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 NIFTY SCALES NEW
 LIFETIME HIGH

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Scrapping NEET-UG not rational: Centre to SC



RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

NEET-PG 2024 exam to be held on August 11

New Delhi: The NEET-PG 2024 entrance examination will be held on August 11 in two shifts, the National Board of Examinations in Medical Sciences announced on Friday. The examination was earlier scheduled to be held on June 23. "...It will now be held on August 11 in two shifts. The cut-off date for the purpose of eligibility to appear in the NEET-PG 2024 shall continue to be August 15, 2024," the Board said. **PNS**

Union Education Ministry have been at the centre of media debates and protests by students and political parties over alleged large-scale malpractices ranging from question paper leak to impersonation in the test held on May 5. In its affidavit, the Ministry said invalidating the exam would "seriously jeopardise" the efforts of lakhs of honest candidates who appeared in the exam. In the absence of proof of any large-scale breach of confidentiality in the examination, it argued that it would not be rational to take the step. This is the first time that the Centre is placing its stand on holding a retest of NEET-UG for all 24 lakh candidates on record. The Ministry has only acknowledged that there were "instances of irregularities, cheating, impersonation, malpractices" during the conduct of NEET-UG. There is no mention of a paper leak. It goes on to state further that "in the absence of any proof of any large-scale breach of confidentiality in a pan-India examination it would not be rational to scrap the entire examination".

The Union Education Ministry and the NTA filed separate affidavits opposing the pleas which have sought scrapping of the exam plagued by controversy, a re-test and court-monitored probe into entire gamut of issues involved. The top court is scheduled to hear on July 8 a batch of pleas, including those alleging irregularities in the examination held on May 5 and seeking a direction that it be held afresh. The National Testing Agency (NTA), which conducts the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test-Undergraduate (NEET-UG) for admissions to MBBS, BDS, AYUSH and other related courses, and the

Rishi Sunak Exits 10 Downing Street

PTI ■ LONDON

Keir Starmer on Friday promised a phase of "national renewal" as Britain's Prime Minister-elect after he led the Labour Party to a landslide victory in a landmark UK general election with a gain of over 200 seats, as outgoing leader Rishi Sunak conceded defeat with his Conservative Party suffering its worst election defeat in history. Starmer, 61, now stands poised to take charge at 10 Downing Street after his audience with King Charles III at Buckingham Palace, following Sunak's meeting with the British monarch. As Labour crossed the halfway mark of 650 constituencies in the early hours of Friday to clinch the minimum 326 required for a majority in Parliament, Starmer stepped up to make his victory speech in London: "Change begins now. And it feels good, I have to be honest. "A mandate like this comes with a great responsibility. Our task is nothing less than renewing the ideas that hold this country together. National renewal. Whoever you are, wherever you start in life, if you work hard, if you play by the rules, this country should give you a fair chance to get on. It should always respect your contribution and we have to restore that." Meanwhile, the country's first British Indian Prime Minister



Britain's Labour Party leader Keir Starmer reacts on stage as he is elected for the Holborn and St Pancras constituency, in London (l). Britain's outgoing Conservative Party Prime Minister Rishi Sunak speaking outside 10 Downing Street before going to see King Charles III to tender his resignation in London, on Friday **PTI**

Modi congratulates Starmer

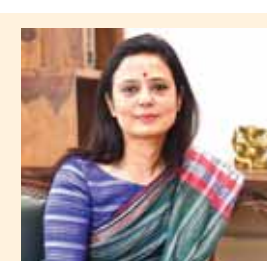
PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday congratulated Labour Party leader Keir Starmer on his party's landslide win in the UK general elections and said he looked forward to their positive and constructive collaboration to further strengthen the India-UK comprehensive strategic partnership. Modi also praised outgoing British Prime Minister and

Conservative Party leader Rishi Sunak for his admirable leadership of the United Kingdom and his active contribution to deepen the ties between India and the UK during his term in office. "Best wishes to you and your family for the future," he said. Congratulating him, Modi said, "Heartiest congratulations and best wishes to Keir Starmer on the remarkable victory in the UK general elections..."

comfortably held on to his own Richmond and Northallerton seat in northern England with 23,059 votes but failed to turn

things around for his party at a national level after 14 years in Government.



Fresh trouble for Mahua over remarks against NCW chairperson

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The National Commission for Women (NCW) has taken suo moto cognisance of the alleged derogatory remark made by TMC MP Mahua Moitra against its chairperson Rekha Sharma and sought an FIR against her. This came a day after the TMC, commenting on a video posted on X showing the arrival at the site of a stampede that recently took place in Uttar Pradesh's Hathras, wrote, "She is too busy holding up her boss's pajamas". Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Government's Special Investigation Team probing the Hathras stampede has recorded statements of 90 people so far, SIT chief Anupam Kulshrestha said on Friday. Kulshrestha, also the Additional Director General of Police (Agra Zone), is leading the three-member SIT team.

J&K Assembly elections likely after Amarnath Yatra



A sadhu poses while waiting to get registered for Amarnath Yatra at Ram Mandir base camp, in Jammu, on Friday **PTI**

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/JAMMU

The Assembly polls in Jammu and Kashmir are likely to be announced after the Amarnath Yatra, which will conclude on August 19. Union Home Minister Amit Shah held a late night meeting with Jammu and Kashmir unit party leaders and directed them to be ready for the upcoming Assembly elections. The two-hour long meeting was attended by BJP chief and Union Minister JP Nadda, MPs Ravinder Raina, Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore Sharma — and other top leaders. Jammu and Kashmir is likely to see its first Assembly election in September this year, according to the timeline fixed by the Supreme

Court after the erstwhile State's special status was scrapped in 2019. The last Assembly election in the erstwhile State was held in 2014. At the meeting, top leadership has made it clear that the party will not enter into a pre-poll alliance with any party in the State. It was also conveyed that the party would remain open to seat adjustments and "electoral understandings" with "like-minded parties. Besides, it was also conveyed that the party will not project any face for the Chief Ministerial candidate in the run-up to the Assembly polls and there will not be any changes in leadership or organisational rejig in the State BJP unit, currently headed by Ravinder Raina. In the coming days, key

Union Ministers and BJP national leaders are expected to visit the State. The party will also launch a mass contact programme with the people in the State. The Legislative Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir was dissolved in November 2018 ahead of the revocation of the State's Special Status in August 2019. The BJP-led Government scrapped Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir in August 2019 and bifurcated the State into two Union Territories. There have been demands from political parties for early Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir and restoration of Statehood. Moreover, during a recent visit to Kashmir, the Prime Minister stated that preparations for elections had begun and that J&K would soon have its own Government. The revision of electoral rolls will start in J&K on July 25 and culminate on August 20, according to the EC. "After the exercise is over, the EC may announce holding of assembly polls in the UT any time," a poll official said. The five LS seats in J&K — the first major electoral exercise post Article 370 abrogation — recorded voter turnout of 58.58 per cent, the highest in the last 35 years.

Jailed MPs Amritpal, Rashid on parole take oath

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jailed radical Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh and Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdul Rashid, who were granted parole to take oath as members of the Lok Sabha, were sworn in as MPs on Friday, amid heavy deployment of security personnel in and around the Parliament complex. While Rashid, popularly known as Engineer Rashid, is in Delhi's Tihar jail in a terror-funding case registered under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, Singh is lodged in a prison in Assam's Dibrugarh district for offences under the National Security Act. They were brought to the Parliament complex by



Sikh preacher Amritpal Singh and Kashmiri leader Sheikh Abdul Rashid

security personnel Friday morning. The MPs-elect took oath in the chamber of the Lok Sabha Speaker after completing formalities, a source said. Singh, 31, and Rashid, 56, won the recent Lok Sabha elections from Khadoor Sahib in Punjab and Baramulla in Jammu and Kashmir,

respectively, as Independents while being incarcerated. They could not take oath as members of the 18th Lok Sabha on June 24 and 25 along with the other winning candidates. For taking oath, Rashid was granted a two-hour custody parole, excluding the travel time from Tihar to Parliament,

and Singh a four-day custody parole, beginning July 5, in view of the travel from Assam to Delhi and back. Their parole orders stated that during their period of temporary release, they can neither speak to or address the media on any issue or make any statements. Their family members also cannot make a statement to the media. While Singh, a Khalistani sympathiser who heads the 'Waris Punjab De' outfit, has been allowed to meet his family in Delhi, Rashid's family had permission only to attend his oath taking. The parole for Rashid, who has been in jail since 2019 after his arrest in 2017, was granted by a court in Delhi and that of Singh by the district magistrate of

Amritsar from where he was arrested in April 2023 for barging into a police station in February and clashing with police personnel in a bid to free one of his aides from custody. Both Singh and Rashid are to be accompanied by security personnel at all times during their parole periods, the orders stated. The Delhi Police and Punjab Police were directed to coordinate with the Secretary General of the Lok Sabha for procedures inside the Parliament complex. The name of Rashid, a former MLA, cropped up during the investigation of Kashmiri businessman Zahoor Watali, whom the NIA had arrested for allegedly funding terrorist groups and separatists in the Kashmir valley.

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ THRISSUR (KERALA)

An outbreak of African Swine fever (ASF), a highly contagious and deadly disease affecting both farm-raised and wild boars, has been reported at a private farm in a village in Kerala's Thrissur district. In response, the State Government has ordered culling of 310 pigs at the farm in Madakkathara panchayat to prevent the spread of the disease. This incident follows a recent Nipah outbreak in Maruthonkara, Kozhikode

Pig culling ordered to contain African Swine fever in Thrissur

district, where ASF was confirmed in wild boars last year. ASF was first identified in India in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam in 2020. ASF spreads rapidly through direct contact with bodily fluids from infected pigs and has no vaccines or treatment available. "The disease was confirmed in the pigs owned by Kuttalappuzha Babu of



Veliyanthara in the 14th ward. The District Collector has directed the district animal husbandry officer to cull the pigs and bury them," according to an official from the State Government. A team consisting of doctors, livestock inspectors and attendants will conduct the culling process, and further primary disinfection measures will also be taken, it said. The area within a

one-kilometre radius of the affected farm has been declared a disease-affected area, and the area within the 10-kilometre radius has been declared a disease surveillance area. "The transportation of pork from the affected areas, and the movement of pigs, pork, and feed from the affected areas to other parts of the district, as well as the movement of these items from other areas into the affected area, have been prohibited until further orders," the release said.

Lord Krishna's favourite king of fruits to add flavour to Rath Yatra

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As the much-revered grand Rath Yatra for Lord Jagannath commences in Puri in Odisha on Monday, the International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) temple at Dwarka in the national Capital will mark the occasion with a grand offering of approximately 5,100 kilograms of various mango varieties. The celebrations will begin a day ahead and continue into the following day, aligning with the Yatra in Puri. Devotees will offer a range of mangoes, including Safeda,

Dussehri, Langra, Malda, Chausa, Ramkela, Totapari, Bombay Green, and Mallika, as part of the rituals dedicated to Lord Jagannath, his brother Balabhadra, and their sister Subhadra as part of the rituals. Mangoes, revered as the "king of fruits," hold significant cultural and religious value, particularly in Krishna Lila, symbolising the sweetness of devotion in the divine pastimes of Lord Krishna. The celebration will attract nearly 20,000 people from across the city. Preparations are in full swing at the temple. The temple altar will be adorned with an impressive



display of mangoes, allowing devotees to participate in the "mango service" by offering their fruits at the Vighraha Seva Department on the eve of the yatra. The festivities will also include a mango-eating competition. Golia, Sindoori, Gulabkhas, Neelam, Kesari, Gola, Lalbagh, Lambori, Ratul, and Alphonso like varieties will also be offered to the God. Sri Gaur Prabhu, vice-president of the temple, explained, "Mango, the king of fruits, is loved by both children and adults during the summer season. This is why we organise the mango

festival every year on the day of Jagannath Yatra. The offering of thousands of mangoes to the deities is beautiful to behold." Attendees can capture memories at designated selfie points and participate in community service. The significance of mangoes in Krishna Lila is profound. During the rasa dance, the gopis would offer mangoes to Krishna, symbolising the sweetness of their relationship. At another time, Krishna accepted mango pits from a poor Brahmana, valuing sincere devotion over material offerings. Mangoes also played a role in Krishna's

childhood at Vrindavan, where he and his mischievous friends would often steal the delicious fruits from orchards. Pritansu Priyadarshini Biswal from Bhubaneswar in Odisha was in praise for the ISKON temple's concept of offering mangoes to the Lord Jagannath. "This celebration at the ISKON temple in the country's capital in Dwarka not only honours the divine but also brings together the community in a shared experience of devotion, cultural heritage, and the simple joy of enjoying mangoes," she said.

20 Years from Mines to Schools: Mica Mines are 'Child Labour Free' finally

20 years later, ALL children in Mica regions of Jharkhand head to school, not mines

PNS : RANCHI



(Children's Council) Child leaders and members, Community members, Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRI) members, MLAs, representatives from Education, Women and Child Development, and Labour departments also attended the event.

The occasion was an emotionally charged one reflecting the celebration of a generational change highlighting the parents, who were once

toiling in these mines as children, coming together to promise to never allow their children to ever work in mica mines (or elsewhere) and instead go to school.

Announcing 'Child Labour Free Mica', NCPDR chairman Priyank Kanoongo said, "Today as I declare that all children are free from exploitation in mica mines and are headed to schools, and not mines, I feel both overwhelmed and proud.

What the joint efforts and will of Child Labour Free Mica program, village panchayats, state government and district administration has achieved in these villages is a testament of how consistent efforts and single-minded aim can ensure safety and justice for children. This is the beginning of the end of child labour in mica mines and that has to be maintained now."

In 2004, a research done

by Bachpan Bachao Andolan had found that over 5000 children were involved in mica mining and collection. By 2019, this number had increased to more than 20,000. It was the collaborative effort between children, communities, civil society organizations and government that led to the creation of 'Child Labour Free Mica.' Every single child who was out of school was identified, withdrawn from labour, enrolled and retained in schools.

Reflecting on the long, arduous journey towards making mica mines child labour free, Bhuwan Ribhu, who started the research, identifying the child labourers in 2004, said, "The identification of 22,000 children in mica mining and collection and their subsequent withdrawal from work and enrolment in schools is a landmark achievement of the government and the civil society organisations involved in the work of child labour free mica. This is an example to be replicated across the



world in the unorganised sector for the complete elimination of child labour in global supply chains."

When it all began in 2004, these regions were infested with Naxalite violence which made it daunting for even government agencies to make inroads. With the strategic, collaborative and consistent work by the 'Child Labour Free Mica' program, all the 684 mica-dependent villages are now free from

child labour, while 20,584 children have been withdrawn from mica mining and 30,364 children have enrolled in schools so far. Through constant vigilance and monitoring, the program protects 137,997 children daily and has enrolled 30,364 children in schools. Besides, 275,516 people benefitted from welfare programs through the collaborative approach in the region.

Reminiscing her life's own

triumphs and tribulations, Bindiya Kumari from Nauwadih village in Jharkhand shared her journey from being a child labourer in mica mines to becoming the secretary of her village Bal Panchayat. She said, "While working in the mica mines, our fingers often bled and we were in constant pain. But when Bal Mitra Gram program was initiated in our village, I along with my friends could once again go to school. I am in Class 10 now and once I grow up, I aspire to be a government officer who can stop such child exploitation." As the secretary of the Bal Panchayat, Bindiya along with others have so far been able to enrol 45 children from her village in schools.

While all children are enrolled in schools now, the 'Child Labour Free Mica' program will continue to keep a close eye on these villages till 2025 to ensure that no child, under any circumstances, is roped in labour in the supply chain of mica mining in the region.

Jal Jeevan Mission meeting : Govt buildings to be connected with piped water scheme

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR



Objectection Certificates (NOC) for project clearance, operational drinking water testing laboratories, and the ongoing construction of plastic waste management plants.

The Secretary emphasized the necessity of completing all small and large projects under the Jal Jeevan Mission within the stipulated timelines. He underscored the importance of ensuring that tap water reaches all villages and households included in the mission.

There was a strong emphasis on the need for better operation and maintenance

of water supply schemes. The Secretary directed officials to connect all approved pipe water schemes to essential community facilities such as health sub-centres, government schools, Anganwadi centres, Panchayat buildings, and community toilets.

Officials were instructed to ensure that residents do not face problems related to contaminated drinking water, especially during the rainy season. The Secretary called for the activation of Jal Sahiya for laboratory testing of drinking water and the

replacement of inactive Jal Sahiya with new appointments.

The Secretary highlighted the need to address NOC-related issues from various departments swiftly. He suggested that such matters should be presented in the District Coordination Committee meetings for prompt resolution at the district level.

Proper publicity of the schemes was stressed, with the Secretary emphasizing the importance of informing the public about the contact points for addressing any issues. All Junior Engineers (JEs) were instructed to be present at block headquarters on Block Diwas to facilitate this communication.

Instructions were issued to complete the under-construction plastic waste management plants in Jamshepur and Adityapur within the specified timeframe, aiming to enhance waste management infrastructure in the region.

During the review of the Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural), the Secretary stressed that the success of

this campaign hinges on changing public behavior. He pointed out the critical need for awareness among the general public about the adverse effects of open defecation and the proper disposal of plastic and other waste to prevent environmental damage. The meeting saw the participation of several high-ranking officials, including the Chief Engineer, Superintending Engineer, Executive Engineer, and other departmental officers. Their presence highlighted the collaborative effort needed to achieve the objectives of both the Jal Jeevan Mission and Swachh Bharat Mission (Rural). At the meeting's conclusion, Secretary Rajesh Sharma expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the district officials and emphasized the need for continued diligence and teamwork to meet the mission goals. District Magistrate cum Deputy Commissioner Ananya Mittal and Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar also reiterated their commitment to the successful implementation of these critical schemes.

PGCIL, CIPET ink MoU for skill development of youth

PNS : RANCHI



A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between CIPET (Central Institute of Petrochemicals Engineering and Technology), Ranchi and Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, Ranchi here on Thursday for providing free skill development training to 80 project affected candidates.

After this MoU, CIPET, Ranchi will provide residential skill development training including placement to the youth of Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, Ranchi project area in the field of plastic engineering and the entire program will be sponsored by Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, Ranchi.

The MoU was signed by S. Samant, Senior General

Manager, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, Ranchi and Praveen B. Bachhav, Joint Director and Head, CIPET Ranchi. Rajesh Kumar Saini, Senior Deputy General Manager, Power Grid Corporation of India Limited, Ranchi and Md. Masoom Haider, Assistant Technical Officer from CIPET Ranchi were present on the occasion.

Under this MoU, 80 beneficiaries of Jharkhand will be provided employment along

with training in plastics processing. The training is completely free and residential. The Director and Head of CIPET Ranchi, while throwing light on the said training program, gave information about the skill development training done earlier and resolved to achieve the current target. S. Samant, Senior General Manager congratulated CIPET Ranchi for successfully achieving the target of this new MOA.

ESL Steel Ltd holds Prerna Samman Samaroh

R SHARMA : BOKARO



teachers were felicitated at the event. Among the honorees were four girls, six boys, four students from the CBSE Board, six from the Jharkhand Academic Council Board, and four teachers from Prerna Centres. The event, held at Vedanta Skill School, attracted a distinguished crowd of 50, including Bokaro's District Education Officer as the chief guest, along with students, parents, teachers, and local dignitaries.

Jagarnath Lohra, Chief Guest & District Education

Officer, Bokaro, Anand Dubey, Chief Financial Officer, ESL Steel Limited; and Ashish Ranjan, Head, CSR, ER & PR, ESL Steel Limited, local dignitaries and stakeholders such as Raftiq Ansari from Panchayat Samiti, Chandaha, and Nimai Sharma from Modidih were present. They shared in the joy of the students, their teachers, and guardians, motivating them to further excel in their chosen fields.

Notably, ESL Steel Limited's CSR efforts, particularly through Project Prerna, have significantly motivated students in 27 villages of Chas and Chandankiyari blocks in Bokaro District. The project has demonstrated outstanding success, with the top CBSE scorer achieving 94.4% and the top JAC scorer securing 91%.

