. Among the indices, Utilities surged 1.97 per cent, Power bounced 1.49 per cent, Consumer durables rallied 1.15 per cent, oil & gas by 0.73 per cent and consumer discretionary by 0.72 per cent.

FMCG, healthcare, IT and Teck were the laggards. CAMS shares closed over 9 per cent higher at Rs 4,692.20 per piece ahead of June quarter results that are scheduled to be released this Friday. On Tuesday, shares of Tata Motors closed higher by 3 per cent on the BSE. During the day, it advanced 4.9 per cent to hit its 52-week high of Rs 1,179.05 apiece. The company's market valuation jumped by Rs 12,843.07 crore to Rs 3,86,408.44 crore. Also, shares of transmission and distribution structure manufacturing company Skipper settled over 9 per cent higher at Rs 403.75 apiece after the company reported a consolidated net profit of Rs 32.42 crore in Q1 FY25. NTPC, Power Grid, Strides Pharma Science and Colgate-Palmolive shares also hit 52-week highs on the bourse. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the negative territory. European markets were trading on a mixed note. The US markets closed higher on Monday.

India's gold demand dips 5% to 149.7 tonnes in June quarter on high prices, says WGC

PTI ■ MUMBAI

India's gold demand declined 5 per cent to 149.7 tonnes during the June quarter, due to record high prices, the World Gold Council (WGC) said in a report on Tuesday. The gold demand stood at 158.1 tonnes during the corresponding quarter of the previous calendar year, WGC's 'Q2 2024 Gold Demand Trends' report said. However, in value terms, gold demand increased 17 per cent during the second quarter at Rs 93,850 crore, compared to Rs 82,530 crore in the same period of the previous year. Prices during the April-June quarter soared, with the cost of 24-carat gold crossing Rs 74,000 per 10 grams. The average price of gold during the April-June period in US dollar terms was USD 2,338.2, compared to USD 1,975.9 in the same period of 2023. The average quarterly price in rupee terms was Rs 62,700.5, compared to Rs 52,191.6 in the same period last year (excluding import duty and GST), WGC said. "India's gold demand softened slightly in the second quarter of 2024,



reaching 149.7 tonnes, down 5 per cent year-on-year. This can be attributed to record-high gold prices impacting affordability and causing a slowdown in consumer purchases. However, the overall value of demand remained strong, increasing by 14 per cent, highlighting gold's enduring value for Indian consumers," said Sachin Jain, WGC Regional CEO, India. Further, the report said the total jewellery demand in India declined 17 per cent to 106.5 tonnes during the quarter compared to 128.6 tonnes in the corresponding period of the last year. Total investment demand increased 46 per cent in the second quarter at 43.1 tonnes

in comparison to 29.5 tonnes in the same period of last year, said the report. The WGC report further stated that recycled gold in India during the quarter under review dipped 39 per cent to 23 tonnes, compared to 37.6 tonnes in Q2 2023. Total gold imports in India during the April-June quarter were 196.9 tonnes, which is 8 per cent more compared to 182.3 tonnes in the same period of last year. Jain said jewellery demand felt the pressure of high prices, declining 17 per cent to 107 tonnes due to high local prices, the general election and a severe heatwave. "While festivals like Akshaya Tritiya and Gudi Padwa

provided a temporary boost, record high prices continued to dampen consumer sentiment," he added. However, he said, investment demand surged 46 per cent to 43.1 tonnes, its highest second-quarter level since 2014 driven by expectations of further price appreciation and safe-haven buying. Bucking global trends, India's gold recycling fell 39 per cent to 23 tonnes, as consumers opted to exchange old jewellery for new rather than cashing in. This indicates limited distress selling and highlights gold's enduring role as a store of value in India, he noted. "Looking ahead, the recent 9 per cent reduction in import duty on gold is expected to revive the gold demand in the July quarter ahead of the main festive season that begins from September, which could be further boosted by a healthy monsoon. India's economic outlook too remains positive, with strong GDP forecasts and rural sector recovery are all likely to support demand in the second half of the year. Our forecast for full-year demand is between 700 to 750 tonnes," Jain added.

Indian Bank eyes recovery of ₹7,000 crore this financial year: MD & CEO

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Public sector Indian Bank has targeted to recover about Rs 7,000 crore during the current financial year, a top official said on Tuesday. The bank has also received the approval from the Reserve Bank of India and shareholders to raise Rs 5,000 crore which would be decided at an opportune time, the bank's Managing Director and CEO Shanti Lal Jain said here. The city-headquartered Indian Bank has reported a 41 per cent jump in its net profit to Rs 2,403 crore for the April-June 2024 quarter due to a decline in bad loans. It had earned a net profit of Rs 1,709 crore in the corresponding quarter of last year. "Last time, we recovered about Rs 8,700-Rs 8,800 crore. But what happens is slowly, this number may come down and this time we have planned that we will be making a recovery of around Rs 7,000 crore," Jain told reporters. Elaborating, he said recovery of Rs 7,000 crore for a financial year comes to Rs 1,750 per quarter and the bank in April-June 2024 quarter recovered Rs 1,937 crore. He said the recovery

