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MENTOR YUVRAJ
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NOW: ABHISHEK
12 SPORTS

THE ARC OF TERROR IS COMPLETE: FROM KASHMIR TO JAMMU, INDIA BLEEDS

FOUR ARMY JAWANS MARTYRED IN MERCILESS MURDER BY TERRORISTS

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU
At least four Indian Army soldiers were martyred and five others were grievously injured in yet another provocative terror strike on an Army vehicle near Badnota village of Machhedri under the jurisdiction of Lohal Malhar block in Billawar tehsil of Kathua district on Monday. The area falls under the 9 Corps of the Indian Army. The attack took place a month after a group of foreign terrorists targeted a pilgrim bus in which nine civilians were killed and 41 others were injured in the Reasi district on June 9. A similar attack was attempted on an Army post by another group of terrorists in the frontier Rajouri district early on Sunday morning. However, the same was repulsed by one of the alert troopers manning the periphery of the Army installation. According to preliminary reports, a group of terrorists pitched atop a prominent hill feature targeted the Army vehicle by first hurling a grenade and later opening indiscriminate firing to inflict

maximum casualties. The terrorists also took advantage of the foggy weather and poor road conditions before targeting the Army vehicle. During the heavy exchange of firing several soldiers were badly hit. The fate of terrorists could not be known immediately as the anti-terrorist operation was still going on in the thickly forested area. Confirming the firing incident, a spokesman of the Jammu and Kashmir police in a brief statement said, "Exchange of fire between terrorists and security forces going on in the Machhedri area of Kathua district. Two Army personnel were injured in the initial round of firing. A massive search operation has been launched". Meanwhile, additional troops have been rushed to the spot to plug the escape routes and neutralise the terrorists. Senior police and Army officers were supervising the ongoing operation. The Army authorities have issued an advisory to the residents in the area to remain indoors and not to venture out to prevent injuries in the heavy



File photo: PTI

exchange of gunfire. A day after gunning down six terrorists in two back-to-back encounters in the South Kashmir district of Kulgam Brigadier Prithviraj Chauhan, Commander 1 sec RR, on Monday claimed the security forces have inflicted a big blow to the Pro-Pakistan

terrorist outfit Hizbul Mujahideen in the Valley. The killing of six terrorists in South Kashmir is a significant blow to Hizbul Mujahideen," he said. The security forces are also investigating the role of the locals in sheltering the terrorists inside their homes.

During the routine searches, the security forces stumbled upon a well-fortified concrete hideout concealed behind a wardrobe in a civilian residence situated in the Chinnigam Frisal area of Kulgam. The senior Army officer also paid tributes to the martyred

soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the line of duty during the twin encounters. Briefing media persons, Brigadier Chauhan said after concluding the operation, we found and promptly destroyed an IED weighing approximately 6 kilogram, keeping collateral damage in mind. Speaking on the Modergam encounter, Javed Ahmad Matoo, DIG South Kashmir, said two terrorists were killed in the second operation. "Adil, who had multiple FIRs against him in different police stations, was killed in one operation. The second encounter took place in the Chinnigam area based on specific information, resulting in the killing of four terrorists. Among them was Yavar Bashir Dar, a Category 'A' terrorist. The others were identified as Tauheed Ahmed, Shakeel Ahmed Wani, and Zahir Ahmad Dar. A significant cache of arms and ammunition was recovered from the encounter site. Both locations had hideouts that the terrorists had been using for a considerable time," Matoo said.



Students at the Supreme Court of India in New Delhi, on Monday. The apex court has begun the hearing for a number of petitions regarding the alleged irregularities in the NEET UG 2024 exams

Photo: Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

NEET re-test if exam sanctity lost, says SC

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI
Directing the National Testing Agency (NTA) for full disclosures on three major aspects of the NEET-UG paper leak case, the Supreme Court on Monday said the fact there was a paper leak in the NEET-UG exam cannot be denied and it has to be ascertained if the nature of the leak was widespread or isolated to decide on ordering a re-test. Referring to legal position on ordering re-test, the bench said it will have to be "scrutinised whether the alleged breach has taken place at systemic level, whether the breach has affected integrity of the entire exam process and whether it is possible to segregate the beneficiaries of fraud from

the untainted students". "In a situation where breach affects the entirety of process and it is not possible to segregate the beneficiaries from others, it may be necessary to order a re-test," the bench said. The court said if the sanctity of NEET-UG 2024 is "lost" and if the leak of its question paper has been propagated through social media, then a re-test has to be ordered. The bench said the extent of question paper leak and the beneficiaries across geographical boundaries have to be ascertained before the top court may order a re-test in the controversy-ridden exam which was taken up by 23.33 lakh students at 4,750 centres in 571 cities including in 14 cities overseas.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi receives a guard of honour upon his arrival at the airport in Moscow on Monday

Modi embarks on Mission Moscow

AGENCIES/PNS ■ MOSCOW/NEW DELHI
In his first trip since the start of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday began a two-day high-profile visit to Russia to hold summit talks with President Vladimir Putin with a focus on boosting bilateral ties in areas of energy, trade and defence. Modi was received at the airport by Russia's First Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov. The Russian First Deputy Minister also accompanied the Indian Prime Minister to his hotel from the airport in the same car, officials said. Manturov had received Chinese President Xi Jinping during his visit to Russia as well.