Registration of contract workers under PM-JAY begins at BSL

PNS : BOKARO



Bokaro Steel Plant (BSL) has initiated the registration of contract workers under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY) from today, July 5th. This initiative is being organized in collaboration with the State Government's Civil Surgeon Office and Medi Assist TPA Private Limited. The coordination of this event is being managed by Pranjali, General Manager (Human Resources - Contract Workers Cell), along with her team members.

The registration campaign was inaugurated on July 5th under the initiative and guidance of Rakesh Kumar, Chief General Manager of the C O & C C Department. Over 150 contract workers participated in the registration process on the first day. Following this, camps will be organized in various departments on July 6th in the Hot Strip Mill Department, on July 8th in the SMS (New) Department, and on July 9th in the Blast Furnace Department.

DAV Sector 4 Celebrates 'Yellow Day' with Joy and Enthusiasm

PNS : BOKARO



In a vibrant display of happiness, enthusiasm, and energy, the students of DAV Sector 4 celebrated 'Yellow Day' with great zeal. Approximately 370 children from LKG to Class 2 adorned themselves in yellow attire and participated in various activities, becoming the center of attraction for all. Their unique dance moves to melodious tunes captivated everyone present.

Interestingly, the day was celebrated in a unique manner, as the students were instructed to come to school without their bags, free from the usual constraints of books and copies. This created an atmosphere of freedom and joy, allowing the children to engage in the festivities without any psychological pressure. It was perhaps the first time in DAV's history that such a day was observed, where children eagerly prepared for school with the

support and enthusiasm of their parents.

The visionary and determined Principal, Sarbendu Shekhar Kar, joined the young children in several programs and addressed the attendees, saying, "The color yellow promotes mental energy and activity, making it an excellent medium for the transmission of knowledge and positive emotions. Such celebrations and environments help in preserving the delicate sentiments of children."

The Principal emphasized that the smiles on each child's face were the greatest testament to the success of the day's event. The celebration of Yellow Day not only highlighted the importance of joy and creativity in education but also demonstrated how a simple change in routine can create a lasting impact on the young minds.

DC calls for improved performance in Aspirational District targets

PNS : BOKARO



Deputy Commissioner Vijaya Jadhav chaired a review meeting at the Collectorate office to assess the progress of various schemes under the Aspirational District Program. The meeting was attended by key officials, including Deputy Development Commissioner Girija Shankar Prasad, District Planning Officer Raj Kumar Sharma, District Social Welfare Officer Purnima Kumari, Hospital Superintendent Dr. Arvind Kumar, District Education Superintendent Atul Kumar

Education, Agriculture and Water Resources, Financial Inclusion and Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. She expressed dissatisfaction with the unsatisfactory results in the health and nutrition sector, particularly in the B.S. City, Jaridih, Nawadih, Bermo, and Kasmar blocks. She directed the concerned officials to seek explanations from the Civil Surgeon and District Social Welfare Officer regarding the inadequate performance in ANC checkups, nutrition distribution, and malnutrition eradication.

During the meeting, Jadhav reviewed the progress across the five key dimensions set by NITI Aayog: Health and Nutrition,

The Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) organised the 11th edition of the Manufacturing Conclave East, with the theme "Future Ready to Future Proof Manufacturing."

The event brought together eminent industry leaders to discuss emerging technologies and their potential to future-proof the manufacturing sector, focusing on competitiveness, inclusiveness, and sustainability.

Kamal Bali, President and Managing Director of Volvo Group India Pvt Ltd, highlighted India's impressive GDP growth rate of 8.2% amidst global geopolitical challenges. He emphasized the need for adaptability, flexibility, and innovation to sustain this growth and shared insights on eight mega trends that could boost

the manufacturing sector from \$600 billion in 2024 to \$6 trillion by 2047. He reinforced that sustainability is imperative for future success.

Suvendra Behera, Chairman of CII Eastern Region and Vice Chairman & Managing Director of RSB Transmissions (I) Ltd, addressed the critical issue of brain drain and stressed the importance of establishing skill development centers in India to retain talent. He noted the manufacturing sector's current 16-17% contribution to India's GDP, with a goal to increase it to at least 25% by 2025.

Ranjot Singh, Chairman of CII Jharkhand State Council and Managing Director of Emdet Jamshepur Private Limited, inaugurated the session, expressing confidence that India would become the leading manufacturing hub by 2030. He emphasized the significance of the Eastern Region in India's industrial growth and called for a collaborative environment to address key economic issues.

Cummins Pvt Ltd, highlighted the government's supportive schemes and initiatives, asserting that the "Make in India" campaign presents vast opportunities for investment and growth in manufacturing.

Ujjal Chakraborti, Immediate Past Chairman of CII Jharkhand State Council and Managing Director of Jamshepur Continuous Annealing and Processing Company Pvt Ltd, spoke about Jharkhand's strategic advantage due to its abundant mineral resources and significant contributions to India's manufacturing sector, particularly in steel and automotive industries.

Ravindra Kulkarni, Vice Chairman of CII Jamshepur Zonal Council and Head of Jamshepur Plant at Tata Motors Ltd, underscored India's commitment to sustainability, aiming for carbon

neutrality by 2070. He stressed the pivotal role of MSMEs and the importance of digital transformation, data analytics, and robotics in driving progress.

Prithish Chowdhary, Co-Chairman of CII ER Manufacturing Sub Committee and Dy Managing Director of Titagarh Rail System Ltd, highlighted India's resurgence as a global economic power.

The conclave featured insights from notable speakers including Sanjay Sahberwal, Managing Director of Metalwork Industries Ltd; Saurabh Verma, Managing Director & Partner at BCG; Ravish Sharma, COO of ESL Steel Ltd; M Sankaranarayanan, Executive Director of Group Operations at RSB Transmissions (I) Ltd; and several others from leading industry organizations.

Dr BR Sarangi sworn in as Chief Justice of Jharkhand High Court

PNS : RANCHI

Dr. B.R. Sarangi, the senior most judge of the Orissa High Court, was sworn in as the Chief Justice of the Jharkhand High Court on Friday. The oath ceremony was conducted by Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan at the Raj Bhawan. The event took place at the Birsa Mandap in Raj Bhawan, where the Governor administered the oath to Justice Dr. Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi.

After the oath, the Governor extended warm congratulations and best wishes to the new Chief Justice. Before the ceremony, Vandana Dadel, Principal Secretary of the Cabinet Secretariat and Monitoring Department (Coordination), read out the official appointment warrant of Justice Sarangi. Dr. Nitin Kulkarni, Principal Secretary to the



Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan administered the oath of office and secrecy to Justice Dr. Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi as Chief Justice of Jharkhand High Court in a ceremony at Birsa Mandap in Raj Bhawan on Friday. PNS

Governor, then invited the Chief Justice for the oath-taking.

The ceremony was attended by several notable figures, including Chief Minister Hemant Soren,

Speaker of the Legislative Assembly Rabintra Nath Mahato, judges of the Jharkhand High Court, senior officers from the Indian Administrative and Police Services, and senior advo-

ates of the Jharkhand High Court.

The Central government had notified Justice Sarangi's appointment on July 4, following a proposal by the Supreme Court

Collegium nearly six months ago. Justice Sarangi, who is set to retire on July 20, has been the senior most judge of the Orissa High Court and will now occupy the position of Chief Justice, which has been vacant since December 28, 2023. Chief Minister Hemant Soren said on the occasion, "Finally, we have a new Chief Justice in the Jharkhand High Court. According to Indian law, an acting Chief Justice can only be appointed under exceptional circumstances and only for a maximum of one month."

Soren said, "From what I understand, the newly appointed Chief Justice also has a very short tenure. Although the Supreme Court appointed him 7-8 months ago, it took the Central Government this long to send him here. I believe he could have been sent earlier..."



Governor C.P. Radhakrishnan along with newly appointed Chief Justice of Jharkhand High Court Justice Bidyut Ranjan Sarangi, Chief Minister Hemant Soren and JMM MLA Kalpana Soren during Swearing-in ceremony at Birsa Mandap in Raj Bhawan on Friday. PNS

MONSOON TO BE ACTIVE IN STATE FROM JULY 10: MET CENTRE

PNS : RANCHI

Good rainfall is being predicted for many parts of the State including the Capital city in the next few days. Some parts of Jharkhand are also likely to witness moderate showers over the weekend.

According to the information received from the Meteorological Centre, Ranchi widespread rainfall across Jharkhand of light to moderate category is predicted for July 6. Fairly widespread rainfall is expected for July 7 whereas scattered showers are on the cards for July 8 and July 9.

"There will be a slight decrease in rainfall over Jharkhand in the next few days. From July 10 onwards, monsoon will once again



pick up over the State. Monsoon cannot always be strong and it is absolutely normal for it to be weak sometimes," said Director MET Centre, Ranchi Abhishek Anand.

As per the bulletin released by the MET Centre, Ranchi on July 5, from June 1, 2024 to July 5, 2024, Jharkhand has recorded a deficit of 50% in rainfall. The State has received a total of 118.5 mm of rainfall while the normal rainfall

during this period should be 236.1 mm.

Ranchi has received a total of 128.7 mm of rainfall so far whereas Dhanbad has received 173.9 mm, Gumla 173.8 mm and Bokaro 113.7 mm of rainfall. The official also stated that monsoon is likely to be strong in the months of July, August and September and hopefully the deficit will also be covered.

The maximum temperature in the State capital was observed at 29.2 degree Celsius which is 1 degree below normal. From July 6 to July 9, the maximum temperature in Ranchi and its surrounding areas will be around 30 degree Celsius while the minimum is expected to be at 23- 24 degree Celsius.

Two hardcore extremists surrendered

PNS : RANCHI

Impressed by the surrender policy of the Government, two Zonal Commanders of CPI (Maoist) surrendered on Saturday in the office of the Superintendent of Police. The Government has announced a reward of Rs. 10 lakh each on these two Maoists.

The names of the zonal commanders of CPI (Maoist) who surrendered are Neeraj Singh Kharwar alias Sanjay Kharwar and Salman alias Lokesh alias Rajkumar Ganjuhu.

When these two Naxalites surrendered under the surrender policy, DIG of Palamu Range YS Ramesh, DC of the district Garima Singh and SP Anjani Anjan welcomed them by giving them a bouquet of flowers and a shawl. The cheque for the reward amount to be given to them was also given on the spot.

On the whole matter, Ramesh said that instead of being killed by the police, it is better that people who have strayed from the mainstream and have taken the path of Naxalism adopt the surrender policy and live their lives by joining the mainstream of society.

Singh appealed to the Naxalites to join the mainstream by adopting the surrender policy.

Also, the SP of the district said that the only option left for the few Naxalites left in Latehar district is to surrender. Latehar Police appeals to them to join the mainstream. "They should surrender and join the mainstream, otherwise the police will be ready for them. Naxalites should join the mainstream otherwise they should be ready to be shot by the police," he added.

Shivraj gives directives for year-end Assembly poll



Union Agriculture Minister cum Jharkhand election incharge Shivraj Singh Chauhan alongwith Jharkhand BJP President Babul Marandi, former Union Minister Arjun Muunda conduct a meeting with MPs and MLAs in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

BJP Jharkhand State Election in-charge and Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chauhan's two-day Jharkhand tour concluded today. Shivraj Singh on his last day of tour reached the office in the afternoon after attending various organizational programs in Ramgarh district today where he addressed the meeting of the State chargesheet and manifesto committee.

The meeting was chaired by State President and former Chief Minister Babul Marandi in which former Chief Minister Arjun Munda, Leader of Opposition Amar Kumar Bauri, State Organization General

Secretary Karmaveer Singh, Union Minister Annapurna Devi, State General Secretary and MP Aditya Sahu, Dr. Pradeep Verma, Manoj Singh, CP Singh, Biranchi Narayan, Anant Ojha, Naveen Jaiswal, Kedar Hazra, Sunita Singh, Arun Oraon, BD Ram, Amit Mandal, Shashank Raj, Aarti Singh, Geeta Koda were present.

In the meeting, Singh discussed the issues in detail with the manifesto committee and the charge sheet committee. He also gave necessary guidelines regarding the upcoming programs.

Later, while talking to the media, Shivraj Singh took a big dig at the change of power in the state government. He said that Hemant

Soren sitting on the driving seat will only cause accidents. As long as he drives, the people of the state will suffer.

He said that the state has been ruined under the leadership of Hemant Soren in the past and will be ruined in the future. The people of the state are troubled. There is looting everywhere. Nothing can be done without money.

He said that sand is not available even for building the Prime Minister's house. Even if it is available, it is at a high price.

He said that this thug-banhand government is a deceitful government and there is an outcry among the people. People are yearning for pension for 6 months. Electricity keeps disappearing, transformers have been burnt for years. Electricity does not come but bills come.

Former ministers and senior officials of the government are in jail due to corruption. He said that BJP will expose such a corrupt useless government. The party will go among the people again and again through mass movement and other programs.

He said that the public is remembering the tenure of the BJP government. They are remembering the development and are resolving to form a strong NDA government under the leadership of BJP again in 2024.

Senior bureaucrats to attend Ranchi Mind Fest 2024 today

PNS : RANCHI

The much awaited, first-ever Ranchi Mind Fest is set to launch on 6th July 2024, Saturday, at Shaurya Auditorium, JAP-1, Doranda, Ranchi. Organized by the Crossword Association of Jharkhand (CWAJ) and Leafam Ventures, and co-hosted by the Jharkhand Police Department, the event promises a day filled with intellectual stimulation and camaraderie.

DGP Jharkhand, Ajay Kumar Singh, will grace the fest as the Chief Guest. The event will also be honored by the presence of Vivek Singh, Chairman of RERA Bihar and Chief Mentor of CWAJ and Leafam Ventures, who is known for his passion for cruciverbalism.

Other distinguished guests at the events include ADG, Headquarters, Raj Kumar Mallik, CMD, Jharkhand Police Housing Corporation, Prashant Singh, Commandant, JAP-1 Rakesh Ranjan, AP Singh, IAS (Retd), President, Crossword Association of Jharkhand, Chief Commissioner of Income Tax, Bihar and Jharkhand Region Kumar Sanjay, Director Primary Education Shashi Singh, Principal Secretary, Department of Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare Ajoy Kumar Singh and Advisor, Central Mine Planning & Design Institute Limited, (CMPDI) Prabhat Kumar.

This one-day event will include two major contests: a General Quiz and a Crossword Contest. Both contests will be divided into three categories: School, College, and Open.



Participants of all ages are welcome to compete in the open category. Prizes and certificates will be awarded to the top three winners in all categories for both contests. Those who missed to register online, can avail the on-spot registration facility at the venue. Registration will begin at 9:30am. One participant can take part in both the contests.

Chargesheet against Alam and his aides in tender scam

PNS : RANCHI

The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has filed a chargesheet in a money laundering case against former Rural Development Minister of the state Alamgir Alam, his personal secretary Sanjeev Lal and assistant Jahangir Alam. In the chargesheet filed by the ED, all three have been accused of money laundering. The ED in its charge sheet has alleged that the rate of commission was fixed for officers and employees at every level in the development schemes run by the department.

During Alamgir's tenure, about Rs 3000 crore has been alleged to have been collected as commission and laundered.

The chargesheet states that a gang was active in the department to collect and distribute the commission amount. It included departmental officers including contractors, engineers. The ED in its charge sheet has stated that 1.5 percent commission was fixed for the departmental minister in development schemes. The Enforcement Directorate (ED) has presented several documents to prove the ongoing commission taking in the department. This also includes the Excel sheet recovered from the personal secretary. This sheet mentions the name of the schemes run by the department, its cost, total commission and share in the commission.

The report says that the money recovered from Jahangir's house was collected as commission from devel-



opment schemes. The report says that the commission rate for senior officers was fixed at 0.75 to 1.50 percent. ED has accused him of acquiring immovable property by laundering the commission amount. Jahangir is said to be close to the personal secretary of the minister. The report says that during the investigation so far, some properties of the accused have been identified. Also, more properties are being traced.

The Enforcement Directorate has seized property worth Rs 4 crore of Alamgir Alam's personal secretary Sanjeev Lal and assistant Jahangir. ED has issued an order regarding the seizure of property. The seized property includes the flats of Sanjeev Lal and Jahangir. ED found in its investigation that the financial source of the property purchased in the name of Sanjeev Lal and Jahangir is not legal. The amount of commission collected in the development schemes run by the Rural Development Department has been used to purchase the flats.

The Enforcement Directorate on May 15 had arrested Jharkhand Minister and Congress leader Alamgir Alam in connection with a money laundering case.

State-level Nipun Samagam Jharkhand organised

Dhanbad became overall winner of Nipun Samagam Jharkhand 2024.

PNS : RANCHI

To mark the completion of three years of NIPUN Bharat Mission, the State School Education and Literacy Department and Jharkhand Education Project Council in collaboration with India Partnership for Early Learning (IPEL) - FLN PMU organised a one-day State-level NIPUN Samagam Jharkhand at Prabhat Tara ground in Ranchi. As many as 450 teachers from 24 districts of Jharkhand, representatives of ten non-governmental groups and thousands of school children participated in this event.

The event was inaugurated by the Secretary of the State School Education and Literacy Department, Umashankar Singh. Also present for the event were Director of Social Welfare, Women and Child Development and Social Security Department Shashi Prakash Jha, Director of Primary Education Shashi Prakash Singh, Director of Secondary Education Utkarsh Gupta, State Education Specialist of UNICEF Parul Sharma, Chief of IPEL Care, Dr. Geeta Verma, State Program Officer Abhinav Kumar and other dignitaries.

Addressing the program, the Secretary of the State Government School Education and Literacy Department, Umashankar Singh said that there is no dearth of talent among the teachers of government schools and urged to make the teaching-learning process interesting and entertaining.



Secretary School Education and Literacy department Umashankar Singh along with Jharkhand Education Project Director Aditya Ranjan and others during the inaugural ceremony of one day state level Nipun Sammelan Jharkhand at Prabhat Tara Ground in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

Singh also emphasized to make the educational environment of schools encouraging in order to prevent dropout of children enrolled in classes 1 to 5. Singh also stressed upon on teaching TLM to children in their regional and mother tongue and also instructed to continuously monitor TLM to make it effective.

Singh also said that Jharkhand Education Project should work towards making TLM excellent and giving its benefits to children by keeping in mind all 24000 primary schools in a phased manner. Singh also said that programs like NIPUN Samagam should be held at regular intervals. "Today, with the help of the trained teachers who have shown their skills in the State-level NIPUN Samagam, such teachers can be taught the skill of making TLM by organising training sessions in every district of the state through JCERT. There is no need to buy any expensive

product for TLM, but it is necessary to have an interest to make better."

Jharkhand Education Project Director Aditya Ranjan said that the talent displayed by the teachers of government schools in the Nipun Samagam will prove to be a milestone and that Nipun Samagam will now be organised every year. "One room in every school will be established as a TLM room, so that children from class one to five can get knowledge of language and numeracy in their mother tongue or regional or tribal language. The teachers, who have proved their talent in the district and block level TLM fair before this State level event, cannot be praised enough. The department will provide funds at the school level to make the best TLM so that the talent of teachers can be encouraged further."

Director of Social Welfare, Women and Child Development and Social Security Department, Shashi

Prakash Jha said that an exhibition of TLM must be organised in a room of DIET and schools of all districts. "Teachers who are skilled in making TLM should be sent to visit other schools so that they can train other teachers as well. Children studying in Anganwadi should be connected to such creative education from now itself, so that they can become proficient in education and numeracy in future."

The teachers selected in the district level TLM fair displayed their FLN/TLM models in the State level Nipun Samagam. The three districts that made the best TLM in this exhibition were awarded. Dhanbad became the overall winner of Nipun Samagam Jharkhand 2024 while Dumka became the first runner up and West Singhbhum became the second runner up. The jury comprised of Mamta Elizabeth Lakra, Seema Rajput and Gayatri Subramaniam. The winners were awarded by the Secretary of the Department of School Education and Literacy Umashankar Singh.