would be more than the slippages during the current financial year. According to bank officials, the slippage ratio contained to 1.50 per cent in June 2024 as compared to 1.57 per cent in June 2023. On fund raising, Jain said the bank's capital adequacy is 16.47 per cent and with the net profit of Rs 2,403 crore for the April-June 2024 quarter has been added, the capital adequacy ratio is 17.08 per cent. "Point is, the bank is adequately capitalised. Basically, the bank is able to take care of capital needs. We have Board of Directors approval, Shareholders approval to raise Rs 5,000 crore through equity and Rs 2,000 crore through Tier II Bonds and Rs 5,000 crore of infra bonds during this financial year," he said. "That approval is with us and at the opportune time within the financial year we will take a call on this," he said. To a query on how much the bank was looking to recover through ARC, he said last year the bank made about Rs 464 crore and this financial year also it would be around Rs 400 crore of recovery. To another query, he said the bank opened about 77

branches last year and this year they have planned to open 100 branches. Jain said the bank was focused on delivering value-added and suitable solutions with the smart use of technology to customers "Through a combination of cutting-edge technology and personalised service, we aim to simplify banking, making it more accessible, convenient and secure" he said. He said the bank has launched its omni-channel banking application INDSMART — which offers a wide range of services including banking services and e-shopping facilities to customers. This application has several features like integrated bill payment, e-shopping, business planner providing a seamless and enriched experience for customers, he said. Customers would also be able to avail loan facilities or open fixed deposits and savings accounts through the application, he said. Indian Bank made a business of Rs 36,678 crore through digital channels in April-June 2024 quarter. Mobile banking users grew by 33 per cent year over year reaching 1.75 crore customers.

Paytm sees no impact of lowering of UPI incentives on its path to profitability

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, sees no impact of lower incentives earmarked by the government in the budget for promoting small ticket digital transactions, a top official of the company said. Speaking on the sidelines of launching "Card NFC Soundbox" machine, Paytm CEO Vijay Shekhar Sharma denied any impact of lower allocation of incentives to promote small ticket digital transactions on his guidance over profitability this fiscal year. "We remain committed to doing the same (achieve a profitable quarter in this fiscal) because we already said without UPI incentive," Sharma said. The government has lowered incentive allocation for Rupay and UPI transactions by about 42 per cent in the budget. Sharma during the company's earnings call had given guidance to achieve a profitable quarter during the current fiscal. "My team and we are also committed to making sure that we go back to profitable



quarters very, very soon. We are hoping and working on making sure that we deliver at least one profitable quarter in this financial year as soon as we are able to see a lot more clarity coming our way," Sharma had said. Paytm had reported widening of loss to Rs 840 crore in the quarter ended June 30, 2024. The company had posted a loss of Rs 358.4 crore in the same period a year ago. Consolidated revenue declined 33.48 per cent to Rs 1,639.1 crore during the quarter, from Rs 2,464.2 crore in the same period a year ago. While discussing Paytm's Card NFC Soundbox, which clubs card-based payment along with QR code-based payments, Sharma said the new device covers a very niche segment and is in line with the company's intent to cover every use case in the payment segment.

Check for 'wilful default' in NPA accounts exceeding ₹25 lakh, RBI urges banks

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The RBI on Tuesday issued a Master Direction on the Treatment of Wilful Defaulters and Large Defaulters under which banks and NBFCs will have to examine the 'wilful default' aspect in all non-performing asset accounts with outstanding amounts of Rs 25 lakh and above. A lender will identify and classify a person as a 'wilful defaulter' by following a specified procedure. The evidence of wilful default will be examined by an identification committee, according to the direction. "Wilful defaulter" means a borrower or a guarantor who has committed wilful default, and the outstanding amount is Rs 25 lakh and above. "The lender shall examine the 'wilful default' aspect in all NPA accounts with an outstanding amount of Rs 25 lakh and above...From time to time," it said. If a wilful default is observed in the internal preliminary screening, the lenders will complete the process of classification/declaring the borrower as a wilful defaulter within six months of the account being classified as



NPA. The Master Direction further said the lenders should formulate a non-discriminatory board-approved policy that clearly sets out the criteria based on which the photographs of persons classified and declared as wilful defaulters shall be published. "No additional credit facility shall be granted by any lender to a wilful defaulter or any entity with which a wilful defaulter is associated," it added. The bar on the additional credit facility to a wilful defaulter or any entity with which a wilful defaulter is associated would be effective for one year after the name of the wilful defaulter has been

removed from the List of Wilful Defaulters (LWD) by the lender. The RBI said the primary objective of the directions is to provide for a non-discriminatory and transparent procedure, having regard to the principles of natural justice, for classifying a borrower as a wilful defaulter by the lenders. The directions also aim to put in place a system to disseminate credit information about wilful defaulters for cautioning lenders to ensure that further institutional finance is not made available to them, the Reserve Bank said. These directions will be effective after 90 days.