It is Modi's first trip to Russia since 2019, the first after the start of the Ukraine conflict in February 2022 and first in Modi's third term as the Prime Minister. Russian President Putin is set to host a private dinner for Modi tonight ahead of Tuesday's talks at the 22nd India-Russia summit in Moscow. "The PM is set to hold substantive discussions with Putin to take forward the special partnership between the two countries. He will also interact with the Indian community in Russia," External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said on social media. In his departure statement, Modi said India seeks to play a supportive role for a peaceful and stable region. After

concluding his engagements in Russia on July 9, Modi will leave for Austria in the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister to that country in over 40 years. The focus of the Modi-Putin summit talks are expected to be on further boosting bilateral cooperation in trade, energy and defence. The Ukraine conflict is set to figure in the discussions. "The special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia has advanced over the past 10 years, including in the areas of energy, security, trade, investment, health, education, culture, tourism and people-to-people exchanges," Modi said in his departure statement.

Mumbai keeps its tryst with Monsoon

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI
The heavy downpour being witnessed in the metropolis and surrounding areas since the weekend — resulted in massive inundation in low-lying areas — threw suburban train services and air traffic out of gear, while the traffic on the Mumbai-Goa Highway remained badly affected for the second consecutive day on Monday. Heavy rains continued to batter Mumbai and adjoining areas of Thane, Navi Mumbai, Kalyan, Palghar and neighbouring coastal Konkan region. Such was the high intensity of rains that during the six-hour period between 1 am and 7 am on Monday, several of the rain catchment areas like Powari received 300 mm of rainfall. The Powai Lake — one of the major water-supplying lakes of Mumbai — started overflowing during the day. Considered the lifelines of Mumbai, the suburban train services of Central Railway (CR) and Western Railway (WR) were badly hit as the railway track remained thick sheets of water, affecting the operation for the better part of the day. The BrihanMumbai Municipal Corporation (BMC) deployed pumps at several places to clear flood water in low-lying areas in the metropolis. More than 50 flights were cancelled, while 27 were



Passengers wait for trains at a waterlogged railway station during rain in Mumbai on Monday

diverted from the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport in Mumbai. "Heavy traffic congestion and slow vehicle movement are expected en route to Mumbai airport today due to weather conditions. Customers are advised to allow more time for their journey to the airport," airline Vistara said in an announcement made earlier in the day. The India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued a red alert for coastal Ratnagiri district, while it has sounded an orange alert for Mumbai, Thane, Palghar and Sindhudurg district. Heavy to very heavy rains have been predicted in Mumbai, Thane and adjoining

coastal Konkan region. Meanwhile, the country's commercial capital has been reeling under very heavy rains since 1 am on Monday. "Mumbai has recorded over 300 mm rainfall at various places during the hour period from 1 am to 7 am today. Heavy rains resulted in severe inundation in low-lying areas. Since there was flooding on tracks at several places, suburban train services were badly affected," a senior BMC official said. Amid pouring rains, Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde visited the State Disaster Control Room and BMC's Disaster Management office to make a first-hand assessment of the

situation. "Unlike in the past, it has rained a lot in less time which is more than the city's carrying capacity. As a result, there was a water-logging on railway tracks and roads. Traffic has now resumed on all roads. Senior officials are present at all water-logging-prone spots in the city. The State Disaster Management Authority, NDRF, BMC are on alert," Shinde said. "There is movement of vehicles on Eastern and Western express highways and all railway lines. NDRF teams have reached all three coastal districts in the state. Army, Navy and Air Force are also on alert," Shinde said.



Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren speaks during a Special Session of the State Legislative Assembly, held in Ranchi on Monday

Hemant Soren wins trust vote in Jharkhand

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ RANCHI/NEW DELHI
The JMM-led Government in Jharkhand headed by Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Monday won the vote of confidence in the Assembly amid a walkout by Opposition members. A total of 45 MLAs, including nominated member Glen Joseph Galstaun, voted in favour of the confidence motion. The BJP and AJSU legislators walked out of the House as the headcount for voting started. The BJP-led Opposition has 24 legislators of the saffron party and three of the AJSU Party. After winning the trust vote, Soren said, "Today, everyone again got to witness the unity and strength of the ruling alliance. I thank the Speaker and all the alliance MLAs."