During the Samagam, Secretary of School Education and Literacy Department, Umashankar Singh and other dignitaries jointly released Children's Literature. Seven teachers who composed this book were also honoured including Ravishankar Pathak, Satendra Kumar, Meenu Kumari, Anjali Kujur, Jaya Prabha, Binish Kumar Shukla, Shipra Mishra. An Activity Bank Handbook was also released during the Samagam.

Birsa Munda Jail inmate commits suicide

An undertrial prisoner committed suicide on Friday in Birsa Munda Central Jail. The prisoner has been identified as Mangara Oraon. He was in jail there since 2017. He was accused of killing his wife. Khelagaon police has taken the body in its custody and started investigating the matter. Mangara Oraon committed suicide in the jail bathroom on Friday. According to the jail administration, Mangara Oraon was in jail since 2017. On Friday morning, Mangara Oraon went to the bathroom. When he did not come out of the bathroom for a long time, other prisoners went inside and looked, and he was found lifeless on the bathroom window. After getting information about this case, Khelagaon police took the body in its custody and sent it to RIMS hospital for post-mortem under the supervision of the magistrate. Mangara Oraon, a resident of Lohardaga district, was in jail on charges of murdering his wife. He was arrested on charges of murdering his wife, he was still under trial.

4 arrested in CID DySP robbery case

CID DySP Sarita Murmu was robbed of her chain by bike-borne criminals near Kachhari Chowk. A police team led by Kotwali DySP Prakash Soy took action and arrested four people including two criminals involved in the incident. Farhan Ansari and Zahid Khan, who were involved in the robbery, have been arrested. Rajesh Soni and Mukesh Kumar have also been arrested by Ranchi Police on charges of buying the stolen chain. Ajay Soni is still absconding in the case. 11500 rupees have also been seized along with the stolen gold chain on the information given by the arrested criminals. SSP Chandan Kumar Sinha and City SP Rajkumar Mehta gave this information in a press conference on Friday.

Chariot Festival Celebration at SGS

Surendranath Centenary School celebrated the Chariot Festival on 5th July 2024 with great enthusiasm featuring active participation from Pre Nursery, Nursery and KG classes. The event marked a memorable bagless day, focusing on group activities and traditional festivities. The highlight of the event was the decoration of chariots, a collaborative effort that showcased the students' creativity. Dressed in traditional attire the children pulled the beautifully adorned chariots around a lively mela (fair) exploring the various displays, rides and play things. Three students dressed up as lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Subhadra added a touch of authenticity to the celebration. The event concluded with a lively dance performance.



India's defence production hits record ₹1.27 lakh cr in 2023-24

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's annual defence production has hit a record high of approximately Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24, with the Make in India programme crossing new milestones, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Friday. The value of defence production in FY 2022-23 was Rs 1,08,684 crore. Welcoming the "encouraging development", Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "Compliments to all those who have contributed to this feat. We are fully committed to nurturing a supportive environment to further enhance our capabilities and establish India as a leading global defence manufacturing hub". He also said, "This will enhance our security apparatus and make us Aatmanirbhar!" in a social media post. Rajnath said the Government is committed to creating a more conducive regime for developing India as a leading global defence manufacturing hub. "The Ministry of Defence has achieved the highest-ever growth in indigenous defence production in value terms during financial year (FY) 2023-24, on the back of successful implementation of the policies and initiatives of the government, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, focussing on achieving 'Aatmanirbharita'," the defence ministry said in a statement. The annual defence production has hit a record



high of approximately Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24, it said. "As per the data received from all Defence Public Sector undertakings (DPSUs), other PSUs manufacturing defence items and private companies, the value of defence production in the country has gone up to a record-high figure, i.e., Rs 1,26,887 crore, reflecting a growth of 16.7 per cent over the defence production of the previous financial year," the statement said. The defence minister congratulated the Indian industry, including defence public sector undertakings and other public sector undertakings manufacturing defence items, and the private industry for the feat. "The Make in India programme is crossing new milestones, year after year, under the leadership of PM Shri

@narendramodi," he said. "India has registered the highest ever growth in the value of defence production in 2023-24. The value of production has reached to Rs. 1,26,887 crore in 2023-24 which is 16.8 per cent higher than the value of production of previous financial year," he wrote on X. The defence ministry said that of "the total value of production (VoP) in 2023-24, about 79.2 per cent has been contributed by DPSUs/other PSUs and 20.8 per cent by the private sector". The data shows that in terms of absolute value, both DPSUs/PSUs and private sector have recorded a steady growth in defence production, the statement said. The feat has been achieved due to the policy reforms and initiatives and ease of doing business brought in by the govern-

ment in the last 10 years with focus on attaining self-reliance, the ministry said. "The indigenisation efforts have been pursued aggressively on a sustained basis, that resulted in the highest ever VoP. Moreover, the spiralling defence exports have contributed tremendously to the overall growth in the indigenous defence production," the statement said. Defence exports touched a record-high of Rs 21,083 crore in FY 2023-24, reflecting a growth of 32.5 per cent over the last fiscal when the figure was Rs 15,920 crore, it added. In the last five years (since 2019-20), the value of defence production has been increasing steadily, and grown by over 60 per cent, the statement said and also shared year-wise data in this period.

BRS member's resignation from RS accepted



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A fresh vacancy was created in the Rajya Sabha on Friday with House chairperson Jagdeep Dhankhar accepting the resignation of K Keshava Rao who had quit his membership as a BRS MP after joining the Congress. As of now, 16 seats in the Upper House are vacant. Rao was a Bharat Rashtira Samithi (BRS) member of the Rajya Sabha from Telangana since 2020. He joined the Congress on Wednesday and resigned from his membership of the Upper House of Parliament on Thursday. On Friday, Dhankhar accepted his resignation, following which his seat in the Rajya Sabha became vacant, official sources said. With Rao's resignation, as many as 16 seats in the House are vacant. Before this, 15 seats -- four from Jammu and Kashmir, three from Maharashtra, two each from Assam and Bihar, and one each from Haryana, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Tripura were vacant in the Rajya Sabha, according to the latest tally.

Cong slams Centre for delay in printing Class VI textbooks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The Congress on Friday criticised the Centre for the delay in publishing new Class 6 textbooks, alleging the Education Ministry is "sabotaging" the education of children after doing the same with the examination process through the "incompetent" National Testing Authority. Congress general secretary Jai Ram Ramesh hit out at the government over the issue, saying that either the "rot runs deep", or the incompetence scales new heights everyday. In a social media post, he said, "After sabotaging the examination process through the incompetent National Testing Authority, the non-biological PM's Education Ministry is sabotaging the education of our children." "Even as the school year has begun, the NCERT - the National Council of Educational Research and Training - has failed to publish new textbooks for Science, Mathematics, and Social Studies for Class 6 students," Ramesh said. The textbooks themselves have not been finalised by the National Syllabus and Teaching Learning Material Committee (NSTC), he said. Ramesh pointed out that printing will take another 10 to 15 days. Officials expect a delay of two months before they can make new books available to students, he claimed. "Either the rot runs deep, or the

incompetence scales new heights everyday!" Ramesh said. Later, Ramesh shared a media report which said the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) is working on a proposal to recreate 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' in a virtual format via a web platform. "They cannot ensure leak-proof Parikshas, and they cannot ensure schoolchildren get their textbooks on time -- but this is what the Ministry of Education is spending its time on. The blame for these warped priorities lies entirely on the non-biological Pradhan Mantri," Ramesh said. His remarks come a day after Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan reviewed the development of school textbooks in accordance with the New Curriculum Framework (NCF) at a meeting here. The meeting came in the backdrop of a delay in the publication of Class 6 textbooks that were supposed to be taught from April and are yet to hit the market. The National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT) had earlier announced that new textbooks for Classes 3 and 6 will be introduced from the 2024-25 academic session. "For the academic year 2024-25, new and engaging textbooks will be introduced in Classes 3 and 6. The textbook development work is in the final phase and nine textbooks for Grades 3 and 6 are already available. The remaining eight will be available very soon," a senior Ministry of Education (MoE) official said. The NCERT had an initial aim of releasing the new textbooks based on the NCF 2023 only for Classes 3 and 6 this year. While the textbooks for Class 3 are available in the market, those for Class 6 have been delayed. It was only this week that the NCERT released new English and Hindi textbooks for Class 6 in the middle of the academic session.

BJP retains most of its office bearers in States

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday appointed its in-charges and co-incharges for states, retaining the incumbent office-bearers in most places. Its national general secretaries Vinod Tawde, Tarun Chugh and Radha Mohan Das Agarwal will continue to steer the party's organisational affairs in Bihar, Jammu and Kashmir and Karnataka respectively, while Prakash Javadekar and Satish Poonia will be the respective in-charges of Kerala and Haryana. Bihar MLA Nitin Nabin will be in-charge of Chhattisgarh, Ashish Sood of Goa, Shrikant Sharma of Himachal Pradesh, Laxmikant Bajpai of Jharkhand, Mahendra Singh of Madhya Pradesh and Vijaypal Singh Tomar of Odisha. Former Gujarat chief minister Vijay Rupani and party's national general secretary Dushyant Kumar Gautam will continue to be in-charge of Punjab and Uttarakhand respectively. BJP MP Sambit Patra has also been retained as the coordinator for the north-eastern states. The party had appointed a co-incharge for most of the states.

Foreigners must comply with organ transplant rules

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

With India emerging as a preferred destination for organ transplants among foreign nationals, the Union Health Ministry has urged the Ministries of External Affairs and Home Affairs to educate these visitors about the country's regulatory guidelines. The move aims to ensure compliance with legal requirements governing organ transplant procedures in India, emphasising transparency and ethical standards in medical tourism practices. In a letter addressed to Union Home Secretary Ajay Kumar Bhalla and Union Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra, Chandra highlighted the necessity for sensitising foreign nationals about these regulations. The initiative aims to ensure transparency and compliance with regulations, especially in light of concerns over potential commercial dealings in organs involving foreign citizens. Chandra outlined measures including the preparation of scroll messages and creatives to be displayed at airports, on Bureau of Immigration portals, and on Ministry of External Affairs' websites and embassies abroad.



"I shall be grateful if you could kindly look into the matter personally and direct the concerned authorities to ensure that the enclosed messages may be circulated extensively through immigration for wide reach," the letter said. The scroll messages stated that when the donor or recipient is a foreign national, then prior approval of the authorizing committee shall be required before removing or transplanting human organs or tissue or both. A senior official of the embassy of the country of origin in India is required to certify the relationship between the donor and the recipient as per form 21, the message states. In case a country does not have an Embassy in India, the cer-

tificate of relationship, in the same format, shall be issued by the government of that country. Foreign patients needing organ(s) from a deceased donor for transplant, can also seek registration in India through their treating hospital after which their name will be included in the waiting list registry. However, such cases would be considered for allocation of organs only when there is no Indian patient available to take that organ. Dr. Atul Goel, Director General of Health Services (DGHS), had earlier urged States and Union Territories to monitor and report all transplant cases, emphasizing the need for strict action against any illegal activities, including suspension of hospital registrations.

SC to review same-sex marriage verdict on July 10

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court is scheduled to consider on July 10 a batch of pleas seeking review of its last year's judgement which refused to accord legal recognition to same-sex marriage. According to the cause list of July 10 uploaded on the apex court website, a five-judge bench headed by Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud would consider in chambers the pleas seeking review of the October 17 last year verdict. As per the practice, the review pleas are considered in chambers by judges. Besides the CJI, the other members of the bench will be Justices Sanjiv Khanna, Hima Kohli, B V Nagarathna and P S Narasimha. In a setback to gay rights activists, the apex court had on October 17 last year refused to accord legal recognition to same-sex marriage, saying there was "no unqualified right" to marriage with the exception of those that are recognised by law. The apex court, however, had made a strong pitch for the rights of queer people so they don't face discrimination in accessing goods and services that are available to others, safe hous-



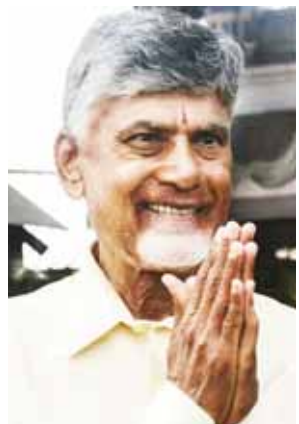
es known as 'Garima Greh' in all districts to provide shelter to members of the community facing harassment and violence and dedicated hotline numbers which they could use in case of trouble. Holding that transgender people in heterosexual relationships have the freedom and entitlement to marry under the existing statutory provisions, the top court had said an entitlement to legal recognition of the right to union, akin to marriage or civil union, or conferring legal status to the relationship can be only done through "enacted law". A five-judge constitution bench headed by CJI Chandrachud had delivered four separate verdicts on a batch of 21 petitions seeking legal sanction for same-sex marriages. All the five judges were un-

animous in refusing to accord legal recognition to same-sex marriage under the Special Marriage Act and had observed it was within Parliament's ambit to change the law for validating such union. While the CJI had written a separate 247-page verdict, Justice Sanjay Kishan Kaul (since retired) had penned a 17-page judgement in which he broadly agreed with Justice Chandrachud's views. Justice S Ravindra Bhat (since retired), who authored an 89-page judgement for himself and Justice Hima Kohli, had disagreed with certain conclusions arrived at by the CJI including on applicability of adoption rules for queer couples. Justice PS Narasimha had said in his 13-page verdict that he was in complete agreement with the reasoning given and conclusions arrived at by Justice Bhat. The judges were unanimous in holding that queerness is a natural phenomenon and not "urban or elite" occurrence. In his judgement, the CJI had recorded the assurance by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta that the Centre will constitute a committee chaired by the Cabinet Secretary for the purpose of defining and elucidating the scope of entitlements of queer couples who are in union. The LGBTQIA++ rights activists, who had won a major legal battle in 2018 in the Supreme Court which decriminalised consensual gay sex, had moved the apex court seeking validation of same-sex marriage and consequential reliefs such as rights to adoption, enrolment as parents in schools, opening of bank accounts and availing succession and insurance benefits. Some of the petitioners had urged the apex court to use its plenary power, "prestige and moral authority" to push the society to acknowledge such a union which would ensure LGBTQIA++ lead a "dignified" life like heterosexuals. LGBTQIA++ stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, pansexual, two-spirit, asexual and allied persons.

Naidu presses for more Central funds ahead of Union Budget

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu on Friday met Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, pressing for enhanced financial support to the debt-burdened state. The meeting came ahead of union budget presentation. Sources said Naidu, during the meeting in North Block, highlighted various ongoing projects in Andhra Pradesh that require urgent central assistance. "The CM presented a detailed memorandum outlining the state's financial requirements and the rationale behind the demand for increased allocation," the sources added. TDP ministers in the Centre were present during the meeting. Naidu also met Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Health Minister J P Nadda. According to the state government data, the public debt of Andhra Pradesh has



increased from 31.02 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) in 2019-20 to 33.32 per cent in 2023-24 fiscal, indicating deterioration in the fiscal health of the state in the last five years. Key among Naidu's demands were funds for the Polavaram irrigation project, special assistance for backward regions, and support for the development of the new cap-

ital, Amaravati. The chief minister also sought resolution of pending issues stemming from the bifurcation of the erstwhile Andhra Pradesh. The meeting assumes significance as it comes just weeks before the presentation of the Union Budget 2024-25. The sources indicated that Sitharaman gave a patient hearing to Naidu's concerns and gave an assurance that she will look into Andhra Pradesh's demands within the broader fiscal constraints. Naidu has been vocal about the state's financial distress and sought increased central support to tide over the fiscal challenges, when he met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and several Union Ministers on Thursday. The Naidu-led Telugu Desam Party is a crucial partner of the NDA with its 16 Lok Sabha MPs supporting the Narendra Modi-led government.

India-DRC Secretary-level meeting aims to boost bilateral defence ties

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to bilateral defence ties, the first Secretary-level meeting between the Defence Ministries of India and Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) was held here on Friday, Defence Ministry said. The Indian delegation was led by Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane and included senior officers of Ministry of Defence, Ministry of External Affairs and the Armed Forces. The Congolese delegation was led by Permanent Secretary of Defence, Ministry of Defence, DRC Major General Lukwikila Metikwiza Marcel and included the senior officers from the Ministry and a representative of Embassy of DRC in India. The meeting was aimed at identifying areas for collaboration to fulfill the potential of defence cooperation between

the two countries. Detailed discussions were held to promote cooperation in training and defence industry. The Indian delegation highlighted the significant progress India has made in defence manufacturing capability. The DRC side shared the need for modernisation of their Armed Forces. They expressed confidence in the capability of the India defence industry and suggested areas of co-production and co-development. Earlier, the visiting delegation called on Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi. India enjoys cordial and friendly relations with the DRC. India was among the first countries to establish a diplomatic mission in Kinshasa in 1962. The visit is expected to open up new avenues for defence cooperation between the two countries.

CJI calls for participation in special Lok Adalat

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chief Justice of India D Y Chandrachud on Friday urged citizens, who have pending cases before the Supreme Court, to take part in the special Lok Adalat from July 29 to August 3 to get their disputes resolved amicably and speedily. In a bid to lessen the pendency of cases in the top court, the special Lok Adalat will be organised in the 75th year of the establishment of the apex court, which came into existence on January 26, 1950 with the coming into force of the Constitution. In a video message uploaded on the apex court's website, the CJI said, "From the 29th of July to the third of August 2024, the Supreme Court is organising a special Lok Adalat. This is part of a series of activities, which the Supreme Court is observing to commemorate the 75th year since the establishment of the Supreme Court." He said most significantly, the judges, who are dedicated to the institution of justice, are



concerned about the large backlog of cases. "The Lok Adalat represents a very informal technology based solution to resolve cases involving our citizens to their satisfaction in a purely voluntary, consensual mode. "Therefore, on behalf of all my colleagues, and the staff of the Supreme Court, I would appeal to all citizens who have cases before the Supreme Court, or lawyers, advocates on record, to take the advantage and benefit of this opportunity in an attempt to resolve the cases speedily in a manner which is acceptable to every contesting party," Justice Chandrachud said. Earlier, the top court had

said Lok Adalats are an integral component of the judicial system in the country, enhancing alternative dispute resolution as a means of expediting and fostering amicable settlements. It had said organising of the Lok Adalat was pursuant to the commitment to accessible and efficient justice delivery for all sections of the society. It had said cases having elements of settlement, including those relating to matrimonial disputes, property disputes, motor accident claims, land acquisition, compensation, service and labour which are pending before the apex court, would be taken up to facilitate speedy disposal.

Budget sops not poll gimmicks, in sync with allocations: Ajit Pawar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The schemes announced in the Maharashtra budget for women, youth and farmers are not "election gimmicks", said Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar on Thursday, slamming the opposition for ridiculing the government over the initiatives.

During the debate on the budget he presented in the legislative assembly last week, Pawar, who holds the finance portfolio, said this was his 10th budget and he was well aware that the schemes were in sync with budgetary allocations. Maharashtra's economy is in a stable condition, said the finance minister. Even though debt has increased by 10.67 per cent compared to the previous year, it is 18.35 per cent of the Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) which is well within the prescribed limit of 25 per cent, he said. Presenting the last budget of the Eknath Shinde government, before the state goes to polls later this year, Pawar had announced sops for women, youth and



farmers and other segments of society that entailed an outlay of more than Rs 80,000 crore. The opposition had called it a "torrent of assurances" but said there was no clarity on how money would be raised for the schemes announced. NCP (SP) Lok Sabha member Supriya Sule on Thursday targeted the much-publicised 'Ladki Bahin' scheme saying though good for women it was nothing but a "jumla" (gimmick). Under the 'Mukhyamantri Majhi Ladki Bahin Yojana' announced in the budget, eligible women will be given

Rs 1,500 per month. Pawar said women have welcomed the scheme. "I am facing criticism from the opposition for the scheme which aims to empower women," said the NCP leader, adding that the government is open to improving it. "We extended the age limit from 60 to 65 years and also relaxed the time for registration. Even if women get registered in August, they will be eligible for the (Ladki Bahin) monthly allowance from July," he assured. Pawar said additional budgetary provisions will be made in the supplementary

demands. About 2.5 crore women will benefit from the Ladki Bahin scheme which would cost the state Rs 46,000 crore yearly, he said. He slammed the Congress for promising a monthly dose of Rs 8,500 to women, before the Lok Sabha polls. "Prithviraj Chavan (ex-CM) while speaking in the assembly on the budget said Congress would give Rs 8,500 per month. If that were to be implemented, a budgetary allocation of Rs 2.5 lakh crore would be needed," Pawar said, terming the rival party's promise an election jumla. In 2003-04, Pawar claimed, the Congress-led government had promised free electricity to farmers before elections and even implemented it for a few months. "After the results, the decision was withdrawn," he said. Pawar said three cooking gas cylinders will be given free per year to 52 lakh families for which Rs 1,600 crore will be spent. He reiterated that the objective of making Maharashtra a one trillion-dollar economy will be achieved by 2028.