Sebi returns IPO documents of Vishal Mega Mart, Avanse Financial Services, 2 others

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has returned the IPO Sdraft documents of four firms, including supermarket major Vishal Mega Mart, education-focused NBFC Avanse Financial Services and private equity major TPG Capital-backed Sai Life Sciences, an update with the regulator showed on Tuesday. Additionally, the offer document of BMW Ventures was returned too. The company's initial public offering (IPO) papers were received by Sebi on July 1. The Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi) has returned the offer documents of these four companies for "non-compliance with Regulation 7(1) (a) of Sebi ICDR Regulations, 2018, as on July 24, 2024". According to the Regulation 7(1) (a) of Sebi ICDR Regulations, an issuer making an initial public offer shall ensure that it has made an application to one or more stock exchanges to seek an in-principle approval for listing of its specified securities on such stock exchanges and has chosen one of them as the designated stock exchange. Vishal Mega Mart, on July 12, took the confidential filing route to submit its draft papers with the markets regulator. Avanse Financial Services



filed its draft papers in June to raise Rs 3,500 crore through IPO. The proposed initial share sale comprised a fresh issue of equity shares of up to Rs 1,000 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to Rs 2,500 crore by the selling shareholders, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The company, promoted by Olive Vine Investment Ltd, an affiliate of private equity major Warburg Pincus, proposed to use the funds to increase its capital base for future needs. Sai Life Sciences' proposed IPO consisted of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 800 crore and an OFS of 6.15 crore shares by a promoter, investor shareholders and other shareholders, as per the draft papers. Under the OFS, one of the promoter entities — Sai Quest Syn Pvt Ltd — and investor shareholders — TPG Asia VII SP Pte Ltd, HBM Private Equity India — were proposed to partly offload their respective stakes.

Construction firms in India adopting digital tech to optimise internal processes: Study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Construction companies in India are increasingly adopting digital technologies to assist project delivery, optimise internal processes and overcome the impact of industry challenges such as growing raw material costs and labour costs, a study has said. Indian companies are exploring a range of newer technologies aiding all the facets of the business including data analytics, construction wearables, prefabrication and modular construction (57 per cent), as well as the integration of cloud software and mobile applications to streamline and manage projects efficiently, it said. Autodesk, Inc recently announced the launch of the second edition of its State of Digital Adoption in the Construction Industry 2024 report in collaboration with Deloitte. The report is based on insights from 933 construction firms across six markets including Singapore, Australia, Japan, India, Malaysia and Hong Kong. Businesses were asked about their use of 16 digital technologies, and the number of technologies that were indicated in use counted. The average number of technologies in use was 5.3, with responses covering the whole range from 0 to 16.



Indian companies surpassed their counterparts from markets such as Australia, Japan, and Singapore in terms of investments in newer technologies with 28 per cent of their business expenditure on average being directed towards integrating newer technologies. Further, robotics and automated systems were identified as the technology most planned for by Indian businesses followed by augmented and virtual reality and artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning (ML). "While challenges like increasing prices of raw materials and growing competition persist in the Indian market, its current strong economic state and steady outlook for the forthcoming years, as reported by the IME, have provided a congenial

atmosphere for businesses to evaluate and adopt newer technologies, and consequently lead the Asia Pacific market in terms of investments in transformational technologies. "Indian businesses have aptly recognized this phase as the ideal time to leverage digital technologies to identify newer growth pockets, usher in efficiencies throughout project lifecycles and give them a competitive edge," said Sumit Oberoi, Senior Industry Strategist, Asia Pacific at Autodesk. "Priority areas for construction businesses to improve digital adoption include starting small, selecting a digital champion, tracking a range of success measures, and asking whether your business is AI ready," he added.

Premier Energies, PN Gadgil Jewellers, 2 others get Sebi's go-ahead to float IPOs

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Four companies, including Premier Energies Ltd and P N Gadgil Jewellers Ltd, have received Sebi's go-ahead to raise funds through Initial Public Offerings (IPOs), an update with the markets regulator showed on Tuesday. The other two firms that obtained the regulator's clearance to float initial share sales are -- Ecos India Mobility and Hospitality Ltd and KRN Heat Exchanger and Refrigeration Ltd. The four companies, which filed their preliminary IPO papers between March and April, obtained Sebi's observation letters during July 22-26. In Sebi's parlance, obtaining the observation letters means it's going ahead to float the public issue. According to the Draft Red Herring Prospectus (DRHP), solar cell company Premier Energies' proposed IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,500 crore and an Offer For Sale (OFS) of up to 2.82 crore shares by a promoter and investors. Under the OFS component, South Asia Growth Fund II Holdings LLC will divest 2.38 crore equity shares, South Asia EBT Trust will divest 1.53 lakh equity shares, and promoter Chiranjeev Singh Saluja will sell 42 lakh equity shares.