A touch of spirituality mooted in DU syllabi

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI
In a bid to expand its course curriculum and provide a wide range of choices to students, the Delhi University is scheduled to introduce Vedic Literature, Upanishad Parichaya, Dharma and Religion among the options at Delhi University's Centre for Hindu Studies which shall be offered to its students as minor electives. Sources said the department has proposed to introduce six new elective papers for students, who wish to specialise in Hindu Studies and awaits their approval from the Academic Council of the university. A meeting of



the Academic Council of Delhi University is slated for July 12. These additions are based on the recommendations of the Governing Body of the Centre for Hindu Studies. The Bhagavad Gita for Humanity elective will acquaint students with foundational Indian spirituality as depicted in the Bhagavad Gita, and the Purana Parichaya paper will cover Hindu history, culture, geography, architecture and other knowledge systems. The Centre also plans to introduce two general electives for students who are not majoring in Hindu Studies but have chosen Commerce, Political Science

or Computer Science as their main subjects. These students will be offered papers on Hindu Jivana Drishti and Manovijnana to familiarise them with Hindu studies. In addition to the UGC-approved syllabus, the Centre

Parichaya. The students who don't wish to study Commerce, Political Science or Computer Science as minor electives along with the major subject can avail these choices. "We have proposed these electives to make our course curriculum more comprehensive and aligned with students' needs. As a relatively new establishment, our effort is to make our programmes well-rounded," the official said. Under Introduction to Vedic Literature, students will learn about the literary works of prominent Vedic and Upanishadic commentators, from the Rigveda to Vedangas.

Sandeshkhali setback for Mamata

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA
There was yet another judicial reverse suffered by the Mamata Banerjee Government with the Supreme Court on Monday asking the State counsel why the administration should want to shield an accused before dismissing the State plea to scrap the ongoing probe into the Sandeshkhali incident conducted by the Central Bureau of Investigation. The State Government had approached the Apex Court to get the CBI investigation ordered earlier by the Calcutta High Court quashed. "Why should the State be interested in protecting someone?" the Bench of Justices BR Gavai and KV

Viswanathan wondered before dismissing the State plea. The Calcutta High Court had on April 10 ordered a CBI investigation into the incidents of Sandeshkhali where villagers complained en masse of large-scale land grab and sexual exploitation of women allegedly at the behest of Trinamool Congress strongmen Sheikh Shahjahan, Uttam Sardar and others. All were presently in jail. Moving the Apex Court, the State Government had earlier said the High Court order directing CBI investigation into the case had demoralised the police administration. It also said it was the State police which had arrested Shahjahan before handing it over to the

CBI. However the opposite side contended that the State had not only tried to stall CBI investigation but also it had handed arrested the main accused after several weeks of the incident apparently because he was a powerful TMC leader. The CBI has been investigating three separate cases with Sandeshkhali appearing in all of them. While the agency is investigating the case of multi-crore public distribution system scam that has seen former State Minister and powerful TMC leader Jyotipriya Mallick going to jail.

Hemant Govt wins Trust Vote amid Opposition boycott

45 votes for confidence motion, zero against the motion

PNS : RANCHI

In a significant political development, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren successfully won the trust vote in the State Legislative Assembly during a special session convened specifically for this purpose. Soren garnered a total of 45 votes in favour during the confidence motion he introduced. The opposition parties, however, chose to boycott the trust vote, leading to a tally of zero votes against the motion.

Following his victory in the trust vote, the expansion of the Hemant Soren Cabinet was done in the afternoon. The revamped Cabinet included three new ministers, in addition to retaining eight members, who were part of Champai Cabinet.



Chief Minister Hemant Soren speaks during a special assembly session for floor test of Soren's Government at the State Assembly in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Monday. Pix by Vinay Murmu

Earlier in the day, Chief Minister Hemant Soren presented the confidence motion in the House, which was followed by a robust debate among the assembly members. Speaking against the motion, Amar Bauri, the Leader of the Opposition, first congratulated Soren but then criticized the government for its unfulfilled promises. Bauri accused the Soren administration of being founded on falsehoods and failing to address key issues.

Bauri highlighted several grievances, including the ongoing strike by assistant police personnel, delayed pension payments, irregularities in examination processes, and the failure to provide ration to eligible cardholders. He also alleged widespread corruption, pointing out that a minister from the government is currently in jail on corruption charges, and examinations are being conducted by blacklisted companies. Bauri asserted that the interests of tribal communities are being neglected, and accused the government of engaging in "vote jihad" following "love and land jihad."

Bauri further questioned the legitimacy of the government's formation, suggesting it might be an attempt to cover up evidence of corruption. He asked, "Is this government formed to erase the evidence of the corruption that has taken place?"

In response, Chief Minister Hemant Soren defended the



Cabinet Secretary Vandana Dadel greets Chief Minister Hemant Soren at the State Assembly in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Monday. PNS

motion, stating that it was brought in accordance with constitutional procedures. He expressed confidence in the government's mandate and criticized the opposition for their lack of political vision. "It can be understood from the conduct of our opposition colleagues as to how they must be feeling seeing me here again... I know that they do not have any political thinking," Soren remarked.

Party chief, also weighed in, congratulating former chief minister Champai Soren for his five-month tenure and commending the adherence to democratic processes. However, Mahto expressed concerns about the ongoing challenges faced by the people of Jharkhand, including the suspension of pension payments for three months and the failure to provide essential food grains to the needy. He cautioned that with

elections approaching, the public will soon have the opportunity to decide the government's fate.

During the voting on the confidence motion, BJP legislators staged a protest by entering the well of the House and raising slogans against the government. They subsequently boycotted the voting process, leading to their absence from the final tally, which saw zero votes against the motion.