Hisar firing incident: Traders decry poor law and order, observe bandh

PTI ■ HISAR

Traders observed a bandh here on Friday and the shops and petrol pumps remained closed to protest the delay in arrest of miscreants even after 12 days of firing of gunshots outside a car dealership by unidentified persons, who had also demanded a ransom of Rs 5 crore. The traders have alleged that after the firing incident, two owners of an automobile showroom and a car accessories shop had also received ransom demands of Rs 2 crore each from unidentified miscreants on their mobile phones. Raising questions on the alleged inaction of police in these recent cases, the traders said that the culprits were yet to be arrested. Meanwhile, Hisar District Bar Association President Viney Kumar Bishnoi said the lawyers of the association suspended their work on Friday in support of the bandh. Petrol Pumps Association chief Raj Kumar Salemgarh said all the 15 petrol pumps in Hisar remained closed due to non-arrest of the miscreants. The day-long shutdown was called by the Haryana



Pradesh Beopar Mandal and other traders organisations. During the bandh, all establishments and shops of Hisar remained closed and the markets wore a deserted look. More than 70 market associations joined the bandh. The traders' organisations alleged that the police have nothing except assurances. The shops remained closed in all areas, including Auto Market, Nagori Gate, Moti Bazaar, Gandhi Chowk, Bhagat Singh Chowk, Rajguru Market, New Raju Market, Laxmi Market, Bishnoi Mandir Market, Arya Samaj Mandir Market, Subhash Market, Cloth Market, Sabzi Mandi and Anaj Mandi. Haryana Pradesh Beopar Mandal State President Bajrang Dass Garg said the bandh was successful. He said the police administration should immediately arrest those who opened fire outside a car dealership and also apprehend

those who demanded a ransom from two other traders of Auto Market, Hisar. The shops of Auto Market, New Grain Market and Bazaar Khajanchiyana had remained closed on Friday last week to protest against the June 24 incident of firing of gunshots outside a car dealership here recently by armed miscreants, who had also demanded Rs 5 crore from its owner. On June 24, three unidentified men had opened fire outside a car dealership in Hisar and demanded Rs 5 crore from its owner. A video that surfaced on social media showed two of them leaving the showroom with their faces covered. The police had earlier said that the three miscreants arrived on a motorcycle, barged into the dealership, left a note with a ransom demand, and fired shots in the air outside the showroom before leaving.

Heavy rain lashes parts of Rajasthan



PTI ■ JAIPUR

Rajasthan continues to see heavy rainfall, with Malpura in Tonk district recording 176 mm rain in the last 24 hours, the meteorological department said on Friday. Significant rainfall was recorded across the state -- 116 mm in Sajangarh (Banswara), 107 mm in Tijara, 101 mm in Danpur, 102 mm in Nainwan (Bundi), 97 mm in Thanagazi, 90 mm in Pipalda (Kota), 88 mm in Tapukda, 82 mm in Fagi Jaipur, 75 mm in Karauli, 75 mm in Ramgarh, 68 mm in Nawalgarh of Jhunjhunu and 65 mm in Baswa of Dausa. Many parts of the state received moderate to heavy rainfall in the last 24 hours, the weather office said. A circulation system formed over southwestern Uttar Pradesh and adjoining eastern Rajasthan contributed to the heavy rains, with the monsoon trough line passing through Bikaner and Sikar on Friday. Monsoon is expected to remain active in most parts of eastern Rajasthan on Friday, with a significant amount of rainfall predicted for Jaipur, Ajmer, Kota, Bharatpur, Udaipur divisions. Heavy rain is expected in Tonk and adjoining districts, the weather department said. Heavy rain is likely to continue in eastern Rajasthan on Saturday, which could decrease subsequently on Sunday and Monday. Rain activities are expected in some parts of northeastern Rajasthan on Sunday and Monday, which are expected to increase again on July 9-10. Bikaner division and eastern and northern parts of Jodhpur division are also expected to receive rain in the next 2-3 days, the weather office said.

MUDA scam: Karnataka Govt transfers Deputy Commissioner of Mysuru

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Amid a controversy over alleged land scam in Mysuru Urban Development Authority (MUDA), the Karnataka government on Friday transferred Mysuru Deputy Commissioner K V Rajendra. Senior BJP leader R Ashoka had earlier alleged that Rajendra had written several letters to MUDA stating that the allotment of alternative sites to land losers, in lieu of land acquired from them to form residential layouts under a "50:50 ratio" scheme, was improper. Rajendra was among the 21 IAS officers who were transferred by the Government in a bureaucratic reshuffle. He has been posted as the Director of Tourism in Bengaluru. Rajendra was replaced by G Lakshminanth Reddy, who is

presently the Managing Director of Karnataka Urban Infrastructure Development and Finance Corporation (KUIDFC), Bengaluru. Ashoka, the Leader of Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, had alleged that Rajendra had also sought details about the process adopted to allot alternative sites but MUDA did not bother to respond. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Thursday rejected BJP's demand for a CBI probe into the alleged irregularities in allotment of sites to land losers, including his wife Parvathi, by MUDA, as he stoutly denied any wrongdoing. Mysuru is the home district of the Chief Minister. The BJP has alleged that alternative sites were also allotted to Parvathi in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property



value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the MUDA, and sought his resignation. The MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under the scheme in lieu of over three acres of her land, where MUDA developed a residential layout. The controversial scheme envisages allotting 50 per cent of developed land to the land loser in lieu of undeveloped land acquired for forming

layouts. The BJP has alleged that irregularities to the tune of Rs 4,000 crore had taken place in distribution of sites to land losers by MUDA. "Apparently 4,500-5,000 sites were allotted by flouting norms," a BJP leader claimed. "Have they (BJP) given any case (to CBI) during their tenure? I have given seven cases (including his earlier tenure as CM). This is not a case that is to be given to CBI...We too had demanded,

did they give (any case to CBI for probe)," Siddaramaiah had said in response to a question on BJP demanding for a CBI probe. The Chief Minister had said the plots were given to his wife by MUDA in 2021 when BJP was in power. "They (BJP) are the ones who gave the site, now if they themselves call it illegal, how should one take it? We did not ask for sites to be given in Vijayanagar 3rd or 4th stage (in Mysuru)," Siddaramaiah said. The Chief Minister said earlier this week that housing sites allotted by MUDA under the scheme have been put on hold pending an investigation into the alleged irregularities. He had also said he wouldn't resign. "What role do I have in this case?" he had asked.

No evidence of sale, receipt of medical exam question papers: Kerala police

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Police on Friday said presently there is no evidence that anyone has received the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination question papers and answer keys as was circulated on social media a day ago. The police, in a statement by the State Police Media Centre (SPMC), requested candidates to be careful and not fall for such scams or transfer money for the question papers. It also said it has intensified investigation into the announcement on social media that the question papers and answer keys were available for sale. Police said that any attempt to subvert the examination process was an offence and strict legal action would be

taken against those who try to do so. It further said that all types of social media were under strict surveillance 24 hours of the day. After completing MBBS studies abroad, those who wish to practice in India are required to pass the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination (FMGE) conducted by the National Board of Examinations. The City Cyber Crime Police in Thiruvananthapuram had on Thursday registered a case against groups that advertised, on Telegram groups, the sale of question papers for the July 6 exam. The case was registered under the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act 2024, making it the first case of its kind in the state to be registered under this law.

Flood situation in Assam critical, CM visits Dibrugarh

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

The flood situation in Assam was critical on Friday with nearly 22 lakh people affected and all major rivers flowing above the danger mark. Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma reviewed the situation in Dibrugarh town, which has been under water and facing severe power shortage for the last eight days. He visited some areas on foot and interacted with the people. "We will be engaging experts and the local residents to find a community-driven solution to the problem of inundation in Dibrugarh town," he said. The town is witnessing waterlogging due to clogged drains, and with the Brahmaputra flowing above the danger level, it was posing more difficulties to drain out the water, officials said. The locals urged Sarma to restore the power supply, but he said that it had been turned off to ensure that there were no mishaps due to electrocution. Sarma, however, directed the deputy commissioner to restore the supply by making public announcements so that people are alert. Nearly 22 lakh people have been affected in 29 districts. The toll in this year's flood, landslide and storm has

increased to 62, while three persons are missing. Among the worst-hit districts are Dhubri where 6,48,806 people are affected, Darrang with 1,90,261 people hit and Cachar with 1,45,926 people affected. A total of 39,338 affected people have taken shelter in 698 relief camps, while 7,24,322 people have been provided with relief materials. An alert was issued in Kamrup (Metro) district where the Brahmaputra, Digaru and Kollong rivers were flowing above the danger marks with vast tracts of land inundated. The Brahmaputra is also flowing above the danger marks at Nimatighat, Tezpur, Guwahati, Goalpara and Dhubri. Its tributaries Subansiri at Badatighat, Burhi Dihing at Chenimari, Dikhou at Sivasagar, Dhansiri at Nanglamuraghat, Dhansiri at Numaligarh, and Kopili at Kamrup and Dharamtul are flowing above the danger levels. The Barak river was flowing above the danger mark at AP Ghat, BP Ghat, Chota Bakra and Fuletrak, while its tributary Dhaleswari was above the red mark in Garmura, Katakhal in Matizuri and Kushiyara in Karimganj town. State ministers are also camping in various flood-affected districts.

Rahul visits UP stampede site, interacts with victims' kin

PNS ■ HATHRAS/ALIGARH

The grieving families of the 'satsang' stampede victims who met Rahul Gandhi in Hathras and Aligarh on Friday said the Congress leader has assured them he will make efforts to get their compensation enhanced. The Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha also assured that he would raise the stampede issue in Parliament in a bid to prevent such incidents in the future, they said. Gandhi met with some families first in Aligarh's Pilkhana village around 7.30 am and then in Hathras's Vibhav Nagar area around 9 am, hours after he began his

pre-dawn journey from Delhi, accompanied by some party leaders, to console the families of those killed in the Tuesday incident. His meetings with the families in the two neighbouring districts in western Uttar Pradesh took place amid deployment of large number of security personnel by the state police. Hari Mohan, a resident of Nai ka Nagla locality in Hathras, lost his paternal aunt Omvati, 55, in the stampede. "Rahul Gandhi interacted with us, extended his sympathies. He said he would make effort to get the compensation amount for victims enhanced," Mohan told PTI.



Mrityunjay Bharti, 22, lost her maternal grandmother Asha Devi, around 55, in the tragedy. Bharti, who lives in Aligarh, has come to Hathras to be with her relatives who

live in the city's Navipur area. "He (Gandhi) spoke to us and tried to understand our issues. He said he would raise the issue in Parliament so that such incidents do not happen in future," Bharti told PTI. In Aligarh's Pilkhana village, Monu, a family member of the deceased, when asked about's Gandhi visit, said, "He also said that he will try his best to help (us), and will talk to the government as his party is not in power." Khusboo, who lost her

mother, said she was assured of help during the interaction with the former Congress president. Another woman, who lost her sister-in-law in the stampede, told reporters, "He (Rahul Gandhi) told us that the (Congress) party will help us, and assured us help. He also inquired from us how it (the incident) took place." According to police, of the 121 people who died due to the stampede on July 2, 17 were from Aligarh and 19 were from Hathras. The Uttar Pradesh government on Wednesday formed a three-member judicial commission headed by a retired high court judge to probe the Hathras tragedy,

looking also into the possibility that a conspiracy was behind the stampede. The government has also announced compensation of Rs 2 lakh for the kind of those killed and Rs 50,000 for the injured. The police are investigating the matter and have so far arrested six volunteers who were members of the organising committee of the satsang of Surajpal alias Narayan Sakar Hari alias Bhole Baba on July 2 in Fulrai village of Hathras. The godman is not named in the police FIR as accused but a senior officer told media on Thursday that he would be questioned if required for investigation.

Mica mines in Jharkhand free of child labour, says child rights' body

PTI ■ RANCHI

Apex child rights body ANCPDR on Friday declared mica mines in Jharkhand 'child labour-free', confirming that all kids are now enrolled in schools. According to Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi's non-profit organisation Bachpan Bachao Andolan (BBA), which spearheaded the 'Child Labour-Free Mica' campaign in collaboration with the district administration and local communities, more than 20,000 kids were previously engaged as child labour in these mines. "Today, as I declare that all children are free from exploitation in mica mines and are attending schools

instead, I feel overwhelmed and proud. The success of the Child Labour-Free Mica programme, supported by village panchayats, state government, and district administration, demonstrates how persistent efforts and a singular focus can ensure safety and justice for children," National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR) chairperson Priyank Kanoongo said. "In 2004, a research conducted by Bachpan Bachao Andolan identified over 5,000 children involved in mica mining and collection. By 2019, this number had escalated to more than 20,000. Through collaborative efforts involving

children, communities, civil society organisations, and government, the 'Child Labour-Free Mica' initiative was born. Every child previously out of school was identified, withdrawn from labour, enrolled, and retained in schools," said BBA. Child rights activist Bhuvan Ribhu, who initiated the research identifying child labourers in 2004, said, "Identifying and withdrawing 22,000 children from mica mining and ensuring their enrolment in schools marks a landmark achievement for the government and civil society organisations. This should serve as a global example for eliminating child labour in unorganised sectors within global supply chains."

Two cops suspended on charges of molesting woman pilgrim in Kedarnath

PTI ■ DEHRADUN

Two police sub-inspectors have been suspended on charges of molesting a woman pilgrim from Madhya Pradesh in Kedarnath a year ago. Sub-inspector Kuldeep Negi and Kedarnath Station House Officer Manjul Rawat were suspended on the basis of the recommendation of an inquiry committee. Rudraprayag Superintendent of Police (SP), Vishakha Ashok Bhadane told PTI. The woman had come to visit Kedarnath in May, 2023 along with eight of her friends. After visiting the Himalayan temple, her friends returned by the heli service. However, she was left behind as there was no space

in the helicopter. While she was waiting for the next sortie to be ferried back the weather turned bad and the heli service had to be suspended for the day. As there were no proper lodging arrangements at the temple, she sought Rawat's help. He asked her to stay at the police camp for the night saying a woman constable will be deployed there for her security, the SP said quoting the woman's complaint in this regard. However, no woman constable was sent to the police camp in Kedarnath as promised. Instead, sub-inspector Negi came to the camp under the influence of alcohol and molested her, she alleged in her complaint. She returned to Indore the next morning

and lodged a complaint with the Rudraprayag SP on WhatsApp. The SP instituted an inquiry committee headed by Guptkashi circle officer to look into the matter. However, the probe did not make much progress. The woman then lodged a complaint on CM helpline Uttarakhnad in October, 2023. After that Dehradun's SP (city) Pramod Kumar was asked to investigate the matter himself. He submitted his report to the administration recently indicting the two cops following which an FIR was lodged against them at Sonprayag Kotwali on June 28 and both of them were suspended, the Rudraprayag SP said.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Momentous meeting

The meeting of PM Modi with President Putin would solidify India's role as a key player in the emerging global order

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to meet Russian President Vladimir Putin. It was a meeting for which preparation was underway for a long but was delayed due to the elections. Indian Russian ties are historic but have become more important in the evolving multipolar world order. This will be Modi's first visit to Russia since the onset of the Ukraine war in February 2022. Despite the West's increasing isolation of Russia due to the Ukraine conflict, India has maintained a neutral stance. India has called for dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the dispute but has refrained from condemning Russia outright. This approach aligns with India's historical policy of non-alignment and strategic autonomy. India continues to buy Russian oil despite Western sanctions. India and Russia share a long-standing relationship dating back to the Cold War era. The two countries have traditionally enjoyed strong defence and economic ties, with Russia being a major supplier of military hardware to India. This relationship has persisted through various political changes and has been marked by cooperation in multiple areas, including nuclear energy, space exploration, and trade. Indeed, the Ukraine war has had far-reaching implications for global politics, economics, and security. The conflict has disrupted global energy markets and supply chains, contributing to inflationary pressures worldwide. India nonetheless did not snap ties with Russia despite its good relations with the US and the Western pressure. While maintaining its stance of neutrality, it has continued its trade relations with Russia, including increased imports of discounted Russian oil.

In this backdrop the meeting of Modi with Putin is significant. It is expected to cover a broad range of topics, reflecting the multifaceted nature of India-Russia relations. PM Modi may seek to secure long-term energy supplies from Russia to ensure stability in its energy markets. Both leaders may discuss ongoing and future defence projects, including the delivery of military hardware and the joint development of defence technologies. India's defence modernization plans, which include acquiring advanced weaponry and upgrading its military capabilities, are likely to be a focal point of discussion. Modi and Putin are expected to discuss the evolving international order and regional security issues. India's position as a rising global power and its role in regional stability will likely be a major point of discussion. The conversation may also touch upon India's vision for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, where it seeks to counterbalance China's influence. Bilateral trade has seen growth despite sanctions on Russia, and both countries may seek to expand this further by identifying new areas of cooperation. Though it may not augur well for the US which may frown but then for every country its interests are paramount. This balancing act could position India as a crucial player in mediating global conflicts and fostering international cooperation, enhancing its role on the world stage.

PICTALK



Locals move their belongings on a boat as they move to a safer place during floods, in Darrang district

Nuanced shift in parliamentary conduct

As parliamentarians navigate new complexities, the emphasis remains on upholding the dignity, decorum, and effectiveness of legislative processes



VINAYSHIL GAUTAM

The 18th Lok Sabha has been ushered in with customary procedural formalities on the 25th of June, 2024. Certain rituals convert the reality of Lok Sabha into the sanctified existence of a group of people meant to lead this country through such vicissitudes as it may face. This is, as it should be, an extraordinary phenomenon. The nation can be legitimately proud of this event. Yet in certain ways, it's different from some of the preceding Lok Sabhas because this time there was no consensus on the identification of a Speaker for the Lok Sabha.

It is not as if in each of the preceding Lok Sabhas, the selection of the speaker was unanimous. There were instances when the Speaker was chosen by ballot and the Lok Sabha still, functioned with a fair degree of cohesiveness.

The unique situation in the 18th Lok Sabha included a demand by the opposition to promise it a Deputy Speaker's position. In the preceding Lok Sabhas, it did not seem to matter to many people. An assurance here and 'now' seemed to be the demand. The matter seems to have would have been settled. The crux of the situation seems to be putting up the Deputy Speaker's position as a factor in negotiation. In the preceding Lok Sabhas, a consensus was built around these issues, which this time around did not seem to bother many people. This is a settled and yet important proposition about the style of conduct of affairs. An illustration may help to establish the point with better clarity. In one of the preceding Lok Sabhas, at a time when Jawahar Lal Nehru dominated the scene in Indian politics, there was a bye-election schedule from Muzaffarpur Constituency in Bihar. Then socialist parties sought to put up Acharya Narendra Dev as their candidate for election from this constituency. Jawahar Lal Nehru, who was one of the tallest figures in the political scene, seized this situation to make a point.