Proceeds from the fresh issue of Rs 1,168 crore will be used for investing in subsidiary Premier Energies Global Environment Private Ltd, to partially finance the establishment of a 4GW solar PV TOPCon (tunnel oxide passivated contact) cell and 4GW solar PV TOPCon module manufacturing facility in Hyderabad, and the remainder will be allocated towards general corporate purposes. The Rs 1,100-crore IPO of jewellery retail chain P N Gadgil Jewellers Ltd is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth up to Rs 850 crore and an OFS of equity shares to the tune of Rs 250 crore by a promoter SVG Business Trust, according to the draft prospectus. Of the IPO proceeds of Rs 850 crore, a total of Rs 387 crore will be utilised for the funding of expenditure towards setting up 12 new stores in Maharashtra, Rs

300 crore for payment of a debt, besides a portion will also be used for general corporate purposes. Chauffeur-driven mobility provider Ecos (India) Mobility & Hospitality Ltd's maiden public issue is entirely an OFS of 1.8 crore equity shares by promoters - Rajesh Loomba and Aditya Loomba - with no fresh issue component. At present, promoters and promoter group entities hold a 100 per cent stake in the company. Since it is an OFS, the Delhi-based firm will not receive any proceeds from the IPO and the money will go to the promoters selling shares. KRN Heat Exchanger's initial paper was filed in January 2024 comprising entirely a fresh issue of 1.93 crore equity shares with no OFS component. Later, the company filed updated papers in late March with revised issue size. Going by the draft papers filed in March, the company's proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of size of 1.6 crore equity shares. Funds will be used for investment in wholly-owned subsidiary KRN HVAC Products for setting up a new manufacturing facility at Neemrana, Alwar, in Rajasthan. All the four companies will be listed on the BSE and NSE.

MANU CLINCHES HISTORIC SECOND OLYMPIC MEDAL WINS 10M AIR PISTOL MIXED TEAM BRONZE WITH SARABJOT

PTI ■ CHATEAURoux (FRANCE)
A calm and composed Manu Bhaker scripted history to become the first Indian athlete in post-independence era to win two Olympic medals in a single edition of the Games as she combined with an equally unruffled Sarabjot Singh to clinch the 10m air pistol mixed team bronze here on Tuesday.



Manu Bhaker and Sarabjot Singh celebrating their bronze medal win in the 10m air pistol mixed team event at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

poor 8.6, while Bhaker shot 10.2 for an aggregate of 18.8. The Koreans aggregated 20.5 to take the opening round and open a 2-0 lead. In mixed team events, the pair that reaches 16 points first wins the medal. Down 0-2, Bhaker's consistency came to the fore and it rubbed off on Sarabjot as the pair took the next four rounds to take their tally to 8-2. Such was her level of confidence that Bhaker had just three shots below 10 in the entire contest which lasted 13 rounds. It was an uphill task for the Koreans who succumbed to pressure and could not match their rivals losing 16-10. IT'S ALL ABOUT KEEPING IT STEADY: Bhaker said the high-speed and high-precision sport requires a steady mind.



Manika becomes first Indian TT player to reach pre-quarterfinals

PTI ■ PARIS
Manika Batra made history by becoming the first Indian table tennis player to reach the singles pre-quarterfinals at the Olympic Games with a fluent 4-0 win over world number 18 and home favourite Prithika Pavade here on Monday. The 29-year-old Manika dominated from start to finish for a 11-9 11-6 11-9 11-7 win over Prithika, who has Indian roots. It turned out to be one of the most memorable matches for an Indian table tennis player in Olympics history. Manika had reached the round of 32 at the Tokyo Olympics and she bettered that performance on Monday. "I am happy that I beat a French player in Paris. I defeated a higher-ranked player. I did not think of creating history and making the pre-quarters, there are more rounds, I will take it match by match and give my best as I always do," Manika told PTI after her match. Manika's play to attack Prithika's backhand proved very effective but that was not the strategy she had devised before the match. "I had planned to play to her forehand as discussed with my coach but I was getting the points on her backhand, so I did not change the tactics. I did play a few shot on her forehand too. I did not want her to think that I am playing only on her backhand. "It was a tough match. Staying relaxed helps me both on and off the court. I do breathing exer-

Chinese women beat reigning champions United States in volleyball



AP ■ PARIS
Paris, Jul 30 (AP) Yuto Horigome was not even thinking about the podium this time. The first men's street skateboarding champion when the sport debuted in the Olympics in 2021, he was so far back going into his final try that it looked as if he would fall short.