Chief Secretary L Khuyangte greets Chief Minister Hemant Soren at the State Assembly in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Monday. PNS



Chief Minister Hemant Soren speaks greets Speaker Rabindra Nath Mahto at the State Assembly in Ranchi, Jharkhand on Monday. PNS

BJP knocks Raj Bhawan door over Minister Hafizul's 'oath'

PNS : RANCHI

Leader of Opposition, Jharkhand Assembly Amar Kumar Bauri and Chief Whip Biranchi Narayan met the Governor of Jharkhand on Monday and submitted a memorandum. The BJP leaders in their memorandum alleged that today Hemant Soren expanded his Council of Ministers. During the oath of office and secrecy, the way Madhupur MLA Hafizuddin Ansari started with a religious line after the call for oath, was unconstitutional. Therefore, administer the oath to him again and till then he should be considered free from the post of minister.

The Governor said that appropriate action will be taken on the memorandum of the Leader of Opposition.

Echoing the views, BJP state spokesperson Pratul Shahdeo, while posting on the social media platform X and tagging the Governor of Jharkhand, raised questions on Jharkhand government minister Hafizul Hasan saying Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim before and in between his oath, and wanted to know whether it is constitutionally correct? Pratul wrote that the oath is taken in the name of God or on truthfulness. Pratul



Leader of Opposition, Jharkhand Assembly Amar Kumar Bauri and Chief Whip Biranchi Narayan handing over a memorandum to Governor CP Radhakrishnan at Raj Bhawan on Monday. PNS

wanted to know whether there is any provision in the Constitution for what the minister said during the oath? Pratul said that if there is no such provision, then the minister's oath will be wrong and his ministerial position will be in danger.

Pratul shared the video of the oath taking and said that Minister Hafizul Rahman has also insulted the national anthem.

Meanwhile, in another development BJP State President and former Chief Minister Babulal Marandi once again targeted the newly formed Hemant government

women and youth. Law and order is in shambles. Murders are happening amidst the crowd of the capital. Criminals are fearless. Women, sisters, daughters are safe. Incidents of gang rape have become common.

He said that in its first budget session, the Hemant government had said on the floor of the House that it would give jobs to lakhs of youth or else unemployment allowance, but today the youth is frustrated and disappointed.

He said that the JPSC, JSSC examinations fell prey to corruption. By conducting the examinations through a blacklisted agency, the state government sold the jobs for lakhs of rupees. Today, young candidates are forced to sit on dharna. They have clear evidence of corruption, yet the government is adamant.

He said that this government is not working according to the law but in an arbitrary manner. It is cheating the youth. He added that this government had gained support by promising to regularize Para teachers, Anganwadi workers, contract workers, assistant police personnel, but all this has been proved false today.

JBKSS launches 'Jharkhand Mange Jai Ram' campaign

PNS : RANCHI

Jharkhandi Bhasha Khatian Sangharsh Samiti's (JBKSS) Chief Jairam Mahto has started preparations for the assembly elections. For this, Jharkhand Mange Jai Ram campaign was started from July 8. The JBKSS Chief Jairam Mahto and JBKSS Vice president Sanjay Mehta told in a joint press conference that under the campaign, a target has been set to reach 3.15 crore people. "Direct communication will be established with them. The objective of this campaign is to unite the Jharkhandi people for their rights," said Mahto. Mehta said that the people of Jharkhand are upset with the current governance. "There is a demand for change. People are looking towards Jairam Mahto with hopeful eyes. We will also participate in the elections with full strength respecting the Jharkhandi sentiments," he added. Mahto said that change of power is certain in Jharkhand. He said that the results of the Lok Sabha elections have made it clear that he has the full support of the people of Jharkhand. He respects the voters. Jairam Mahto claimed that JBKSS will form the government in Jharkhand. We will do such work that Jharkhand will be rebuilt, he added. During the press conference, Prakash Kumar of Bokaro joined JBKSS. Kumar has studied from Imperial College, London. He has done many notable works at the international level. Now he wants to do something positive by joining politics in Jharkhand. The organization's Vice president Sanjay Mehta said that all those people are welcome in our team who want to do something different for Jharkhand. "We will form a team of policy-planning, research and development and will find solutions to the policy issues of the state. We are establishing contact with people doing good work at the National and international level," he added.



Jharkhand stares at weak monsoon, 47% rain deficit till now

PNS : RANCHI

Monsoon has weakened in Jharkhand. Due to lack of rain in different parts of the State including the State Capital, heat and humidity have increased.

There is no possibility of rain till July 13. This time the state has received much less rain than expected. In such a situation, the crisis in agriculture in the State has deepened. Ranchi has received 138.5 mm of rain so far, while the normal rainfall figure is 263 mm. A decline of 47 per cent has been recorded in this.

According to the Meteorological Department, there is no possibility of heavy rain in the state till July 13. During this time, most parts of the state will remain cloudy. At the same time, it may rain once or twice a day.

The sky will remain cloudy in the capital Ranchi till July 13 and there is a strong possibility of light and moderate rainfall. During the last 24 hours, the highest rainfall of 74.2 mm was recorded in Khunti Rania. 68 mm of rain was recorded in Masanjore and Jamtara. At the same time, sporadic rain was seen in Chatra, Deoghar, Dhanbad, Garhwa, Giridih, Godda, Jamtara, Pakur, Ramgarh, Ranchi.