He felt that even if Acharya Narendra Dev was a candidate for the opposition, yet there was



no bitterness that Congress as a party had towards him. Ordinarily, Congress was expected to win this election of the parliamentary seat to the Lok Sabha, yet Jawahar Lal Nehru felt that the Lok Sabha should have more different types of people, and therefore Congress would not contest for the Lok Sabha seat from Muzaffarpur against Narendra Dev. Those times were different. There was a predominantly universal sentiment for merit and goodwill, and Narendra Dev sailed home well on that argument. As stated, with the main opposition and Congress working together for Narendra Dev, it was not difficult for him to get elected to the Lok Sabha. Those times were different, and those times still resonate with many people as to what good traditions in the parliamentary system are all about. It's remarkable that during the arguments for Deputy Speakership, no one in public even recalled this episode from the perspective of parliamentary history. It is indeed a case for a two-tiered split on which way the parliamentary traditions could be heading. One can only hope that over time, the good sense and goodwill of parliamentar-



PARLIAMENTARY TRADITIONS ARE IMPORTANT, AND IT MAY WELL BE THAT THE 18TH LOK SABHA WILL HAVE SOME DARING CHALLENGES TO ITS METHOD OF WORK, TO WHICH BOTH THE RULING PARTY AND THE OPPOSITION, LED BY SOME OLD VETERANS, WILL NEED TO ADAPT AND TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

ians will prevail and matters take their course in a more enlightened way. Be that as it may, one is not quite sure what the adamancy of a prior commitment about the Deputy Speaker's position being given to the opposition has been all about.

In any case, the convention has been for the Deputy Speaker's position to be given to the opposition, so ultimately, the contention was only about the timing of the formalization of this kind of prior agreement. It is indeed a small matter, but if the loftiness of parliamentary traditions were to be seen in its due weightage in the conduct of affairs, it is important. Running a parliament cannot and should not be solely about positions, it has also to be about patterns, graces, decency, and above all, dignified conduct in electoral and consensual politics. The people show their class through their representatives, behaviours, and the way arguments are made or not made.

This becomes the algorithm for the conduct of public affairs. Every parliament loses at least 20 to 40% of its members who fail to return for various reasons or who

may only serve for one term. Therefore, being a member of parliament, especially the Lok Sabha, carries a huge moral weight that goes beyond simple political votes.

Parliamentary traditions are important, and it may well be that the 18th Lok Sabha will have some daring challenges to its method of work, to which both the ruling party and the opposition, led by some old veterans, will need to adapt and take responsibility.

This is a simplified version of what happens, as the method of working is nearly as critical as the methods of resolving differences. All said and done, even parliament has to operate within the bandwidth of rules, regulations, bylaws, practices, and more. It is best done through goodwill and grace. Senior members in the Lok Sabha need to conduct affairs with statesmanship and dignity. The Prime Minister has done well to emphasize that for a nation to work well, all must work together, not just the majority.

(The writer is a well-known management consultant of international repute. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

NEW BUILDING NORMS

Madam — This letter refers to the news titled "Haryana Permits Stilt plus Four-Floor Construction" published on July 3. In Haryana, the government led by Nayab Singh Saini has given approval for the construction of Stilt plus Four floors for homeowners, builders, and property dealers.

This decision has sparked a mixed response from both society and the construction industry. There is a requirement to obtain permission from neighboring plot holders before commencing Stilt plus Four construction. However, many Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) across the state have expressed opposition to the government's decision through various channels. The government's intention seems to be to increase the income of those involved in the construction sector, despite some technical and legal challenges. It is crucial, however, to strike a balance between the structural changes, such as the reconstruction of sewage systems, public facilities, and the concerns of the public.

For residents of builder floors, the use of parking spaces will be significantly improved. Nevertheless, the construction of Stilt plus Four buildings will present both opportunities and challenges.

Yugal Kishore Sharma | Faridabad

MAKE QR CODE PAYMENTS UNIVERSAL

Madam — There is a recurring problem with currency change across various services, including both government and private sectors such as transportation (RTC buses, metro trains), and e-seva centers. To address this issue, it is crucial to provide the option of QR code-based online payments everywhere. Additionally, offering a choice between partial cash payment and partial online payment would be beneficial.

QR code payments are a secure, contactless method that reduces the risk of account hacking compared to credit or debit card payments. It would also be

Vigilance urged for Zika virus



Among Pregnant Women Dear Editor, The Union Health Ministry has called on states to maintain constant vigilance by screening pregnant women for Zika virus infection

and monitoring the development of fetuses in those who test positive. Each health facility and hospital has been assigned a nodal officer responsible for ensuring that the premises remain free from Aedes mosquitoes, the carriers of the Zika virus. States have also been directed to enhance their entomological surveillance and intensify vector control efforts in residential areas, workplaces, schools, construction sites, institutions, and health facilities. The spread of Zika has been reported in Pune, where two more cases have recently emerged, bringing the total to six, with both new cases involving pregnant women from Erandwane. The rising number of cases poses a significant health risk, and it is imperative that the government takes appropriate action to curb the spread of the virus across the country.

Shanthi Ramanathan | Ghaziabad

advantageous to install ticket vending machines inside metro coaches for last-minute passengers. This would enhance convenience for both employees and customers, reducing arguments, stress, and conflicts, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and healthy lifestyle. In any case the digital payment is the future so why not embrace it wholeheartedly.

PVS Sreelekha | Secunderabad

PM ON MANIPUR

Madam — Prime Minister's Response to Manipur Crisis Questioned Dear Editor, Regarding the news "Modi Silences Critics on Manipur" published on July 4, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, facing criticism from the opposition over the handling of the ethnic conflict in Manipur, broke his silence on July 3, claiming that violence in the state has been declining. This statement is characteristic of Modi's tendency to address issues long after they have escalated, often offering little more than empty promises. Despite

both central and state governments being under BJP control, there has been minimal action to address the crisis effectively. Kuki residents have been unable to use Imphal airport since May 3, 2023, and essential supplies have to be transported through Mizoram. Modi's recent comments seem insincere and detached from the reality on the ground.

The Prime Minister, who has ample time for inaugurating projects and foreign visits, has not visited Manipur, which has been plagued by violence for the past 14 months. The Supreme Court has expressed its distrust in the Manipur government, reflecting the sentiment of the people towards Modi's assurances. Even as Manipur starts to stabilize, it is imperative for the Prime Minister to prioritize visiting the state and addressing the issues directly, rather than focusing on his image and political importance.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Give freebies only when essential and unavoidable

While 'freebies' schemes are intended to offer immediate relief to the targeted groups, their effectiveness and necessity remain suspect

Delhi Government on 1st July 2024 buckled down for implementing the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana, which aims to provide aid of Rs 1,000 to Delhi women above 18, barring the taxpayers, government employees and other government pension plan beneficiaries. An amount of Rs 2,000 crore has been set aside for this scheme. Several such schemes or freebies are provided by different state governments across the length and breadth of the country. Many times these freebies of diverse nature are strategically planned to precede elections and are highly poll-driven in a bid for electoral success.

These freebies or Rework culture as mentioned by PM Modi, have been defined by the Reserve Bank of India report as "a public welfare measure that is provided free of charge". They are generally aimed at benefiting the targeted population in the short term and are different from long-term welfare schemes which are categorized as public/merit goods

and are a way of promoting social justice, equity, and human development. Some examples of welfare schemes are the Public Distribution System, the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act

(MGNREGA), the mid-day meal scheme, etc. While freebies are frequently used by political parties to build public trust, it is worthwhile to analyse them as a necessity or waste.

Such schemes stimulate economic growth by incentivising and increasing the productive capacity of the workforce along with providing necessities and social welfare to the poor and marginalized sections of society. For example, freebies such as uniforms, textbooks, bicycles or health insurance can improve the literacy, mobility, health, and quality of life of the needy and vulnerable groups. By increasing the disposable income of the

poor, freebies can stimulate demand for goods and services, thereby boosting economic activity. Besides, if rationally devised, they can also reduce income inequality. For example, loan waivers, or cash transfers can empower the weaker and indebted households by giving them access to assets, credit, or income support. However, freebies are like a double-edged sword, with heavy economic and social costs. Foremost, large-scale public expenditure comes with a huge and permanent fiscal burden and macroeconomic distortions.

It leads to an immediate increase in demand, disrupting inflation; diverting funds from repaying governments' previous obligations causing accumulation of public debt; and diverting funds from more productive and essential sectors such as infrastructure, agriculture, industry, etc. leading to resource misallocation. Besides the freebies in the form of free water, electricity, or fuel can lead to the deterioration of the environment, by encouraging their

overuse and wastage of natural resources. Freebies can also lead to negative externality by creating a dependency culture and loss of productivity, reducing the incentive for individuals to seek employment or improve their economic situation through their efforts. Additionally, cash vs. kind grants are always debatable and in general cash benefits generally lead to misuse of funds such as gambling, liquor consumption, adultery, etc. which leads to deviation from the desired benefits.

In conclusion, freebies can play a crucial role in addressing immediate social and economic challenges, they must be implemented with careful consideration of their long-term impact and sustainability. A rational policy framework is needed foremost, to define the targeted section and then design the nature and amount of benefit to minimize inappropriate utilization of resources

(The author is assistant professor at Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of Commerce, University of Delhi; views are personal)



KAJLEEN KAUR





FIRST COLUMN

A TALE OF DECEIT, DESIRE AND DEVASTATION

Buddha once reflected, those captivated by lust fall into the cyclical suffering of existence



RAVI VALLURI

Those who are lust-infatuated fall back into the swirling current (of samsara) like a spider on its self-spun web," said Buddha. Aeons ago lived an old farmer whose wife was young and alluring. The prepossessing woman was not satisfied physically by her aged husband and fantasized about young men. She hardly attended to the household chores and was perpetually looking for the company of youngsters to fulfil her carnal desires. A trickster came to know about the quandary of the winsome one and seeing her alone went up to her uttering, "I am a widower. The moment I saw you I was ensnared by your voluptuous body. I beseech you to give me the pleasure of your company. However, I have very little wealth at my disposal." Delighted at the offer, the woman blurted, "O handsome one, my husband has plenty of lucre. He is old and infirm. I will embezzle the mammon and jewellery at our house and let us scoot from this place to some far away place where we can spend rest of our lives."

The strapping trickster possessing a chiselled frame became excited and asked the damsel to bring the loot and gold to a place where he would be waiting for her. "We will then leave the place as it darkens," he informed her. The farmer's wife waited till it was dark and when her husband fell asleep robbed the money and gold and left the house in the cover of darkness to meet her lover. The mountebank took the



bag full of money and gold on the pretext that he would carry it and they began their journey. After travelling some distance, they halted as there was a river to cross. The hoodwinker pondered, "What do I do with this libidinous woman? If someone were to set his eyes on her, he would perforce have to protect her. Let me scoot with the loot," he decided. His mind was cannonaded with all these thoughts, "Look, my dear, it would be arduous to cross the river. Let me first ferry the money bag to the other side of the river. I will come back and we can swim across to the other bank."

The ludicrous woman gave the bag to the young charlatan. He requested her to give up her apparel as the clothes could hinder swift swimming. The naïve lewd woman agreed to the proposal. The youthful trickster was now left with the bag and her clothes. Covering her naked body with her hands, the woman began waiting restlessly for the deluder to return. Suddenly a jackal with a piece of meat in his mouth happened to pass by. The jackal happened to see a fish that emerged from the water and in attempting to grab it dropped the piece of meat and ran towards it. However, the fish, seeing the rushing jackal, jumped back into the water.

Disappointed, the jackal went back to pick up the piece of meat. Unexpectedly a kite swooped and took it away before the jackal could reach it. The naked woman laughed at the jackal that had lost the fish and also the piece of meat. Hurt by the woman's behaviour, the jackal said, "You may be twice as intelligent as I am. But what is the use? You have lost your husband, your lover and your wealth too. The distraught woman realized her folly and entered a temple to pray for her sins as the priest draped her nudity and uttered, "Cover your nudity with the cloak of purity. Lust is ephemeral. Godliness is permanent."

(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 expressed are personal)

Paper leak: Call for fair and a political resolution



GOURAV VALLABH

Paper leaks are not merely procedural failures; they erode trust in the examination system. This matter transcends political divides and requires a systemic reform



The recent NEET paper leak has caused a stir in the nation. Paper leaks are a serious issue that must be addressed sensitively and apolitically. No government can condone such malpractices, and addressing them must prioritize fairness over political gain. This issue needs to be handled sensitively and free from political agendas. Addressing the root causes and implementing robust measures are essential to ensure the integrity of the examination process and restore trust among students and their families. Paper leaks aren't new and have happened before. It's crucial to take this issue seriously and work on solutions. Understanding why parents and students are influenced by leaked papers and addressing these root causes will help maintain exam integrity and ensure a fair process. Instances of paper leaks have undermined trust in the examination system, leading to the temptation for guaranteed selection through illicit means. It is essential to stop this practice, implement stringent security measures, enforce strict penalties for malpractices, and ensure transparent and fair examination processes to restore trust and uphold the principle of merit-based success. We must remember that the National Testing Agency (NTA) was established as a premier, specialist, autonomous, and self-sustained testing organization for higher educational institutions.

The NTA is governed by a body consisting of esteemed members such as former UPSC Chairmen, Directors of IITs, NITs, IIMs, and Vice Chancellors of JNU and IGNOU, whose integrity should not be doubted. However, the issues lie at both the policy and execution levels, and solutions are needed at both levels. Here are some proposed solutions: For examinations with over 500,000 students, a two-tier filtering system should be



THE COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND INVESTIGATIVE AGENCIES LIKE THE CBI IS ESSENTIAL IN ADDRESSING SUCH MALPRACTICES AND RESTORING TRUST IN THE EXAMINATION SYSTEM

used, including preliminary and main exams. If the number of candidates exceeds 2,000,000, a more rigorous three-tier system should be adopted: preliminary, main stage 1, and main stage 2 exams. The final merit list should be based on the average marks obtained in main stage 1 and stage 2.

This approach ensures a comprehensive evaluation process, maintaining fairness and integrity by filtering candidates through multiple stages. Implementing this system would address the challenges of managing large numbers of candidates and reduce the malpractice risk, leading to a more reliable and credible examination process. It is important to designate certain cities or centres as sensitive or extremely sensitive, similar to how polling booths are identified by the Election Commission. These centres should be under constant CCTV surveillance to maintain the integrity of the examination process, deter malpractice, and ensure fairness and transparency.

This proactive approach will help restore confidence in the examination system and mitigate the risk of irregularities. The distinction between the Examination of Selection and the Examination of Rejection must be clearly defined and resolved. High-stakes exams like NEET and JEE are designed to be rejection-based, aiming to filter out unqualified candidates. This means the primary goal is to eliminate those not meeting the necessary standards. To achieve this, paper setters need specialized training to craft exams that effectively serve this purpose.

Each question should act as a hurdle designed to bifurcate and challenge candidates and comprehensively test their knowledge and skills. This approach ensures that only the most capable and prepared students succeed. A strong question bank, online testing, and AI-based proctoring can enhance the credibility of exams. Involving all teachers in contributing to the question bank and testing items for difficulty promotes participation.

Implementing global standard cybersecurity protocols is essential to maintain the integrity of the examination process. Implementing biometric verification for handling question papers can prevent incidents like the NEET 2024 leak. Technological measures like constant surveillance, digital encryption, and secure transmission methods are crucial for ensuring fairness and security. The recent government notification of the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act on June 21 is a significant move to ensure the integrity of India's examination system. This Act introduces stringent penalties, including jail sentences of up to 10 years and fines of up to Rs 1 crore, for those involved in organized paper leaks and exam malpractices. It aims to combat examination fraud and restore public confidence in the examination process, clearly conveying that cheating and corruption will not be tolerated. This legislation deserves widespread support as it seeks to protect honest students' hard work and aspirations, ensuring a fair and transparent system for all. The grace marks system

should be eliminated as it relies on subjective measures like answering speed and accuracy, leading to inconsistency and unfair advantage. Examination bodies should avoid awarding grace marks to ensure a level playing field for all candidates, maintaining the credibility and fairness of the examination system.

The government's prompt action in conducting NEET again for 1,563 students in seven centres is commendable. Recently, the CBI was appointed to investigate NEET irregularities and has been rigorously probing the entire examination fraud, leading to the arrest of numerous brokers, teachers, principals, and others involved in the wrongdoing.

This swift response demonstrates the government's commitment to maintaining the integrity of the examination process and ensuring a fair opportunity for all students. The collaborative effort between the government and investigative agencies like the CBI is essential in addressing such malpractices and restoring trust in the examination system. Focusing on creating and enforcing fair exam policies is essential rather than engaging in political finger-pointing. Opposition parties should provide helpful solutions for issues such as exam leaks and fraud, and we need to come together to solve these problems proactively. We must prioritize students' well-being and create a secure, transparent exam environment to support their academic and career goals, positively impacting the country's future.

(The writer is a professor and a BJP leader; views are personal)

How Assange redefined the political terrain for modern whistleblowers

Julian Assange has become a symbol of the complex battle for press freedom and the protection of whistleblowers worldwide

In recent years, the narrative surrounding whistleblowers and their impact on press freedom has garnered significant global attention. Julian Assange, the founder of WikiLeaks, remains a prominent figure in this ongoing discussion. His latest legal and personal developments provide a lens through which we can examine the broader issues of press freedom, whistleblower protection, and the intricate dynamics of state power. Julian Assange is best known for founding WikiLeaks in 2006, a platform designed to publish classified, censored, or otherwise restricted information of political, ethical, diplomatic, or historical significance. WikiLeaks gained international notoriety in 2010 when it released a cache of U.S.



SANTOSH MATHEW

military documents and diplomatic cables, revealing controversial actions and policies of the U.S. government. This move cemented Assange's reputation as a champion of transparency and press freedom but also made him a target of intense legal and political scrutiny. As of mid-2024, Assange remains detained in the United Kingdom's Belmarsh Prison, fighting extradition to the United

States, where he faces charges under the Espionage Act. His legal team argues that extraditing Assange would set a dangerous precedent for journalists worldwide, potentially criminalizing the publication of classified information in the public interest. His health has been a significant concern, with reports indicating deteriorating physical and mental well-being. Human rights organizations have repeatedly called for his release, citing the harsh conditions of his detention and the potential impact on global press freedom. In addition to his legal battles over WikiLeaks, Assange has faced rape allegations in Sweden. In 2010, Swedish authorities issued an arrest warrant for Assange on charges of sexual

misconduct, including rape. Assange denied the allegations, claiming they were part of a political smear campaign. He sought asylum in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012, where he remained for seven years until his asylum was revoked in 2019, leading to his arrest by British authorities. In 2019, Swedish prosecutors dropped the investigation, but the allegations continue to cast a shadow over Assange's public image. Julian Assange's influence on global journalism and transparency cannot be overstated. Named Time Magazine's Person of the Year in 2010, Assange's work through WikiLeaks has inspired a new era of investigative journalism. By leveraging technology to

expose hidden truths, Assange has empowered journalists and activists worldwide to challenge powerful institutions and demand accountability. Julian Assange's plight is part of a larger narrative that includes other notable whistleblowers like Edward Snowden and Chelsea Manning. Snowden, a former NSA contractor, leaked classified information in 2013, revealing extensive global surveillance programs conducted by the NSA and its allies. Currently residing in Russia, Snowden continues to be an advocate for privacy and government transparency. Chelsea Manning, a former U.S. Army intelligence analyst, leaked classified military and diplomatic documents to

WikiLeaks in 2010. Her disclosures included the infamous "Collateral Murder" video, showing U.S. helicopter gunship attacks that killed civilians in Baghdad. Manning was convicted in 2013 and sentenced to 35 years in prison, but her sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama in 2017 after seven years in custody. India, with its complex socio-political landscape, has its own history of whistleblowing and press freedom challenges. Cases like those of Sanjiv Chaturvedi, an Indian Forest Service officer who exposed corruption in the Haryana Forest Department, highlight the risks faced by whistleblowers in India. Despite the Whistle Blowers Protection Act, 2014, which aims to pro-

tect individuals exposing corruption or wrongdoing, whistleblowers in India often face retaliation, including harassment, legal action, and even physical harm. The cases of Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, and Chelsea Manning illustrate the critical intersection of press freedom and whistleblower protection. While their actions have undeniably contributed to public awareness and accountability, they have also faced severe repercussions. These cases underscore the need for robust legal protections for whistleblowers and journalists to ensure that the pursuit of truth does not come at the cost of personal freedom and safety. In India and globally, the fight for press freedom and the

protection of whistleblowers is far from over. As governments continue to navigate the balance between national security and the public's right to know, the outcomes of these high-profile cases will undoubtedly influence future policies and the broader discourse on transparency and accountability. In the context of the Emergency period's media compliance, L.K. Advani's comment, "You were asked to bend, but you began to crawl," remains relevant today as a stark reminder of the dangers of compromised press freedom and the importance of journalistic integrity in holding power to account.