through a difficult phase trying to come to terms with the disappointment of the individual competition just three days back, said he was under a lot of pressure to perform. "I'm feeling good, the game was very tough and there was a lot of pressure, I am very happy," said the 22-year-old Sarabjot, who comes from a farming family. The Indians started on the wrong foot with Sarabjot's opening shot fetching a 2022 Hangzhou Asian Games. The prodigal talent's long list of honours also includes nine World Cup gold medals across events. Sarabjot is also a World Championship, World Cup and Asian Games gold-medallist.

three pools and the top two third-place teams will advance to the knockout round, with wins, total points and set and point ratio used as tiebreakers. "It just highlights how thin the margins are and how we have to take care of some of these little plays," coach Karch Kiraly said. "And I want to give our team a huge amount of credit for fighting back. It is not easy to come back from down 2-0 against a really good China team." The Americans only lost one match in pool play in Tokyo and did not lose a set in the knockout stage en route to their first-ever gold medal. With eight holdovers from the 2021 champions, they arrived in Paris as the fifth-ranked team in the world. But sixth-ranked China won the first two sets handily, 25-20 and 25-19, before the Americans came back to win the third 25-17 and rallied from a 13-10 deficit to tie it 13-11 on a challenged ball that barely caught the Chinese end line. For the first time, the crowd was engaged and chanting "U-S-A!" and at 17-14, China took a timeout to regroup. It was 21-20 for the Americans when they ran off the last four points, getting an ace from Washington to set up set point. On the winner, Washington's dig set up Andrew Drews' spike. But China again took the lead in the tiebreaker. The Americans staved off two match points before Zhu Ting's spike went off blocker Andrea Drews for the victory. Japan's Yuto wins second gold medal in men's street skateboarding

Chinese women's volleyball team defeated the United States in a thrilling match at the Paris 2024 Olympics.

PHYSICAL POSSESSION NOTICE
ICICI Bank
The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.

PNB HOUSING
REGD. OFF. : 9TH FLOOR, ANTRIKSH BHAWAN, 22, K.G. MARG, NEW DELHI-110001, PHONES : 011-23357171, 23357172, 23705414, WEBSITE : WWW.PNBHOUSING.COM
BRANCH OFFICE : OFFICE NO. 111-112, FIRST FLOOR, PLOT NO. 1, BLOCK NO. 9, DB CORPORATE PARK, RAJBANDHA MAIDAN, RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH - 492001

व्यायालय कलेक्टर, दुर्ग जिला - दुर्ग (महसियत)
व्यक्तिगत व्यक्ति सभन
रा.प्र.क. 121/ब-121/ब/2023-24
प्राधिकृत अधिकारी, एचएचो स्माल फायनेंस बैंक लिमिटेड, शाखा - तीसरी मंजिल स्काई पार्क भाटिया नर्सिंग होम के पास, केनॉल रोड राजा तालाब रायपुर नर, बजिला रायपुर (छ.ग.)

आईआरएल (इंडिया) लिमिटेड
IREL (India) Limited
(A Govt. of India Undertaking Department of Atomic Energy Manavakurichi, Tamil Nadu, E-mail: purchase-mk@irel.co.in An ISO 9001, 14001 & 45001 Unit, Phone: 04651-200402 CIN : U15100MH1950G01008187

ASSETS CARE & RECONSTRUCTION ENTERPRISE LTD.
Corporate Office : Unit No. 502, C Wing, ONE BKC, Plot No. C - 66, G - Block, Bandra Kurla Complex, Mumbai - 400051. Tel : 022 68643101
Registered Office : 14th Floor, EROS Corporate Tower, Nehru Place, New Delhi - 110019
E-mail : acrc.aac@acrcindia.in | Website : www.acrcindia.in | CIN : U65993DL2002PLC115769

APPENDIX IV-A
Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Property
E-Auction Sale Notice for sale of Immovable Assets under the Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 read with proviso to Rule 6(6) and Rule 9(1) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002.

US men's soccer team close to reaching knockouts of Olympics for first time since 2000

AP ■ SAINT-ETIENNE (FRANCE)

The United States men's soccer team is closing in on qualification to the knockout phase of the Olympics for the first time since Sydney 2000. Argentina is back in control of its destiny after its first game was marred by violence and chaos - and a shock defeat to Morocco. The group stage of the men's soccer tournament at the Paris Games concludes on Tuesday and with only Spain and Japan guaranteed their place in the quarterfinals tensions are likely to be high as a host of nations battle for a place in the final eight. The U.S. is competing in its first Olympics since Beijing 2008 and the 4-1 win against New Zealand last week has put it in a strong position to advance. "I said, even before coming here, when people ask me what they can expect from us, I said one thing: I promise that this group is going to give everything on the field and where that's going to take us, I don't know. But I know that they're going to give everything," U.S. Coach Marko Mitrovic said.