Among the districts of the State where monsoon has been the weakest, Pakur is at the forefront, where there has been 72 percent less rain than normal. After this, Saraikela-Kharsawan, where there has been 69 percent less rain. After this, Lohardaga where there has been 63 percent less rain. Similarly, less than normal rain has been recorded in 24 districts of the State. So far, 129.3 mm of rain has occurred in Jharkhand, which is 49 percent less than normal. By now, 255.3 percent rain should have occurred in the State.



Hemant keeps Champai, drops Basant from Cabinet

First time after 9 years State Cabinet will run with full capacity of 12 ministers



Governor CP Radhakrishnan, Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Ministers Champai Soren, Rameshwar Oraon, Satyanand Bhokta, Baidyanath Ram, Deepak Birua, Banna Gupta, Irfan Ansari, Mithilesh Kumar Thakur, Hafizul Hasan, Baby Devi and Deepika Pandey Singh during a Swearing in ceremony at Raj Bhawan in Ranchi on Monday. Pix by Ratan Lal

PNS : RANCHI

The Jharkhand government led by Chief Minister Hemant Soren passed the floor test in the Assembly on Monday. Followed by the trust vote, Chief Minister Soren expanded his cabinet, inducting three new faces. However, the biggest surprise to today's Cabinet expansion



This time three new faces have got a chance in the Hemant cabinet. Congress leaders Deepika Pandey Singh and Irfan Ansari and Baidyanath Ram of JMM have been given a place in the cabinet.

Congress has removed one of its four ministers, Badal Patralekh, from the ministerial position. Badal Patralekh will be replaced by Deepika Pandey Singh as a minister.

Additionally, Irfan Ansari will replace the former minister Alamgir Alam.

The JMM has also included one more minister this time. Baidyanath Ram, who was sidelined from Champai Soren's cabinet last time, is being given a place in this cabinet. However, Hemant Soren's younger brother Basant Soren has not been included in this cabinet.

Thus, there will be a total of 12 ministers in Hemant Soren's government this time. Former CM Champai Soren was the first to take

the oath of office. Governor CP Radhakrishnan administered the oath of office and secrecy to all the ministers.

After Champai Soren, Rameshwar Oraon, the sole RJD MLA Satyanand Bhakta, Baidyanath Ram, Deepak Birua, Banna Gupta, Irfan Ansari, Mithilesh Thakur, Baby Devi, and Deepika Pandey Singh took the oath



of office as ministers. Later the ministers were allocated portfolios, Champai was assigned with higher education minister along with water resources. Rameshwar Oraon has been retained as finance minister. Lone RJD MLA Satyanand Bhokta with labour resources minister.

Earlier, Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Monday won the trust vote in the state assembly with a comfortable majority of 45 MLAs. He was sworn in as the chief minister last week after replacing Champai Soren, who had taken over



the post following the former's dramatic arrest in a land scam case around five months ago. Hemant was granted bail by the Jharkhand High Court on June 28. Subsequently, Champai Soren tendered his resignation, paving the way for Hemant's return to the chief ministerial post. In the 81-member Jharkhand Legislative Assembly, the JMM-Congress-RJD alliance holds 45 seats, with the JMM having 27 legislators, the Congress 17, and the RJD one seat. The Opposition BJP has 24 MLAs.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Macron makes it

From the UK to Iran and now France, progressive voices and inclusive thinking is making a comeback

France has just about managed to keep the ultra-right at bay. ultra rightwingers have lost to the liberals in the snap poll ordered by French President Emmanuel Macron. France has a rich history of liberalism and social progressivism, yet in recent years, the country has seen a rise in far-right nationalism. However recent elections and political movements indicate a resurgence of progressive values. A left-wing alliance secured the most seats in the French parliament after tactical voting in Sunday's second-round election thwarted Marine Le Pen's far-right party. But the victory of the Left is not decisive. France now faces political uncertainty, as no party achieved an absolute majority in the National Assembly. President Emmanuel Macron's gamble seems to have worked as he had ordered a snap poll and decided to go to elections despite his waning popularity. He has championed a centrist approach that blends liberal economic policies with progressive social reforms. His administration has focused on addressing climate change, promoting gender equality, and fostering a more inclusive society. His surprise win, despite predictions to the contrary, suggests that people across the globe are moving towards liberal values and giving them prominence over reactionary forces.

This shift could have far-reaching implications for the European Union and beyond. However, to take a pragmatic approach, France has just about managed to defeat the far right who went on a rampage after the elections did not go in their favour as was widely expected. In the time to come, the challenges for President Macron may multiply as no one has secured a simple majority in the lower house of 577 seats. So now France enters the uncharted waters of coalition politics. The new government would be anything but stable and may give right-wingers a chance to discredit it. President Macron would face several significant challenges. Politically, he would need to navigate a fragmented landscape with diverse parties, address low public trust, and manage frequent protests. Economically, tackling inequality, unemployment, and high public debt while balancing social spending demands would be critical. Right now, France is struggling to pull back its economy from crisis. So far annual growth has been 0.7 per cent in 2024 after a significant slowdown in the second half of 2023 but may gain momentum in 2025 (1.3 per cent). Socially, issues like immigration integration, pension reforms, and the housing crisis would require careful attention. Finally, Macron would have to address sensitive cultural issues, including secularism, religious freedom, and debates around national identity and multiculturalism. To effectively tackle the far right, President Macron would have to focus on reducing socioeconomic disparities to address the economic grievances that fuel extremism.