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

Pope to preside over interfaith meeting in Indonesian mosque

AP ■ ROME

Pope Francis will preside over an interfaith meeting in a mosque in the world's largest predominantly Muslim country during a four-nation Asian visit in September that will be the longest and most complicated foreign trip of his pontificate.



The Vatican on Friday released the itinerary for Francis' September 2-13 trip to Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. The packed schedule makes clear that the 87-year-old pontiff, who has battled health problems and is increasingly reliant on a wheelchair, has no plans to slow down. After a day of rest upon arrival in Jakarta on September 3, Francis launches into a typically rigorous round of protocol visits to heads of state and government, speeches to diplomats and meetings with clergy and public Masses. Francis will be the third pope to visit Indonesia, after Pope Paul VI in 1970 and Pope John Paul II in 1989. About 87 per cent of Indonesia's 277

million people are Muslim, but the country also has Southeast Asia's second-largest Christian population, after the Philippines, and the third-largest in Asia after the Philippines and China. In Jakarta, he'll preside over an interfaith meeting at the capital's Istiqlal Mosque, expected to be attended by leaders of the six religions in Indonesia that are officially recognised and protected: Islam, Protestant, Catholic, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism. Francis is also expected to walk through a tunnel, called the "Tunnel of Friendship," connecting the grand mosque to the neo-Gothic Our Lady of The Assumption Cathedral, which was constructed by Indonesian authorities in 2020. As a result, the first leg of Francis' four-nation trip is likely to heavily emphasise interreligious harmony and tolerance, a theme he has hammered home on many of

his foreign visits, especially to the Gulf and other Muslim majority nations. Sprinkled in the mix in all four countries are encounters with young people, poor and disabled people, elderly people and Francis' regular meetings with his Jesuit confreres. The trip was originally planned for 2020 but was called off because of the COVID-19 pandemic. At 11 full days, it's the longest of Francis' 11-year papacy, outpacing by a few days some of his long trips to the Americas and recalling some of the strenuous, globe-hopping trips of St. John Paul II. It will bring the Argentine Jesuit to the world's most populous predominantly Muslim nation, Indonesia, as well as one of the world's newest countries, the former Portuguese colony of East Timor, where the Catholic Church wields enormous influence. About 98.3 per cent of its 1.34 million population is Catholic, according to the 2022 census, and it's the Asian country with the highest proportion of Catholics after the Philippines.

Nepal PM Prachanda to face floor test on July 12 after key ally's withdrawal of support

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's embattled Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost support from two major alliance partners earlier this week, is set to seek a vote of confidence from the House of Representatives on July 12, it was announced on Friday. The prime minister sent a letter to the Parliament Secretariat asking the latter to make arrangements for the vote. In a letter addressed to the federal parliament on Friday, Prime Minister Prachanda mentioned that after one of the members of the ruling alliance withdrew the support to the government, he will seek a vote of confidence on July 12 under Article 100 (2) of the constitution of Nepal. Earlier, Prachanda, 69, had announced

that he would not quit after the resignation of eight Cabinet ministers belonging to the largest party and instead face a vote of confidence in Parliament. His announcement was prompted after Nepali Congress (NC) president Sher Bahadur Deuba and Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) chairman K P Sharma Oli, both former premiers, inked a power-sharing deal on Monday night to form a new NC-UML alliance government. According to the understanding, UML chair Oli will lead a coalition for a year and a half. As per the understanding, NC President Deuba will be the prime minister for the remaining term of the present parliament. The Nepali Congress, which is the largest party in the 275-member House of Representatives (HoR), has 89 seats,

while CPN-UML has 78 seats. Prachanda's party, the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist Centre (CPN-MC), has 32 seats. The CPN-Unified Socialist (CPN-US), which has 10 seats in the Lower House, has said it will vote in favour of the Prachanda-led government. Despite that support, Prachanda enjoys support from just 63 members of the HoR. He requires 138 votes for the government to win the vote of confidence in the House. This will be the fifth time Prachanda will seek a vote of confidence within a term of one and a half years. It is required for the coalition government to seek a vote of confidence within 30 days if a coalition partner withdraws support. Nepal has had 13 governments in the last 16 years, indicating the fragile nature of the Himalayan nation's political system.

Brazil's Bolsonaro indicted for alleged money laundering

AP ■ SAO PAULO

The indictment dramatically raises the legal threats facing the divisive ex-leader that are applauded by his opponents but denounced as political persecution by his supporters. Bolsonaro did not immediately comment, but he and his lawyers have previously denied any wrongdoing in both those cases, as well as other investigations into the former president. One is probing his possible involvement in inciting an uprising in capital Brasilia on January 8, 2023 that sought to oust his successor from power. Last year, Federal Police accused Bolsonaro of attempting to sneak in diamond jewellery reportedly worth USD 3 million and selling two luxury watches. Police said in August that Bolsonaro received cash from the nearly USD 70,000 sale of two luxury watches he received as gifts from Saudi Arabia. Brazil requires its citizens arriving by plane from abroad to declare goods worth more than USD 1,000 and, for any amount

above that exemption, pay a tax equal to 50 per cent of their value. The jewellery would have been exempt from tax had it been a gift from Saudi Arabia to Brazil, but not Bolsonaro's to keep for himself. Rather, it would have been added to the presidential collection. The investigation showed that Mauro Cid, Bolsonaro's former aide-de-camp who allegedly falsified his COVID-19 records, in June 2022 sold a Rolex watch and a Patek Philippe watch to a store in the US for a total USD 68,000. They were gifted by Saudi Arabia's government in 2019. Cid later signed a plea bargain with authorities and confirmed it all. Flavio Bolsonaro, the former president's eldest son and a sitting senator, said on X after Thursday's indictment that persecution against his father was "blatant and shameless". In addition to Bolsonaro, police indicted 10 others, including Cid and two of his lawyers, Frederick Wassef and Fábio

Wajngarten, according to one of the sources. Wassef said in a statement that he didn't have access to the final report of the investigation, and decried selective leaks to the press of an investigation that is supposed to be proceeding under seal. "I am going through all of this solely for practising law in defence of Jair Bolsonaro," he wrote. On X, Wajngarten said police have found no evidence implicating him. "The Federal Police knows I did nothing related to what they are investigating, but they still want to punish me because I provide unwavering and permanent defence for former President Bolsonaro," he said. Bolsonaro retains staunch allegiance among his political base, as shown by an outpouring of support in February, when an estimated 185,000 people clogged Sao Paulo's main boulevard to protest what the former president calls political persecution. His critics, particularly members of his rival President



Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei casts his vote for the presidential runoff election in Tehran, Iran, Friday, July 5, 2024. Iranians began voting Friday in a runoff election to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi, killed in a helicopter crash last month, as public apathy has become pervasive in the Islamic Republic after years of economic woes, mass protests and tensions in the Middle East. AP/PTI

Israel conducts military operation in West Bank city of Jenin, 7 Palestinians killed

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Palestinian authorities say seven people were killed Friday during an Israeli military operation in the area of the West Bank city of Jenin, where the Israeli military said it had been carrying out "counterterrorism activity" that included an airstrike. The military said Israeli soldiers had "encircled a building where terrorists have barricaded themselves in" and the soldiers had exchanged fire with those inside, while an airstrike had "struck several armed terrorists" in the area. The Palestinian Health Ministry said a total of seven people had been killed, but did not specify whether they died in the exchange of fire or the airstrike. The Islamic Jihad militant group named four of the dead as its members. The clashes in Jenin, a known militant stronghold where the army frequently operates, came a day after an Israeli anti-set-



tlement monitoring group said the government plans to build nearly 5,300 new homes in settlements in the occupied West Bank. The construction plans revealed by the Peace Now group are part of the hard-line government's efforts to beef up settlements as part of a strategy of cementing Israel's control over the West Bank to prevent a future Palestinian state. The Palestinians seek the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza — areas captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war — for an independent state. Violence has spiralled in the West Bank since the start of Israel's war in Gaza, sparked by the October 7 raid into south-

ern Israel by Hamas militants who killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took more than 200 others as hostages. The Palestinian Health Ministry says over 500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war. Most have been killed during Israeli raids and violent protests. The dead also include bystanders and Palestinians killed in attacks by Jewish settlers. In Gaza, the war has so far killed more than 38,000 Palestinians, Gaza's Health Ministry says. The ministry does not differentiate between combatants and civilians in its count, but it includes thousands of women and children. Cease-fire talks appeared to be reviving after stalling for weeks. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office said Thursday he was sending negotiators to resume the talks, a day after Hamas handed mediators its latest response to a US-backed proposal for a deal.

Beryl makes landfall on Mexico's Caribbean coast near Tulum

AP ■ TULUM

Hurricane Beryl made landfall on Mexico's coast near the resort of Tulum as a Category 2 storm early Friday, whipping trees and knocking out power as it came ashore after leaving a trail of destruction across the eastern Caribbean. The US National Hurricane Centre said that Beryl is expected to rapidly weaken to a tropical storm as it crosses over the Yucatan Peninsula before it re-emerges into the Gulf of Mexico and likely regains hurricane strength. Once in the warm waters of the Gulf, Beryl is forecast to head toward northern Mexico near the Texas border, an area had already been soaked by Tropical Storm Alberto just a couple of weeks ago. Once the earliest storm to

develop into a Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic, Beryl spread destruction in Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Barbados in recent days. Shortly after landfall, Beryl's maximum windspeeds had decreased to 100 mph (160 kph), according to the US Hurricane Centre. Mexican authorities had moved some tourists and residents out of low-lying areas around the Yucatan peninsula prior to landfall, but tens of thousands remained to tough out the 100 mph (160 kph) winds and expected storm surge. Much of the area around Tulum is just a few yards (metres) above sea level. The city was plunged into darkness when the storm knocked out power as it came ashore. Screaming winds set off car alarms across the town. Once a sleepy, laid-back village,

in recent years Tulum has boomed with unrestrained development and now has about 50,000 permanent inhabitants and at least as many tourists on an average day. The resort now has its own international airport. Early Friday, the storm's center was about 15 miles (25 kilometers) north-northwest of Tulum and was moving west-northwest at 15 mph (about 24 kph), the hurricane center said. On Friday, Beryl was expected to weaken as it crossed over the Yucatan peninsula and re-emerge in the Gulf of Mexico, where the surprisingly resilient storm could once again become a hurricane and make a second landfall around Mexico's border with Texas next week. As the wind began gusting over Tulum's beaches, four-wheelers with megaphones rolled along the sand telling people to leave. Tourists snapped photos of the growing surf, but military personnel urged them to leave. Authorities around the Yucatan peninsula have prepared shelters, evacuated some small outlying coastal communities and even moved sea turtle eggs off beaches threatened by storm surge. In Tulum, authorities shut things down and evacuated beachside hotels. Tourists were also taking precautions. Lara Marsters, 54, a therapist visiting Tulum from Boise, Idaho, said "this morning we woke up and just filled all of our empty water bottles with water from the tap and put it in the freezer ... so we will have water to flush the toilet." "We expect that the power will go out," Marsters said. "We're going to hunker down and stay safe."

Fireworks light up skies across US as Americans celebrate July 4

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Millions of people in the US celebrated and suffered under heat warnings as they flocked to beaches and travelled in droves to toast their nation's birth with July 4 parades, cookouts and the always anticipated fiery splashes of colour in the evening sky. In Washington, neon bursts of light illuminated the night above the National Mall. The Boston Pops performed a musical fireworks spectacular at that city's Hatch Memorial Shell. And at parades all across the country, revelers dressed up in red, white and blue and waved the Stars and Stripes in commemoration of Independence Day. Travel records were projected to fall with people jamming airports and crowding highways to reach Thursday's Independence Day celebra-

tions, which will stretch into a long weekend for many. On the East Coast, some would-be beachgoers in Connecticut were turned away as parking at state parks along the shore filled to capacity, including a 2-mile (3 kilometer) stretch at Hammonasset Beach State Park — the state's largest shoreline beach. Across the West, meanwhile, residents dealt with stifling heat as the National Weather Service warned of a "significant and extremely dangerous" heat wave across much of the region. A heat advisory in Philadelphia that came with temperatures tipping into the 90s didn't stop crowds from gathering at historic sites in the city where the Declaration of Independence was adopted on July 4, 1776. Outside the National Constitution Centre, volunteer actors dressed in Revolutionary War-era cos-

tume made of heavy wool, despite the heat. Participants said it was worth it. "It keeps you connected to your neighbourhood and where you live," said Adrian Mercado, who was donning a 6th Pennsylvania Regiment uniform. Evening fireworks were scheduled over the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, after a concert by Ne-Yo and Kesha. Fireworks crackled in backyard displays and an anticipated 16,000 professional shows were planned to light up the horizon from sea to shining sea. Millions of people were expected to watch the Macy's 4th of July Fireworks show in New York City, where cross rings, strobing comets, waterfalls and other effects can reach up to 1,000 feet (305 metres) in the air. Excited viewers crowded along both the New York and New Jersey sides of the Hudson River as

dusk turned to dark, and they hoped rain would stay away. "This is how we celebrate. It's the bombs bursting in air. It's the rockets' red glare. That's how people show their pride and patriotism," said Julie Heckman of the American Pyrotechnics Association. All signs pointed to big celebrations: The Transportation Security Administration reported that a record of nearly 3 million people travelled through airports in a single day last week, a figure expected to be broken this week. AAA projected that 60.6 million people will travel by car during the holiday period. Part of the boost was attributed to easing inflation, though many Americans remain concerned about the economy. On much of the West Coast, residents were advised to take precautions to avoid overheating on the holiday.

Hungary PM Orbán meets Putin for talks in Moscow

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin welcomed Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán to Moscow on Friday for a rare meeting with a European leader to discuss peace proposals for Ukraine.



Commission spokesperson Eric Mamer said, Hungary at the beginning of the month took over the six-month rotating presidency of the EU Council, a largely formal role that can be used to shape the bloc's policy agenda.

Josep Borrell, said in a statement that Orbán's visit to Moscow "takes place, exclusively, in the framework of the bilateral relations between Hungary and Russia."

Hungarian Prime Minister is thus not representing the EU in any form." He noted that Putin has been indicted by the International Criminal Court and an arrest warrant released for his role in relation to the forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia.

foreign policy chief, accused Orbán of "exploiting" the presidency and said the Hungarian leader is trying "to sow confusion." "The EU is united, clearly behind Ukraine and against Russian aggression," Kallas, a staunch supporter of Ukraine, wrote Friday on the social media platform X.

not represent anything. The only thing I do is go to those places where there is a war or the threat of war that has negative consequences for Europe and Hungary as well."

Lanka achieved \$8 billion relief through debt restructuring: Prez

Colombo (PTI): President

Ranil Wickremesinghe on Friday said Sri Lanka saved USD 8 billion over the past two years due to "effective economic management" and emphasised that the nation is now recovering from economic turmoil due to debt restructuring. Sri Lanka finalised debt restructuring agreements with bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris on June 26. Earlier on June 12, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) disbursed the third tranche of USD 336 million from its USD 2.9 billion bailout package to Sri Lanka.

Prachanda to face floor test on July 12 after key ally's withdrawal of support

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

Nepal's embattled Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal 'Prachanda', who lost support from two major alliance partners earlier this week, is set to seek a vote of confidence from the House of Representatives on July 12, it was announced on Thursday.

belonging to the largest party and instead face a vote of confidence in Parliament. His announcement was prompted after Nepali Congress (NC) president Sher Bahadur Deuba and Communist Party of Nepal-Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) chairman K P Sharma Oli, both former premiers, inked a power-sharing deal on Monday night to form a new NC-UML alliance government.

Vatican declares US ex-envoy Vigano guilty of schism

AP ■ ROME

The Vatican has excommunicated its former ambassador to the US, Archbishop Carlo Maria Vigano, after finding him guilty of schism, an inevitable end for the firebrand conservative who became one of Pope Francis' most ardent critics.

Catholics who are subject to him. It is considered particularly dangerous to the faith because it threatens the unity of the church. And in fact, Vigano had created a following of like-minded conservatives and traditionalists over the years as he delved deeper and deeper into conspiracy theories about everything from the coronavirus pandemic, to what he called the "Great Reset" and other fringe ideas.

lic's awareness in 2012, during the first Vatileaks scandal, when Pope Benedict XVI's butler leaked the pontiff's private papers to an Italian journalist to try to draw attention to corruption in the Holy See.

Man who stabbed South Korea opp leader gets 15 years in prison

Seoul (AP): A man who

stabbed South Korea's opposition leader in the neck earlier this year was sentenced to 15 years in prison on Friday, court officials said. The knife-wielding man attacked Lee Jae-myung, head of the liberal Democratic Party, South Korea's biggest political party, in January after approaching him asking for his autograph at an event in the southeastern city of Busan.

the country's crucial parliamentary elections in April, which ended with Lee's Democratic Party and other opposition parties winning a massive victory against President Yoon Suk Yeol's conservative governing party. A court verdict called the attack "a grave challenge" to the country's election systems and an act that "significantly destroys social consensus and confidence on the basic liberal democratic principles," according to Yonhap news agency. It cited the verdict as saying the attacker had long loathed Lee because of differences of political opinions, practised stabbing his neck in advance and followed him on five public events. The court's public affairs office couldn't immediately confirm details of Friday's verdict. The court didn't disclose the man's identity. Police earlier said he's about 67.

Af wants to dust off postal service and modernise

AP ■ KABUL

In parts of Afghanistan where there are no street names or house numbers, utility companies and their customers have adopted a creative approach for connecting. They use mosques as drop points for bills and cash, a "pay and pray" system. Now the national postal service wants to phase this out by putting mailboxes on every street across the country, part of a plan to modernise a service long challenged by bureaucracy and war.

nies don't deliver even to the capital, Kabul. The changes mean Afghans will pay higher service fees, a challenge as more than half the population already relies on humanitarian aid to survive. The Afghan Post, like much of the country, still does everything on paper. "Nobody uses email," said its business development director, Zabihullah Omar. "Afghanistan is a member of the Universal Postal Union, but when we compare ourselves to other countries it is at a low level and in the early stages."

admission to higher education or overseas institutions. The main Kabul branch has dedicated counters for it along with VIP lanes and a women-only area. Post offices in Afghanistan are vital for women wanting to access services or products they would otherwise be denied, since they are often barred from entering ministries or other official premises. But the spectre of the Taliban's edicts targeting women and girls also looms at the Afghan Post. At the entrance to the main Kabul branch, a sign tells women to correctly wear hijab, or the Islamic headscarf. One picture shows a woman with a red cross over her visible face. The other has a green check mark over the face because only her eyes are seen.