The Americans face Guinea at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard in Saint-Etienne after the win against New Zealand saw Mitrovic's team bounce back from an opening 3-0 loss to France in Group A. The U.S. is in second place, level with New Zealand on three points, but ahead on goal difference. France, which is top on six points, plays New Zealand in its final match and is expected to secure the win or draw needed to be certain to advance. There is the potential that three teams could be tied on either six or three points, depending on results in the final round of games. That would mean goal difference or other tiebreaker criteria is required to determine which teams advance. **GROUP B:** Argentina plays Ukraine and is on top of Group B on goal difference, with all four teams tied on three points. Argentina beat Iraq 3-1 in its second game after its opening loss, which was marred by violent scenes when Moroccan fans rushed the field and forced a delay of around two hours. Ukraine's late 2-1 win against



Morocco means all four teams won and lost their opening two games and a tiebreaker could be required if there are two draws in the final round of fixtures. "We're not thinking about the next round. First we have to beat Ukraine," said Argentina coach Javier Mascherano. **GROUP C:** Spain (6 points) has qualified after back-to-back wins in Group C but could still have a big say over who joins it in the next round. Spain plays second-placed Egypt (4 points), which needs a draw to guarantee it advances. Third-placed Dominican Republic (1 point) plays already eliminated Uzbekistan (0 points). **GROUP D:** Any one of three teams could join Japan and advance from Group D. Japan (6 points) is into quarterfinals after back-to-back wins and plays last-placed Israel (1 point), which needs a victory to stand any hope of qualifying. Second-placed Paraguay (3 points) plays Mali (1 point). A win for Paraguay would guarantee its place in the quarterfinals.

Carlos says he has been dealing with groin muscle problem since Wimbledon

AP ■ PARIS

Carlos Alcaraz took a medical timeout for what he said is a lingering groin muscle issue in the second set of his 6-1, 7-6 (3) singles victory over Tallon Griekspoor at the Paris Olympics. Alcaraz is scheduled to play doubles for Spain with Rafael Nadal on Tuesday - and the opponents happen to be the Dutch pair of Griekspoor and Wesley Koolhof. "It's a pain that I've been dealing with. I know what I have to do ... To deal with this pain," said Alcaraz, a 21-year-old who won the French Open at Roland Garros, the same site being used for Olympics tennis, last month, and Wimbledon this month.



"I will try to recover as soon and as (best) as I can tonight," he said, "to be ready ... 100 percent tomorrow in my doubles." Alcaraz said he watched part of Nadal's 6-1, 6-4 loss to Novak Djokovic in singles earlier Monday, before preparing to face Griekspoor. "When Djokovic is playing at this level, it's really, really difficult to play against him. Really aggressive, no mistakes, moving very, very well," Alcaraz said. "I saw Rafa playing decent, let's say. Not his best tennis, for sure. But when Djokovic is like this, he's almost unbeatable." That last word is one often used to describe Alcaraz, who was the first teenager to reach No. 1 in the ATP rankings, was the youngest man to win major titles on hard, grass and clay courts, and defeated Djokovic in each of the past two Wimbledon finals. "One of the best players there is," Griekspoor said about Alcaraz. "Someone who likes to play on this court. He made it very difficult for me in the first set." That was clear. But in the second, Griekspoor began to serve better and hit more aggressively, and suddenly it was a much tighter match. After Alcaraz left the court with a trainer while trailing 5-4 in that set, he

returned and was a single point from being pushed to a third. Griekspoor couldn't convert that chance, which Alcaraz erased with a volley winner that he celebrated with a right uppercut and a yell of "Vamos!" Soon, in the tiebreaker, he was back in full control. "I didn't see any problems with him," Griekspoor said when asked how Alcaraz seemed in the second set. "I don't know what the problem was, but it's not like he fell down or twisted his ankle and couldn't walk anymore. He was still all over the place." Griekspoor said he would prepare for the rematch of sorts by going back and taking a look at the first-round doubles victory for Nadal and Alcaraz to help figure out a game plan. Giant barrels and steady swells for men's third day of surfing competition Teahupo'o (France), Jul 30 (AP) With the ceremonial blow of a conch shell and blare of a judge's horn, the third day of the Paris Olympics surfing competition in Tahiti began on Monday with the men's surfers going head-to-head, some reaching the end of the road in their quest for gold. Stunning waves and steady swells in the morning heats brought a fresh surge of energy to competitors and spectators, after Sunday's lackluster

conditions, while conditions rapidly tapered around midday due to a storm, postponing the women's afternoon competition. "Today is probably gonna be one of the most exciting days ... There's some serious waves out there," said Jory Smith from South Africa, who lost to Peru's Alonso Correa in the day's first heat. "I got pounded a couple of times." Coming out of a barrel and riding across a wall of nearly 10-foot cerulean blue water, French Polynesian surfer Kauli Vaast raised his arms to the air, an enormous smile on his face as he cruised to victory in his heat, knocking out Griffin Colapinto from the United States. "I just came out, after a great ride, great takeoff and great wave," Vaast said. "That one felt good, and I was just too happy and and enjoying the moment." Colapinto's loss was the first for the U.S. Team during the Paris Olympics surfing competition, after the entire team won their heats the first day of competition then directly qualifying for Monday's round. John John Florence from the U.S. was also eliminated from the competition. Brazil also suffered its first surfer being knocked out of the competition, after Filipe Toledo lost to Japan's Reo Inaba.