Emmanuel Macron

PICTALK



The chariots of Lord Jagannath, Balabhadra and Devi Subhadra prepared for annual Rath Yatra festival, in Puri

Indians dying on the Russian frontline

The presence of Indian nationals on the Russian side of the Ukraine conflict raises broader questions about the ethics of foreign combatant recruitment.



BHOPINDER SINGH

The issue of Indians fighting along with the Russian forces in the Ukraine War is particularly piquant, given India's historic relations with the Soviet Union earlier and Russia now. The fact that many had claimed to have been 'forced' to fight had forced the Indian Government to intervene. It is a claim that hasn't been conclusively confirmed as the Indian Embassy was aware of many Indians having signed up for support jobs in the Russian Army. Pending confirmation that their terms of service had been unfairly and involuntarily extended to fight on the frontline, the Indian authorities had formally sought their discharge. It further advised Indians to "exercise caution" and "stay away from this conflict" – diplomatese for dissuading Indians from joining any Russian Army, in any capacity, given the situation. But as it routinely happens e.g., as it happened with advisories to Indian students to leave Ukraine before the full-fledged assault, some heeded the call and some didn't, till the situation became desperate and inextricable for them. The Russians have been particularly keen to swell their ranks with foreigners given the heavy loss of lives in the bloody stalemate and the accompanying sense of fatigue and despondency amongst its combatants.

The inclusion of private militias like the 'Wagner Army' is under that impulse. But the inclusion of individual foreigners is a formalized initiative that can be traced back to Law 29 March 1998 'On Military Obligation and Military Service' – which has since then been made increasingly attractive and lenient to attract new intake. Talks of individuals from Central Asian Countries (for the Soviet Union), Cuba, Afghanistan, Nepal, Syria, Somalia etc., have been doing the rounds. For these foreign inductees, besides the relatively lucrative salary (\$2000-\$3000), the additional lure of Russian citizenship is dangled. Estimated to be numbering in thousands, BBC reported that as of last year's end, 254 foreigners had been killed in the conflict. How many of them had enlisted



for support jobs and how many were forcibly taken for active combat, remains a matter of conjecture.

The tact of enlisting 'mercenaries' is an old and convenient practice, as besides the relatively low levels of accountability, they also come with the plausible option of deniability. Under the International Criminal Court and the International Humanitarian Law, the status of 'mercenary' does not constitute a specific crime. But they are not entitled to the status of 'prisoner of war' and its necessities. The idea is to discourage mercenaries as material greed-based and amoral entities as opposed to soldiers of the nation who are driven by a sense of national purpose, patriotism, and professional excellence. To qualify as 'mercenaries', six criteria need to be fulfilled. Firstly, the person is specially recruited internally/abroad. Secondly, the belligerent participants in conflict. Thirdly, he/she is motivated by private gain, as promised by one side in the conflict. Fourthly, they are not national, resident or interested party in the said conflict. Fifthly, they do not belong to the militaries of either side. Sixthly and lastly, they have not been sent by a non-interested state on any official duty as a member of their military. Therefore, it could be pre-



THE RUSSIANS HAVE BEEN PARTICULARLY KEEN TO SWELL THEIR RANKS WITH FOREIGNERS GIVEN THE HEAVY LOSS OF LIVES IN THE BLOODY STALEMATE AND THE ACCOMPANYING SENSE OF FATIGUE AND DESPONDENCY AMONGST ITS COMBATANTS

sumed some Indians who are unfortunately caught in a form of combat that they probably had not imagined whilst signing up, and may still qualify as 'mercenary'.

Such a scenario does not reflect well on the nation as it is suggestive of limited job opportunities domestically and therefore suggests societal desperation which is understandable for broken nations like Somalia or Syria, but not India. Sadly, portents of 'cannon fodder' or even 'human trafficking' are rife, but given the opaqueness that surrounds the Russian reality, nothing can be confirmed. Such times birth human trafficking networks that paint a very different picture to recruit the gullible when the truth is starkly different. There have been gut-wrenching pleas from some Indians beseeching the Indian authorities to secure their release, with some losing their lives, soon after that. The Indian External Affairs Minister is believed to have reiterated his concern to his Russian counterpart during a recent bilateral in Astana, Kazakhstan. To the query, if S Jaishankar had taken up the issue of stranded Indians, he assured, "Very clearly and strongly... several Indians have been pressed into service with the Russian Army. Only when they come back will we know the full cir-

cumstances. But whatever the circumstances are, to us it is unacceptable that Indian citizens find themselves in the army of another country in a warzone. I told him that we seek their cooperation and that they are our friend and partners. We have to find a way so that these people can return to India as quickly and effectively as possible." Thankfully, despite the ostensibly pro-Ukraine position taken by Delhi, it has maintained a parallel and strong relation with Russia, replete with non-linear moves as part of its 'strategic independence'. However, while the government had initiated the needful from Russian authorities, there is a reciprocal expectation of Indians abroad to heed advisories, and not wait for situations to deteriorate. No right-thinking country would encourage its citizens to partake in conflicts given the diversity of complex geopolitical and societal ramifications, amongst which guaranteeing their safety would be paramount. For Russians, foreign recruitment makes practical sense – for Indians to be availing the same, reflects poorly. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Implications of Iran's election