Pope to preside over interfaith meeting in Indonesian mosque

Rome (AP): Pope Francis

will preside over an interfaith meeting in a mosque in the world's largest predominantly Muslim country during a four-nation Asian visit in September that will be the longest and most complicated foreign trip of his pontificate. The Vatican on Friday released the itinerary for Francis' September 2-13 trip to Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Singapore. The packed schedule makes clear that the 87-year-old pontiff, who has battled health problems and is increasingly reliant on a wheelchair, has no plans to slow down. After a day of rest upon arrival in Jakarta on September 3, Francis launches into a typically rigorous round of protocol visits to the four countries' heads of state and

government, speeches to diplomats and meetings with clergy and public Masses in each location. In Jakarta, he'll preside over an interfaith meeting at the capital's Istiqlal Mosque. Sprinkled in the mix are encounters with young people, poor and disabled people, elderly people and Francis' regular meetings with his Jesuit confidantes. The trip was originally planned for 2020 but was called off because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Francis had to cancel his last planned foreign visit -- a quick trip to Dubai last year to participate in the UN climate conference -- because of a recurring case of bronchitis. He has seemed in relatively good form in recent months, including during day trips to Italian cities and visits to Roman parishes.

Pak Punjab province to ban social media platforms for 6 days during Muharram

Lahore (PTI): The government

in Pakistan's Punjab province is now set to ban all social media platforms — YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok — for six days between July 13 and 18, citing the need to control "hate material" during the Islamic month of Muharram. Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz's cabinet committee on law and order has recommended banning all social media platforms — YouTube, X, WhatsApp, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok, among others — during the 6th to 11th day of Muharram (July 13-18) in Punjab, a province of over 120 million people, to "control hate material, misinformation to avoid sectarian violence," according to a notification issued here late Thursday night.

media apps, particularly Facebook and X during Muharram, which eventually becomes a bone of contention between two sects instead of the two persons involved. "Dissemination of hate content creates bad blood and spoils the overall environment, particularly during Muharram," he said

and added that shutting down social media apps was recommended before, during and a day after Muharram. Pakistan Army Chief Gen Asim Munir has already declared social media a "vicious media" and underscored the need to fight what he called "digital terrorism".

Fierce fighting breaks out as militias launch new attacks

AP ■ BANGKOK

New fighting has broken out in northeastern Myanmar, bringing an end to a Chinese-brokered cease-fire and putting pressure on the military regime as it faces attacks from resistance forces on multiple fronts in the country's civil war. The Taang National Liberation Army, one of three powerful militias that launched a surprise joint offensive last October, renewed its attacks on regime positions last week in northeastern Shan state, which borders China, Laos and Thailand, and the neighbouring Mandalay region with the support of local forces there. Since then, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army has joined in, and by Friday, combined forces from the two allied militias had reportedly encircled the strate-

gically important city of Lashio, headquarters of the regime's northeastern military command. This is the next phase of October's "1027" offensive, said Lway Yay Oo, spokesperson for the TNLA, which last week said the military provoked retaliation with artillery and airstrikes despite the cease-fire. "In phase two, our number one aim is the eradication of the military dictatorship, and number two is the protection and safety of local people," she said. The Shwe, a spokesperson for the military regime, which seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February 2021, accused the militias of putting civilians in jeopardy by restarting the fighting. "As the TNLA are starting to violate the cease-fire, the Tatmadaw is protecting the lives and the property of the ethnic people," he said in an

email to the AP, referring to the military by its Burmese name. There was no indication that the third ethnic armed organization that makes up the Three Brotherhood Alliance, the powerful Arakan Army, has joined in the renewed fighting in Shan state, but its troops have never stopped fighting in its home Rakhine state, which was not covered by the Jan. 11 cease-fire. The TNLA claims to have already captured more than 30 army outposts, and to now control the western part of Mogoke, whose ruby mines make it a lucrative target. There is also fighting for the town of Kyaukme, which sits at a high-way crossroads, and Nawnghkio to the southwest, which leads toward the major military garrison town of Pyin Oo Lwin along the same highway. "That's where you need to cut

it off to prevent the military from sending reinforcements," said Morgan Michaels, a Singapore-based analyst with the International Institute of Strategic Studies who runs its Myanmar Conflict Map project. In Mandalay, the region west of Shan, a local People's Defense Force — one of many armed resistance groups that have sprung up in support of the underground National Unity Government, which views itself as Myanmar's legitimate administration — joined the TNLA's offensive. Osmond, a spokesperson for the Mandalay People's Defense Force who would only give his nom de guerre because of safety concerns, said his and other local resistance groups have seized nearly 20 military outposts. The October offensive by the Three Brotherhood Alliance made rapid advances as the militias took large

expanses of territory in the north and northeast, including multiple important border crossings with China and several major military bases. The alliance militias have close ties to China, and it's widely believed that the offensive had Beijing's tacit approval because of its growing dissatisfaction with the military regime's seeming indifference to the burgeoning drug trade along its border and the proliferation of centers in Myanmar at which cyberscams are run, with workers trafficked from China and elsewhere in the region. China then helped broker the cease-fire in January, bringing the major fighting in the northeast to an end, even as other ethnic armed organizations and PDF groups launched their own attacks on regime positions elsewhere around the country.

PUNJAB STATE POWER CORPORATION LTD. (Regd. Office: PSEB Head Office, The Mall Patiala-147001) Corporate Identity Number: U40109PB2010SGC033813 Website: www.pspcl.in (Contact Number 9846117607)

Tender Enquiry No. 105/GHTP/MM-II/CS-49(X) Dated 04-07-2024 Dy. Chief Engineer / MM-II/ GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat invites E-tender for the work of "AMC for Repair, Laying & Joining of Conveyor Belts and Pulley Lagging of Conveyor System of CHP Stage-I & II at GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat as per detail in tender specifications.

For detailed NIT and tender specifications please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in from 05-07-2024, 11:30 AM onwards. Note: Corrigendum and addendum if any, will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in only. GHTP-48/24

76155/12/3069/2023/35373 Dated CHD - 7/5/2024

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Tender Enquiry No. 321/HPs/ED-I/S-426 Dated 04-07-2024 Dy. Chief Engineer / MM-II/ GHTP, Lehra Mohabbat invites E-tender for the work of "REPAIR OF ONE NO.15 MW PELTON TURBINE RUNNER HAVING SR. NO. 03/RE/SHANAN FOR SHANAN, HEP, PSPCL, JOGINDER NAGAR, DISTT. MANDI (H.P.)

For detailed NIT & tender specification please refer to https://eproc.punjab.gov.in Note: Corrigendum and Addendum, if any will be published online at https://eproc.punjab.gov.in C407/24

76155/12/3072/2023/35378 Dated CHD - 7/5/2024

verka THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD. SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022. EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66 Notice Inviting e Tender www.verka.coop

e-tender is hereby invited for the supply of following item :- Name of Work/Item Period/Tentative Qty For Verka Head Office Chandigarh

NOTE: 1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in. 2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only. Dy. General Manager (Purchase) NA/12/23917/2023/35350 Dated CHD :- 7/5/2024

Sebi issues new guidelines to streamline operations of credit rating agencies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Markets regulator Sebi has issued new guidelines to streamline operations and enhance the ease of doing business for credit rating agencies.



CRAs (Credit Rating Agencies), it has been decided to provide specific timelines for dealing with appeals made by the issuer in respect of rating actions carried out pursuant to periodic surveillance of ratings.

three working days to request a review or appeal of the rating decision, and the dissemination of the press release on the CRA's website and intimation of the same to the stock exchange or debenture trustee must occur within 7 working days of the rating committee meeting.

Sebi has also outlined specific timelines for certain types of disclosures, such as a list of non-cooperative issuers that should be updated daily, ensuring that stakeholders are promptly informed about issuers who fail to cooperate with rating agencies.

Nifty scales new lifetime high

Sensex retreats from record to slip below 80K

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The broader NSE benchmark Nifty advanced further to settle at an all-time high for the third straight session on Friday, while the BSE gauge Sensex retreated from the record to slip below the 80k level.



India, Power Grid, ITC, JSW Steel and Sun Pharmaceuticals were the major gainers. On the other hand, HDFC Bank, Titan, Mahindra & Mahindra, IndusInd Bank, UltraTech Cement, Tata Motors, HCL Technologies and Asian Paints were among the laggards.

"The domestic market traded with a mixed bias, with the heavy-weight banking sector acting as a laggard. Adding to the worry are the top lending banks, which recorded a sequential decline in deposit growth in the June quarter."

all-time high," Vinod Nair, Head of Research at Geojit Financial Services, said. Asian markets were closed on a mixed note on Thursday. The US markets were closed on Thursday for Independence Day.

Passenger vehicle retail sales dip as heatwave curtails showroom visits

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Passenger vehicle retail sales in India witnessed a 7 per cent on-year decline in June as severe heatwave conditions resulted in 15 per cent less showroom walk-ins, industry body FADA said on Friday.

customer inquiries and postponed purchase decisions, he added. Singhania also highlighted that inventory levels of passenger vehicles have reached an all-time high, ranging from 62 to 67 days.



Factors such as extreme heat resulted in 13 per cent less walk-ins by probable customers in showrooms, Singhania said. Stalled monsoon and

Commercial vehicle sales dropped 5 per cent to 72,747 units last month, from 76,364 units in June 2023. "The industry continues to face de-growth, impacted by high temperatures affecting the agricultural sector and infrastructural project slowdowns," Singhania stated.

constraints and regional market variations remain. In the passenger vehicle segment, high inventory levels and ongoing low market sentiment necessitate cautious management, the industry body said.

Only 7 per cent of MSME credit to women: RBI ED

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Reserve Bank's executive director Neeraj Nigam on Friday said low labour force participation among women is a barrier to financial inclusion efforts and also to broader economic growth.

Small & Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), he said, adding that this is very low when compared to nearly a fifth of the MSMEs being women-led.

Startups to showcase cybersecurity innovations in mega summit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Prominent founders, global cybersecurity experts and chief information security officers (CISOs) of large enterprises as well as tech unicorns will gather at the Accel Cybersecurity Summit scheduled to be held in Bengaluru on July 25.



According to a report by the Data Security Council of India, the market reached approximately USD 6 billion in 2023, clocking a CAGR (compounded annual growth rate) of over 30 per cent from 2019 to 2023.

tracks tailored to the varied interests of participants, and a pavilion where startups and data security teams can showcase their products. The 'application security' track will cover topics like setting up a high-quality AppSec programme, which involves practices and tools to protect applications from threats and vulnerabilities during development and deployment, and automating tasks across the AppSec stack.

Veg thali gets dearer by 10 per cent in June on onion, tomato price jump: Crisil

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The average cost of a vegetarian thali became dearer by 10 per cent in June due to the jump in onion, potato, and tomato prices, a report said on Friday.



On the surge in tomato prices, it said virus infestation in the summer crop due to high temperatures in key growing regions of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh reduced tomato arrivals by 35 per cent year-on-year.

Training for interns held



PNS ■ SONEPAT

National Institute of Food Technology Entrepreneurship and Management, Kundli (NIFTEM-K) under the Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI) has launched its second training-cum-internship programme on food technology development starting from today.

Govt makes ISI mark must for stainless steel, aluminium utensils

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The government has made it mandatory for stainless steel and aluminium kitchen utensils to conform to national quality standards, the Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) said on Friday, in a move aimed at enhancing consumer safety and product quality.

utensils. Indian Standards Institution (ISI) mark is developed by BIS, assuring of product quality and safety. According to BIS, the order prohibits the manufacture, import, sale, distribution, storage, or exhibition for sale of any stainless steel or aluminium utensils that do not bear the BIS standard mark.

JSW Energy plans ₹15K crore capex in FY25

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

JSW Energy Chairman & Managing Director Sajjan Jindal on Friday said the company has planned a capital expenditure of Rs 15,000 crore during the current fiscal year. In his address to shareholders at the annual general meeting, he said, the company intends to spend around Rs 1,15,000 crore to reach the goal of 20 GW generation and 40 GW storage under 'Strategy 2.0'.

production, it said. The growth capital secured through the recently completed QIP (qualified institutional placement) strategically positions the company to accelerate the execution of returns accretive growth plans, he noted. In April 2024, JSW Energy had raised Rs 5,000 crore of equity through a QIP issue to build a war chest for accelerating its growth ambitions.

कार्यालय नगर निगम, देहरादून

Table with 4 columns: क्रम सं०, मार्ग का नाम, युनिपोल/होर्डिंग हेतु कुल साईट, निगम द्वारा विज्ञापन हेतु आरक्षित निविदा घनराशि. Includes details for various sites and their respective values.

Table for Northern Railway Notice Inviting Tender. Columns include Name of Work and its Location, Approx Cost, Address of the Office, Bid Security, Date & time of submission of tender, Opening of tender, Website & Notice Board.

Table for Nagarnigam Dehradun. Columns include निविदा प्रप्रत के अनुसार, कुल पोल, निगम द्वारा आरक्षित घनराशि. Includes details for various tenders and their values.

YOUR INPUTS WILL HELP 2036 BID: PM ASKS ATHLETES TO SHARE OBSERVATIONS ON CONDUCT OF OLYMPICS

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Confident that India's bid to host the 2036 Olympics will be successful, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has urged athletes bound for this month's Paris Games to share their views on the arrangements in the French capital to help his government's ambitious plan to bring the quadrennial showpiece here. In an interaction with Paris-bound athletes, conducted both in person and online on Thursday, Modi said those travelling to the French capital would do the country a huge service by providing inputs from their experience. "We are hoping to host the Olympics in 2036, it will help in creating a sporting atmosphere (in the country). Work is in progress to prepare infrastructure for it," he said in the interaction, which was attended by the national men's hockey team, the shooting contingent, boxers and track-and-field stars such as Neeraj Chopra among others. The complete video of the PM's light-hearted conversation with the athletes was shared by his office on Friday. The meeting with the contingent was also attended by sports minister Mansukh Mandaviya and Indian Olympic Association (IAO)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi interacts with the athletes of the Indian contingent who are going to represent the country for the first time in the Paris Olympics, in New Delhi, Thursday, July 4, 2024

President P T Usha. "I won't ask you to do anything in the middle of your events but when you are free, I would urge you to observe the arrangements. Your inputs will help our bid for 2036. We will have an understanding on how to make sure that we are better-prepared," he added in his closing remarks to the athletes. The upcoming Games will be held from July 26 to August 11 and India would be hoping to better its best ever tally of seven medals, including Chopra's historic javelin throw gold, achieved in the Tokyo Games. Over 100 Indian sportspeople have qualified for the Games, including an unprecedented 21 shooters, who would be aiming to end the medal drought of last two editions. India has repeatedly asserted its desire to host the Games and found support from International Olympic Committee (IOC) chief Thomas Bach. However, it would be no walk in the park to secure the rights as several other strong contenders such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia are also expected to throw their hats in the ring. A decision on the 2036 Games host is not expected before next year's IOC elections where a new President is expected to take charge.



Abhay leads India's charge on first day of Asian doubles squash

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Asian Games medallist Abhay Singh led India's charge on the opening day of the Asian Doubles Squash Championships by registering comfortable wins in both his events along side his respective partners in Johor, Malaysia. The Indian contingent registered four wins in five outings on the opening day of the event on Thursday. Abhay and Velavan Senthilkumar beat David Pelino and Reymark Begornia of Philippines 2-0 (11-4 11-6) in the men's doubles group stage. Abhay then teamed up with experienced Joshna Chinappa in the mixed doubles, with the Indian pair starting with a bang, winning both their Pool C matches on Thursday. Abhay and Joshna first accounted for Philippines pair of Yvonne Dalida and Reymark Begornia 11-4 11-3 and then returned to the court to beat Naisha Singh and Anders Ong Wee Jun of Singapore 11-3 11-6. The women's doubles pair of Rathika Suthanthira Seelan and Pooja Arthi R won one and lost one.

INDIA'S RESULTS:
Men's doubles: Abhay/Velavan bt David Pelino/Reymark Begornia (PHI) 11-4 11-6.
Women's doubles: Rathika/Pooja bt Raifa Putri Yattaqi/Zalzabila (INA) 11-1 11-4, Rathika/Pooja lost Ho Tze Lok/Fung Ching Hei (HKG) 4-11 6-11.
Mixed doubles: Abhay/Joshna bt Yvonne Dalida/Reymark Begornia (PHI) 11-4 11-3, Abhay/Joshna bt Naisha Singh/Anders Ong Wee Jun (SGP) 11-3 11-6.

Misfiring England faces in-form Switzerland for semifinal spot



AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)
England will play Switzerland in the quarterfinals of Euro 2024 on Saturday. England faced criticism from fans who thought the team underperformed in its extra-time win over Slovakia, while Switzerland exceeded expectations by knocking out defending champion Italy. The winner will play either the Netherlands or Turkey in the semifinals. Here's what to know about the match:
Match facts: England is playing its fourth quarterfinal game at a major tournament under manager Gareth Southgate and won two of the previous three. Southgate's cautious tactics have brought heavy criticism from England fans, some of whom threw plastic cups at him in the group stage.
■ Jude Bellingham's last-minute overhead kick to send England's last-16 game with Slovakia to extra time was one of the most dramatic moments of Euro 2024 so far. Defender John Stones said surviving that brush with elimination gave the team new confidence.
■ Switzerland coach Murat Yakin has won a reputation for smart tactics at Euro 2024, especially by outclassing an Italy team packed with more famous names in the round of 16.
■ England is playing two days after a general election ended 14 years of rule by the Conservative Party. It didn't make waves in the England camp, which Stones called a "politics-free zone."
Team news: Bellingham is under investigation by UEFA after seemingly making a gesture toward his crotch during England's last game. He has denied he was mocking Slovakia, saying it was an "inside joke gesture towards some close friends who were at the game."
■ England defender Marc Guehi is suspended after picking up a second booking



UEFA suspends Turkey player Merih Demiral for 2 games for making nationalistic gesture at Euro 2024

AP ■ BERLIN
The Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) has suspended Turkey player Merih Demiral for two matches for making a controversial gesture at the European Championship. The governing body said Friday that it had banned the defender "for failing to comply with the general principles of conduct, for violating the basic rules of decent conduct, for using sports events for manifestations of a non-sporting nature and for bringing the sport of football into disrepute." Demiral scored both goals Tuesday in a 2-1 win over Austria to earn Turkey's place in the quarterfinals and celebrated with a hand sign associated with an ultranationalist group. After scoring the second goal he made a sign with each hand that is used by Turkish nationalists and associated with the Turkish ultranationalist organization Ulku Ocaklari, which is more widely known as the Gray Wolves. Demiral will miss Turkey's match with the Netherlands in Berlin on Saturday.

Jude Bellingham avoids immediate ban at Euro 2024 over offensive gesture

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)
Jude Bellingham has avoided an immediate ban after the England midfielder appeared to make an offensive gesture in his team's win over Slovakia. Bellingham will be available for England's game against Switzerland on Saturday for a place in the semifinals after UEFA on Friday imposed a one-game ban but said it "is not immediately enforced and is subject to a probationary period" of a year. The Real Madrid midfielder will have to pay a fine of 30,000 euros (\$32,500). UEFA said the punishment was "for violating the basic rules of decent conduct" in the Slovakia game. Bellingham seemed to make a gesture with his hand toward his crotch after scoring an overhead kick to level the score Sunday as England went on to win 2-1 in extra time. Bellingham's goal with about 80 seconds left in the game saved England from a humiliating exit in the first knockout round. Bellingham previously denied suggestions he gestured toward the Slovakia bench. "An inside joke gesture towards some close friends who were at the game. Nothing but respect for how that Slovakia team played tonight," Bellingham wrote on X. UEFA also fined England a total of 11,000 euros (\$11,900) for crowd disturbances and the "lighting of fireworks" at the Slovakia game.