Gabriel Medina from Brazil made Olympic history on the waves, receiving the highest score in Olympic surfing history - a 9.9, just shy of a perfect 10. After the ride he launched himself into the air, raising his right arm and pointing towards the sky in a gravity-defying moment. At times water safety patrol staff on jet skis pulled surfers from the water after their rides, towing them to calmer waters before jettisoning them back out to the wave. "It's really dangerous out there. It's super shallow ... You can see the corals," Medina said after his win against Kanoa Igarashi from Japan. On land, emotions ran high. Expletives were commonly heard from losing surfers coming back to shore. Broken boards, snapped from the power of the waves, were laid on the ground and inspected by teams shaking their heads. Staff of opposing teams going head-to-head whistled in awe and clapped at their opponents' rides, marveling as surfers reappeared from being inside heavy barrels of water. Blustery winds swept in around midday, turning the surf conditions sour, marring the men's final heats and causing the women's competition being postponed. Monday was the last men's competition day before the quarterfinals, semifinals and gold medal heats take place on the fourth and final day of competition. Correa from Peru, Inaba from Japan, Joan Duru and Vaast from France, Joao Chianca and Medina from Brazil, Ethan Ewing and Jack Robinson from Australia all qualified to compete in the final day of the men's competition. The rest of the competition functions as a single-elimination, head-to-head bracket. Each heat will feature two surfers, with the winner advancing to the final stage of competition: the quarterfinals, semifinals and final gold medal heat. The next competition day will be determined after officials assess wave conditions.

Ex-NBA player Chase wins beach volleyball debut in Paris

AP ■ PARIS

Chase Budinger has never forgotten how badly he played in his first NBA game. He'll have only good memories from his Olympic debut. The former Arizona and professional basketball player and his partner, Miles Evans, beat host France in straight sets on Monday to coast through their opening match of the Paris beach volleyball tournament. "I really tried to use my basketball experience of playing in front of big crowds to be composed the whole time," Budinger said after a 21-14, 21-11 victory. "But it definitely was not like that inside." Budinger spent seven years in the NBA, mostly as a bench player for the Rockets and Timberwolves, before turning to beach volleyball to fulfill an Olympic dream. His first game, he still remembers, "I played awful."



"On the bus ride over here, I was telling Miles about my first basketball game, of how nervous I was and how the nerves really got to me," Budinger said. "I was 0-for-2 (from 3-point range), had two turnovers and one of my shots I had was an airball. So the nerves affected my game play." At the Eiffel Tower Stadium on Monday the jitters didn't get to him - even against a French team that had won the last three matchups on the

international tour. "It took me six years. It took me a long time to finally achieve this goal and I am here competing at the Olympics," Budinger said. "And there is no better feeling." Budinger and Evans scored the first three points and never trailed in the first set. In the second, France did eke out a 3-1 lead before the Americans won the next three points and finished the match in just 32 minutes.

"It's one of the best starts we could imagine," Evans said. "I had all these bad scenarios in my head going into this match. I am super thankful we were able to overcome that." Unlike the NBA debut against the Portland Trail Blazers back in 2009, Budinger said, "I felt like out here, I was able to get a couple of points early. That helped relieve some of that stress, those nerves and allowed me to play my game more without it affecting me as much." In other notable beach action on Monday, Americans Kristen Nuss and Taryn Kloth beat Tokyo silver medalist Taliqna Clancy of Australia and her new partner, Marifate Artacho del Solar, in straight sets to improve to 2-0 in Paris. France swept Rio gold medalist Laura Ludwig of Germany and her new partner, Louisa Lippmann. Qatar, the bronze medalist in Tokyo on the men's side, beat top-ranked Sweden 2-1 to improve to 2-0 in pool play.