exacerbated by the Gaza conflict and disputes over Iran's nuclear program. India anticipates evolving bilateral ties under reformist President-elect Pezeshkian. Despite historical ties spanning language, culture, and commerce, both nations face a crucial juncture. With shared roots and significant strategic interests, India and Iran navigate a relationship poised for new dynamics. The future of Iran under liberal leadership holds promise for significant domestic and international shifts. Potential reforms could ease tensions, particularly regarding Iran's nuclear program, fostering better relations with the West. Internally, liberal policies may encourage socio-economic progress and cultural openness, reshaping Iran's global image and regional dynamics. Dimple Wadhawan Kanpur

The untimely demise of Iran's conservative President Ebrahim Raisi has necessitated an election amidst regional tensions,

norable government. The common man eagerly anticipates budgetary relief through increased exemption limits, revised tax slabs, and measures to alleviate everyday financial burdens. Expectations include provisions for healthcare subsidies, travel benefits for senior citizens, and incentives supporting livelihood stability, reflecting hopes for tangible improvements in quality of life. AG Rajmohan |Anantpur

KEIR STARMER'S VISION FOR CHANGE

Madam — Apropos, "Now we get to work, Starmer to cabinet," The Pioneer, July 7. The British election results that led to Labour leader Keir Starmer's entry into 10 Downing Street mark a pivotal moment in the country's politics, promising to steer the nation through the turbulent aftermath of 14 years of Conservative governance. The enormity of Labour's victory cannot be overstated. Achieving a massive majority in Parliament, Labour has been given a clear mandate to implement change. His

acknowledgment of the public's lack of trust in politics is a refreshing departure from the often defensive posture of recent administrations. His promise to heal this mistrust through actions rather than words is a step in the right direction. The British public has grown cynical after enduring repeated scandals, including the infamous Downing Street parties during the Covid-19 lockdowns, which eroded confidence in government integrity. Economically, Mr Starmer inherits a nation grappling with significant challenges. The tax burden is at its highest since the post-World War II era, and public services, particularly the National Health Service, are under immense strain. His government's ability to deliver on ambitious promises, such as green spending initiatives and public service improvements, will be a key measure of success. N Sadhasiva Reddy |Bengaluru

HOPE FOR INDIA'S FUTURE

Madam — Observing Rahul Gandhi's political trajectory reveals his focused objectives: welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Once dismissed with derisive labels, he now stands as a pivotal opposition figure and a national benefactor. In Parliament, he champions crucial issues like poverty rights, constitutional protection, and unemployment, spotlighting concerns from the Agniveer scheme to NEET. We trust he will persist in combating corruption for India's bright future.

Rahul Gandhi's tenure as Leader of the Opposition has been marked by a transformation from skepticism to significance. Initially dismissed, he has emerged as a pivotal voice, advocating for the marginalized and pressing critical issues in Parliament. His agenda emphasizes welfare for the poor, social justice, MSME development, and job creation. Gandhi's relentless pursuit of transparency and accountability has kept the government accountable on issues ranging from poverty alleviation to constitutional protection. His proactive stance on national challenges like unemployment and inflation underscores his commitment to India's future, positioning him as a proactive and influential leader in the opposition ranks. Masood Ahmad |Barabanki

EXPECTATIONS FROM THE BUDGET

Madam — Amidst anticipation of the upcoming budget session, national attention is fixated on its contents. India Inc. hopes to retain production incentives, while salary earners seek raised exemption limits and improved tax slabs. The common man yearns for relief from economic hardships, and farmers seek guaranteed minimum returns. Senior citizens anticipate travel benefits and healthcare subsidies. Supporters are poised, their lists ready, crucial for the government's survival. The budget's essence lies in who gains and by how much from this vul-

Paving the way for India's own Green Silicon Valley



SAIRAM SUBRAMANIAN

Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through cooperation and collaboration

Growth, Employment and Climate Change, the trifecta of modern economic challenges, have rekindled the interest of policymakers in bringing back the craft of industrial policymaking right at the centre of the discussion table. Ominous estimates highlight climate change as a critical factor negatively impacting growth and employment, whereby ~18% of GDP and labour productivity equivalent to 72 million jobs might be lost, therefore the argument by Nicholas Stern and Joseph E. Stiglitz that "the only long-run growth trajectory is a green trajectory" echoes loudly for adaptation by industrial policymakers globally. Fashionably rechristened as Green Industrial Policy, the craft embeds within itself a series of government intervention measures (supply and demand focussed subsidies, regulations, incentives and standards) that aim at achieving economic development while simultaneously cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Globally leading nations have com-