Andy Murray's Wimbledon farewell tour begins with a loss in doubles with his brother

AP ■ LONDON
There were tears from Andy Murray. Standing ovations from the Centre Court crowd. A video tribute replete with messages from Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic and Venus Williams. And, yes, a doubles match Murray played alongside his brother on Thursday, all part of the first stop on the two-time Wimbledon singles champion's farewell tour at a tournament that meant so much to him. The Murrays lost 7-6(6) 6-4 in the first round of men's doubles against Rinky Hijikata and John Peers - but the result was, truly, beside the point on this evening. "The match itself, it was tough, physically. It was hard for me. ... I was fortunate I was even able to get on the court to play," said Murray, who had surgery to remove a cyst from his spine less than two weeks ago, forcing him to withdraw from singles. "It was pretty emotional," Murray said about the postmatch tribute. "Watching the video was nice, but hard as well, for me. Because you know it's coming to the end of something that you absolutely loved doing for such a long time. So that was difficult." It was the first time a men's doubles first-round match was played in the event's main stadium in nearly 30 years, a fitting way for him to begin to say goodbye - and for his many fans to offer their thanks and well wishes, too. Murray, a 37-year-old from Scotland, has said he will head into retirement after playing at the All England Club, where he is also entered in mixed doubles with 2021 US Open winner Emma Raducanu, and the Paris Olympics, which begin later this month. "I'm ready to finish playing," Murray said, "because I can't play to the level I want to anymore." Murray occasionally fidgeted with his back and looked a tad uncomfortable while playing, but he also let out a celebratory scream after hitting a forehand return winner to go up a break at 2-0 in the second set, the type of shot that helped him reach No. 1 in the rankings. This was the first time the Murray siblings had played together at the All England Club. They bumped fists before the match began; they slapped palms between points. Their mother, Judy, who taught both boys tennis, was in a guest box, sitting with Andy's wife, Kim, and two of the couple's four children. "It was a fun experience for me to be out there and play with him," Jamie said. "It was sort of strange knowing what the background was." Jamie's younger brother became a superstar in these parts by winning Wimbledon in 2013, making him the first British man to triumph in singles at the All England Club in 77 years. He won the title again in 2016. His other Grand Slam trophy came at the US Open in 2012, the same year he won his first singles gold medal at the London Olympics at Centre Court - "One of my favourite days I've ever had, certainly as an athlete," he said on Thursday - and the next, at Rio de Janeiro in 2016, made him the only player with two in a row. There were some of his usual mannerisms, whether it was tugging on the brim of his white hat or leaning over to pull on the tongues of his shoes or clenching a fist while looking up at the stands. There wasn't as much of the fire and brimstone he was famous for, the cursing and muttering directed at his team or, just as frequently, himself. "Sometimes," Djokovic said during the four-minute video, "it looked like you against the world." Then it was Federer's turn to say: "But you were never alone. Because while you carried your own dreams, you also carried theirs," referring to Murray's many fans. After the ceremony, Murray was greeted by several current and former players, including Djokovic, Iga Swiatek, Lleyton Hewitt, Holger Rune, Cam Norrie, Martina Navratilova and John McEnroe.

Verstappen's emerging F1 rivalry with Norris goes another round at British GP



AP ■ SILVERSTONE (ENGLAND)
Max Verstappen's emerging rivalry with Lando Norris goes another round at the British Grand Prix this week and this time Norris has home fans behind him. Sunday's Formula 1 race follows their crash at last weekend's Austrian GP, the home race of Verstappen's Red Bull team. It cost both drivers a victory chance and ended Norris' hopes of a second win after the Miami GP. Norris retired his McLaren and felt let down by Verstappen, saying the Red Bull driver impeded him by moving under braking. Norris cleared the air with Verstappen when the friends spoke twice this week. "I don't think he should apologize. I thought it was good racing, at times very close to the edge, but we've spoken about it and we're both happy to go racing again," Norris said on Thursday. "Some of the things I said in the (TV) pen after the race were more just because I was frustrated at the time. A lot of adrenaline, a lot of emotions." Verstappen's main concern was protecting their friendship. "He's a great guy. Of course he loves racing, he's very passionate," Verstappen said. "You also have to realize he's fighting for his second win, I'm fighting for my 62nd. Naturally, your emotions are a little bit different." Verstappen also has 106 podium finishes compared to Norris' 19, and in pole positions leads him 40-2. Verstappen felt Norris may have panicked a bit. "I always said to Lando, when you go for moves up the inside, outside, you can trust me that I'm not there to try and crash you out," Verstappen said. "I felt everything that I did was nothing massively over the top." Another heated incident at Silverstone could change that and jog some memories. At the 2021 British GP, Verstappen and Lewis Hamilton collided heavily on Lap 1 at the high-speed Copse corner. Verstappen went to hospital for checks and Hamilton won. It sparked a bitter feud lasting until the last lap of the last race in Abu Dhabi, where Verstappen recovered from a

puncture to finish fifth and extend his championship lead over second-placed Norris to 81 points, was blown out of proportion. "It was hard, but you're also fighting for a win. So you're not going to just wave someone by," he said. "The outcome was bigger than what was actually happening on the track. Was it pushing the edge? Probably. But was it anything dangerous or reckless? From what I've seen, no." Mercedes driver George Russell, who benefited from the late crash to win in Austria, seemed to agree. "Max is one of the best and he's a hard racer," Russell said. "He'll push the rules to the limit, as all the top drivers do." British hopes Home fans could be in for a treat with three British drivers - Norris, Russell, Hamilton - possibly in contention. There is fresh hope in a season producing five different race winners in 11 races, compared to just three in 22 in 2023 with Verstappen winning a staggering 19. Verstappen has seven wins this year while Ferrari duo Carlos Sainz Jr. and Charles Leclerc have one win each. Although Hamilton has won Silverstone a record eight times, the 39-year-old British driver has not won anywhere since the penultimate race of the 2021 campaign. Verstappen overtook Hamilton after a controversial restart to win his first world title and deny Hamilton a record-breaking eighth. Observers have drawn comparisons between Silverstone 2021 and Austria 2024 with Verstappen coming in for some unfair criticism, according to his former Red Bull teammate Daniel Ricciardo. "People are probably hammering Max a bit," said Ricciardo, who now races for the RB team. He defended Verstappen as an "elbows out" and "tough" racer who imposes himself. He knows that given they raced together from 2016-18, the year they collided at the Azerbaijan GP and scored no points. Ricciardo said the late incident at the Red Bull ring, where Verstappen recovered from a

New look India start their journey without Virat, Rohit against Zimbabwe

PTI ■ HARARE

A new-look Indian T20 team would embark on a journey of self-discovery without their constant talismans, Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli, hoping to unearth their mainstays for the future in a five-match series against Zimbabwe starting here on Saturday.

Even as the euphoria of T20 World Cup triumph sweeps through the length and breadth of India, Shubman Gill, who was a reserve in that squad, will hit a refresh button along with a bunch of IPL performers.

All the fresh faces are expected to make their international debut during the series scheduled to be played entirely in the Zimbabwean capital.

Two young men, who are lined for debut could be Punjab's Abhishek Sharma, who had a stupendous IPL for Sunrisers Hyderabad and the young Assamese lad Riyan Parag, who has given ample demonstration of his capabilities as a competent T20 batter. Both of them tick all the boxes for this format.

While over the past few years, Rohit and Kohli have skipped a lot of bilateral series, especially in the

shortest format, their international retirement from the format is bound to be felt more strongly. The skills and quality that the two modern greats brought to the table will be hard to replicate but as it is the order of nature, the old guard has to make way for the new one. Zimbabwe certainly isn't the most formidable opposition but in T20 format, the gulf between sides is comparatively lesser than the other two traditional forms of the game.

The hosts, led by the gutsy Sikandar Raza, who played for Punjab Kings in the IPL recently, could prove to be a handful on nippy afternoons at the Harare Sports Club where the ball will jag around during the afternoon starts.

Some solid performances in this series will keep these youngsters in contention for future when the first team players of the world champion side are back on national duty. Shivam Dube, Sanju Samson, and Yashasvi Jaiswal will be available from the third match onwards and some of the young men would only get a couple of games to prove their mettle.

In future, the likes of T20 captain-in-waiting Hardik Pandya, his likely deputy Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Axar Patel, Arshdeep Singh, and Kuldeep Yadav will also be back



playing the format and there won't be too many vacancies in the playing eleven. From now till the 2026 T20 World Cup in India, the national team will play 34 games in the shortest format.

While skipper Gill is expected to open, one needs to see whether his best friend Abhishek gets his maiden India cap or the seasoned CSK skipper and captain of the Asian Games gold medal-winning team Rituraj Gaikwad ends up being the chosen one.

In case Abhishek opens, Gaikwad could come in at No.3 or swap positions with the Punjab southpaw. Parag's chances of a debut are brighter compared to Abhishek as he can bat at No. 4 in the first match, a slot he made his own for the Royals.

Rinku Singh, the designated finisher of the Indian T20 team for years to come, is expected to arrive at No. 5 in this new look line-up while one among Jitesh Sharma or Dhruv Jurel will bat at No. 6 while donning the big gloves.

If one looks at selection pattern, Jurel was the second keeper behind Sanju Samson for this series and Jitesh was a late entrant because of the unavailability of the World Cup squad members.

Hence Jurel, who made an

impressive Test debut against England is likely play in the first two games before Samson arrives.

In the bowling department, Avesh Khan and Khaleel Ahmed, the two standbys during the T20 World Cup are certainties and Mukesh Kumar, who is a very steady death bowler could be the third seamer pipping Harshit Rana, who is a better slogger with the willow.

Washington Sundar with his all-round abilities will hold his place till Dube arrives while leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi is expected to play all games.

SQUADS
India (first 2 games): Shubman Gill (c), Rituraj Gaikwad, Abhishek Sharma, Rinku Singh, Dhruv Jurel (wk), Riyan Parag, Washington Sundar, Ravi Bishnoi, Avesh Khan, Khaleel Ahmed, Mukesh Kumar, Tushar Deshpande, Sai Sudharsan, Jitesh Sharma (wk), Harshit Rana.
Zimbabwe: Sikandar Raza (captain), Faraz Akram, Brian Bennett, Johnathan Campbell, Tendai Chatara, Luke Jongwe, Innocent Kaia, Clive Madande, Wesley Madhevere, Tadiwanashe Marumani, Wellington Masakadza, Brandon Mavuta, Blessing Muzarabani, Dion Myers, Antum Naqvi, Richard Ngarava, Milton Shumba.



Inspirational, emotional: New-Gen India stars hail T20 WC triumph, eye their own glory

PTI ■ HARARE

India's emotional and epochal triumph in the just-concluded T20 World Cup found its resonance in Gen-Next stars such as Shubman Gill and Riyan Parag who termed it as an "inspiration" while vowing to bring more glory to the nation in future.

The new line of Indian players is here to play a five-match T20 series against Zimbabwe, which is starting from Saturday at the Harare Sports Club.

Gill, who is leading the contingent here, was a travelling reserve with Rohit Sharma's men before returning to India after the group stage of the T20 WC which was held in the USA.

The 24-year-old rated the victory as a "feather in the cap". "This must have been very special for all of them, and special for me. They have been working very hard for this. So, it's a feather in the cap," Gill told BCCI while sharing his feelings about India's thrilling seven-run win over South Africa in the title match at Barbados last week.

Abhishek Sharma, who had a stellar run for the Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL 2024, had a special companion while watching the final - multiple World Cup winner Yuvraj Singh.

"I was watching the match (T20 WC final) with the one and only Yuvi paji (Yuvraj Singh). He got very emotional when India won the final. Watching that, I felt very good and got very inspired.

"It's a dream for all of us to win an ICC trophy, and he has won it for India many times," Sharma said.

"I will never forget that moment, and then we went outside and celebrated. I think this World Cup was very special and now I am really motivated to win a Cup for the country," he added.

Riyan Parag, who is set to make his T20I debut against Zimbabwe, called the victory an inspiration to all budding players in the country.

"It's an inspiration for all of us, the young players here in this squad to win a World Cup, to win something this big in stature. I think it's motivating for all of us, and the young cricketers in India," said Parag.

Wicketkeeper batter Dhruv Jurel used inverse logic while watching the final.

Jurel did not want to jinx India's chances of winning the match, hence he was telling everyone that South Africa would lift their maiden World Cup. "I was thinking that if I say India will win, then SA might win. So, I was saying SA will win, and eventually India won. I was celebrating like a kid after that," Jurel chuckled.

Rituraj Gaikwad was delighted to see three modern day giants in Virat Kohli, Rohit and Ravindra Jadeja, his teammate at the Chennai Super Kings, retiring from T20Is with a title win.

"To have a win of this kind, where we were almost in the jaws of defeat, and then to come back from there and win is a special moment. Obviously, a great end to the

T20I career of three legends (Kohli, Rohit and Jadeja). For pacers Mukesh Kumar and Tushar Deshpande, the victory was nothing short of a "miracle".

"As we say, the game is not over, till it's over. The final was the best example for it. We believe that miracles can happen," said Deshpande.

Mukesh joined him. "God! It was a different feeling seeing them winning."

Pacer Avesh Khan shared the big moment with local fans and now he wants to create his own piece of history.

"There is a place near my native - Rajwada - where people gather in a public space to watch big matches. I also went there to watch the match. I celebrated with everyone.

"I feel so proud to watch those videos and photos coming out in social media after our trophy win, and we will strive to maintain this standard of performance in future too," he noted.

Leg-spinner Ravi Bishnoi exploited the luxury of loneliness inside a hotel room to scream his lungs out, while all-rounder Washington Sundar said the win has created an emotional chord with the country.

"It was a great feeling that day. I was alone in the hotel and I was screaming all along inside the room," said Bishnoi.

"It's a huge thing for all of us. We saw it on TV as it was emotional for every one of them. It's a huge inspiration and huge congratulations to every one of them," said Washington.

Kohli, Jadeja thank Mumbai Police for phenomenal job managing victory parade

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Floored by the grand reception and also the comprehensive police presence that ensured an orderly conduct of proceedings for most part, star India Virat Kohli on Friday thanked the Mumbai Police for doing a "phenomenal job" in crowd control during the victory parade of the T20 World Cup-winning Indian team here.

The side returned to a euphoric reception on Thursday after a 16-hour non-stop flight from Barbados.

It was hosted for breakfast by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi before heading to Mumbai for the victory parade which was attended by lakhs of fans.

It culminated into a felicitation

ceremony at the iconic Wankhede stadium where the players danced and took a victory lap after sharing their thoughts on the triumph that ended a trophy drought of 11 years.

"Deep respect and heartfelt thanks to all the officers and staff of @MumbaiPolice & @CPMumbaiPolice for doing a phenomenal job during Team India's Victory Parade. Your dedication and service is highly appreciated. Jai Hind," Kohli posted on X.

The 35-year-old, who was adjudged player of the match in the seven-run final win over South Africa last Saturday, flew out to London early this morning after completing the engagements here.

He had announced T20 international retirement at the end of the final.



Fans also thronged the complex to catch a glimpse of him and he duly obliged amid heavy police presence, waving and smiling at them.

"...This is for you," read his post, prefixed with the emoji of the national flag, on X.

Senior off-spinner R Ashwin, who was not a part of the squad in the Americas, said he felt overwhelmed while watching the celebrations.

"Watching all the videos and pictures from the celebrations yesterday in Mumbai just fills my heart. This nation has given and continues to give so much to the sport. Once again so proud of the champions," he said.

At least 11 persons were rushed to hospitals for sustaining minor injuries or feeling dizzy during the massive fan gathering.

I want Sikandar to lead from front: Zimbabwe coach Sammons

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sikandar Raza's vast experience of playing in various T20 leagues would certainly come in handy for an inexperienced Zimbabwe outfit, which would like to punch above its weight against a talented Indian side full of IPL performers, head coach Justin Sammons said ahead of five-match series, starting Saturday.

"I think we're very fortunate to have a player like Sikandar Raza leading the side. He brings great experience. We want him to lead from the front. He's been superb in the changing room and taking the players under his wing. We want his bat to do the talking. As well as his bowling," Sammons told PTI Videos in an exclusive interview from Harare.

Over the years, Indian selectors have always rested its top players during the summer months when the team tours the African nation where a five-match T20I series' broadcast rights helps in keeping the host country's cricket board in good health and best of spirits.

Even then three players from the T20 World Cup winning squad -- Shivam Dube, Yashasvi Jaiswal and Sanju Samson are expected to be available from the third game of the series and all four stand bys, including skipper Shubman Gill are part of the set-up,



taking the count up to seven.

"This is an opportunity for this team to do that and to showcase their skills against the best and obviously to get an understanding of where they're at," said Sammons, who was South Africa's batting consultant between 2021 to 2023.

Sammons said that his focus is on the future and he wants to build a good team in next two years with players improving their game awareness and also honing their skills adequately for

the elite level.

"I don't want to dwell on what's happened in the past, but what I want to do is obviously focus on the future. We've created a clear vision in terms of where this team wants to go within the next two or three years..."

"We're encouraging players to continually want to up-skill and improve. And they know they're going to be taken out of their comfort zone in doing that," he added.

Sammons waxed eloquent about young

India skipper Shubman Gill, praising his work ethic which translated into a golden period of 18-odd months across formats.

"Shubman is a superb cricketer, I remember first seeing Shubman, I think I was with the Proteas. We were playing that Test series against India. I think it was December 2021. He didn't get any game time there, but you could see his work ethic and how professional he was in the way he went about his business in the nets during that test series was something exciting to watch. And like I say, his record speaks for itself."

Talking about the swashbuckling southpaws Rinku Singh and Shivam Dube, the coach said, "They're exciting, they're dangerous. They have proven records against their names. It's an amazing opportunity for us...I think as a youngster growing up you always dream of playing against the best in the world."

The coach also heaped praises on newbie Riyan Parag.

"We can see how dangerous Riyan Parag is. He had a great IPL, showed his worth there. Again, another exciting prospect for India. Again, it's another opportunity for our guys to test themselves against the best," he concluded.

Diksha rises to tied 4th in Aramco Series London, Tvesa makes cut

PTI ■ LONDON

Indian golfer Diksha Dagar shot an impressive bogey-free 5-under 68, best round of the second day, to rise 45 places to tied fourth spot at the Aramco Series London here.

Another Indian Tvesa Malik (73-77) was 4-over and T-41st, as top 60 and ties made the cut at the Par-73 Centurion Golf Club. Pranavi Urs, who had a disappointing 80 in the first round, retired with an injury. Diksha, who was way down in

T-49th place when the first round finally ended, made big amends in the second round as she carded 68 to get to 8-under for 36 holes to climb up the leaderboard.

Diksha, who started her second round late in the afternoon from the 10th tee, had two birdies on the back nine on 11th and 16th. She added three more birdies on the first, seventh and ninth.

Another Indian making the cut was Tvesa, runner-up at the Swiss Ladies Open last

week. She was T-24 after the first round but fell dramatically on the back nine. Even par for the first round, she parred the entire front nine but dropped shots on 10th and 11th. Then came a roller-coaster, as she birdied the Par-3 14th, but dropped a double bogey on Par-5 15th. Then she birdied Par-4 17th and dropped a second double bogey on Par-5 18th to close at 4-over 77 and was T-41st.

Diksha, winner of two Ladies European Tour titles and third



last year at Hero Women's Indian Open, is five shots behind the leader, Leona Maguire of Ireland. Maguire shot 66-72 for 8-under and

England's Georgia Hall (70-70) was second at 6-under. Austrian Sarah Schober (67-75) was sole third while Diksha shared the fourth place

with Welsh golfer Chloe Williams (69-74), Ines Laklalech of Morocco (72-71) and Laura Fuenfstueck of Germany (70-73) at 3-under.

In team competition, Team Nadaud with France's Nastasia Nadaud, Czechia's Kristyna Napoleaova, Spain's Mireia Prat and amateur George Brooksbank, set the early pace to reach 24-under.

They were joined by Team Hall, which had Georgia Hall, Hannah Burke alongside Morocco's Lina Belmati and

amateur Shane Hart-Jones. With both teams level on 24-under-par, they will feature in a play-off for victory at Centurion Club at the end of the third round on Saturday afternoon.

In the individual competition, Maguire holds a two-shot lead heading into the final round after carding a round of 72 (-1) to sit on eight-under-par.

The cut fell at +6 with 69 players making it through to the final day of the individual competition.



CHANGE OF NAME

I, Ramesh Kumar Bansal Alias Ramesh Kumar Agrawal S/o Purnamal Agarwal R/o Bansal Trading-Company Govinda-Sweets Jharia, Dhanbad Jharkhand-828111 changed my name to Ramesh Kumar Bansal. PD(576)A