Chennaiyin FC announces 22-member squad for Durand Cup

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC on Tuesday announced a 22-member squad for the 133rd edition of the Durand Cup being played from July 27 to August 31. Chennaiyin FC are placed in Group D along with ISL side Jamshedpur FC, Indian Army and Assam Rifles with all six games of the stage to be played at the JRD Tata Sports Complex in Jamshedpur. The Marina Machans will face Indian Army in their opening game on Wednesday as the group winners and possibly the second-placed team will advance to the knockout. "The squad features a blend of senior team members and promising reserves, including notable players such as Vincy Barretto, Bikash Yumnam, Irfan Yadwad, Samik Mitra,



Alexander Romario Jesuraj, and Sachu Siby," the club said in a statement. "This mix of experience and youth is reflected in the roster, which comprises three goalkeepers, eight defenders, nine midfielders, and two forwards, ensuring a well-

balanced team across all positions." Chennaiyin FC, who reached the quarterfinal stage in the 2022 and 2023 iterations of the Durand Cup, will take on Jamshedpur FC on August 4 followed by their last group stage game against Assam

Rifles on August 11. "We are going there to win games. We are not going there to take part. As a team, we are going to be together, on the field, off the field. There's going to be unity. We are going to go on the field and fight and give our 100 per cent," said CFC assistant coach Noel Wilson, who joined the club ahead of this season. **CHENNAIYIN FC SQUAD:** **Goalkeepers:** Mohanraj K, Samik Mitra, Malhar Umesh Mohol **Defenders:** Niketh N, Bikash Yumnam, Alexander Romario Jesuraj, Rojjak Ali SK, YV Praful Kumar, Aby S, Shanu Stellus, Sachu Siby **Midfielders:** Ngangom Raman Singh, Ganeshpandi S, Solaimalai R, Jayasurya, Vivek S, Karthik T, Vincy Barretto, Komal Thatal, Lalpekhlu

AP ■ NANTERRE (FRANCE)

17-year-old McIntosh wins gold in 400-metre IM

Canadian phenom Summer McIntosh claimed the first gold medal of her just-burgeoning career Monday night with a dominating victory in the 400-meter individual medley at the Paris Olympics. The 17-year-old McIntosh collected her first medal of any color on the opening night of swimming, taking a silver in the 400 freestyle behind Arianne Titmus - and ahead of Katie Ledecky. Now, McIntosh has the most prized color of all. "I try to take every event very individually and just do my work, but starting off for me - getting on the podium - is definitely a great way to start," McIntosh said. "You try to continue to get better and better." She pushed the pace hard through the first half of the grueling race - the butterfly and backstroke legs - to leave everyone in her wake except American Katie Grimes. McIntosh was under her own world-record pace, but couldn't keep it going. She touched in 4 minutes, 27.71 seconds, more than three seconds off the mark of

4:24.38 she set at the Canadian trials in May. But it was more than enough to blow away the field in the Olympic final. McIntosh seemed to take it all in stride. Maybe it's because she competed at the Tokyo Olympics at age 14, so she sort of feels like a veteran now. "Every single time I get to race on the world stage, I learn more and more about handling mentally and physically and emotionally and trying not to get too high or too low," McIntosh said. She's got a grueling schedule in Paris which includes two more individual races - the 200 butterfly and 200 IM. There are no plans to celebrate just yet. "I mean, obviously I'm super happy with this gold," McIntosh said. "But now I'm all about the 200 fly on day five." Grimes, who is also swimming the open water event in Paris, held on to claim the silver in 4:33.40. The Americans also grabbed the bronze



when Emma Weyant touched in 4:34.93. **ANOTHER TEEN RULES:** David Popovici made the teenagers 2-for-2 on the night when he pulled off a thrilling victory in the men's 200 freestyle. The 19-year-old Romanian was among three swimmers who swapped the lead back and forth on the final lap. First, it was American Luke Hobson edging in front. Then Britain's Matthew Richards, out in Lane 1, pushed to the lead. Finally, it was Popovici mustering everything he had to get to the wall in 1:44.72 -- a mere two-hundredths ahead of Richards, with Hobson just 0.07 back to earn the bronze. Britain's Duncan Scott, the silver medalist in Tokyo three years ago, finished in 1:44.87 to miss out on the podium this time. The top four were separated by a mere 0.15 seconds. **GOLD FOR ITALY, AGAIN:** Thomas Ceccon gave Italy its second gold in as many nights at La Defense Arena, rallying to win the

men's 100 backstroke. China's Xu Jiayu led at the turn, just ahead of American Ryan Murphy - the 2016 gold medalist. Ceccon was third, but he switched to another gear on the return lap. The Italian, who has held the world record since the 2022 world championships in Budapest, now has a gold medal to go with it after finishing in 52.00. Xu claimed the silver (52.32), while the 29-year-old Murphy settled for the bronze for the second Olympics in a row at 52.39. Ceccon followed Nicolò Martinenghi, who grabbed Italy's first gold at the pool with a victory in the 100 breaststroke Sunday night. **LOOKING AHEAD:** In the only semifinals of the night, Australia's Kaylee McKeown and Regan Smith of the U.S. Set up a much-anticipated duel in the women's 100 backstroke. They each won their heats, with McKeown posting the fastest time (57.97) ad McKeown right on her heels (57.99). McKeown is the reigning Olympic champion and former world-record holder - a mark that Smith snatched away with time of 57.