India has made some formidable moves towards a green future by focusing on domestic market formation and localization of components. Its Long Term-Low Emission Development Strategy submitted at COP27 articulates seven transitions to low-carbon development such as electricity systems, transport systems, sustainable urbanization etc. The production-linked incentive schemes in renewable energy equipment space and technology-focused national missions on hydrogen and energy storage are steps in the right direction that can be aptly followed by a broader green industrialisation policy for India. The broader green industrialisation policy by catalysing investments in manufacturing of decarbonisation technologies which are foundational in the short run can trigger the Schumpeterian process of innovation and discovery in the medium term towards high-carbon growth and employment. In this regard, the thrust on clean energy

entrepreneurship through industrial policy and a green R & D policy can foster breakthrough innovations and patents that can create and monetise new solutions. Japan and Korea have acknowledged this potential of startups as open innovation resources and introduced industrial policy support that encourages them to partner with larger conglomerates to propel the innovativeness of the economy at large and compete with their European, Chinese and American competitors. Green startups with their agility and Conglomerates with their market power and experience can aspire to create our own green Silicon Valley. Climate change offers an opportunity to create an international market for green products, capital and goods through international cooperation and collaboration. These initiatives can catalyse a virtuous cycle of growth, employment and carbon neutrality. (The writer is a Chevening Scholar and an International Development expert; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE

Embracing life's challenges with a grateful heart leads to a profound awakening



RAVI VALLURI

Almighty divinity, through the prowess of nature, and the resplendent and ever-mutating cosmos is eternally showering bounties on humans. However, the human mind is not wakeful or grateful to accept this materiality. A question of attitude is primarily and predominantly our attitude which reinforces gratitude within our personalities. The word gratitude strikes its roots in the word the Latin word gratis, meaning to be thankful. It is always sagacious to recite a short prayer before a meal. Language is no trammel. Annadata Sukhi Bhava. By remembrance of these lines (Sanskrit), we express our gratefulness and indebtedness to the agrarian community and the cook for producing and preparing the meal respectively. Body: a divine instrument Nature has gifted us with something incomparable and priceless, the human body. We have been provided with a supercomputer of a brain.

Prowess of the breath Next humans are blissfully unmindful of the power of our breath. It can be likened to a cell phone which nature has provided to connect us with divinity. Breath is perhaps the most potent form of effervescence and pizzazz of our personalities. Humans are insensible to the fact that ninety per cent of toxins get expatriated from our bodies through the potency of breath. If we delve deep into the ancient practices like pranayama or the unique rhythmic technique of Sudarshan Kriya (imparted in various bouquets of courses of the Art of Living) the primacy of breath is under-



stood by us. An inestimable nun Aeon ago lived an exalted and celebrated Zen nun. There were far and few like her. It was believed that few women could attain the venerable state like this pious lady. Once she had undertaken an arduous pilgrimage and arrived at a village as the sun sank in the horizon.

In all humility, she begged for lodgings for the night. However, the villagers slammed their doors and were unwilling to accommodate her in the village. They were opposed to the tenets of the Zen school of thought. They thought it to be exceedingly revolutionary. Thus, the clichéd and conformist individuals were unwilling to accept the nun into their fold even for a night. The traditionalists banished her from the village and she was compelled to wage the battle against inclement weather out in the cold. At the stroke of midnight, she woke up abruptly, unearthed the cherry tree which fed her ravenous body with sweet fruits, talking to the full moon which lightened up the sky.

Immediately she was engulfed with waves of emotions and suffused with love and affection for all those who had exiled and expatriated her from the village. She experienced the quintessential silence of an awakened one. She was extremely grateful to the villagers who had not accommodated her, to the cherry tree that fed her, the meditative silence that encompassed her body, all of which had wily nicely contributed to her awakening, an almost celestial spectacle. "Thus, a stock individual, a savant, a sage or a nun becomes a Buddha the moment he/she accepts all that life brings with its variegated, paradoxical situations.

The one who accepts these situations which gratitude and gratefulness, without admonishing anyone or carping verily becomes an awakened one." - The Buddha. "Good men and bad men differ radically. Bad men never appreciate kindness shown them, but wise men appreciate and are grateful. Wise men try to express their appreciation and gratitude by some return of kindness, not only to their benefactor, but to everyone else," said Gautama Buddha.

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

The cost of freebies and the legal quagmire



UTTAM GUPTA

Despite a Supreme Court ruling highlighting the impact of freebies on election fairness, political parties continue to leverage public funds for electoral gain



In the Maharashtra Budget for 2024-25 presented by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar, the BJP-led MahaYuti has announced financial assistance of Rs 1,500 per month for eligible women between 21 to 60 years of age, a stipend up to Rs.10,000 per month for youth in industrial and non-industrial sectors, electricity bill waiver for farmers etc. Unambiguously, these are freebies - an acronym for something given by the State free of charge - aimed at garnering votes during the State assembly elections later this year.

In a July 2013 order in S Subramaniam Balaji vs Government of Tamil Nadu & Ors, the Supreme Court (SC) had said that the distribution of freebies of any kind influences all people; that "It shakes the root of free and fair elections to a large degree". Yet, it had held that promises in the election manifesto cannot be construed as "corrupt practice" under the Representation of People Act (RPA), or any other prevailing law and, hence, distribution of freebies can't be stopped when the ruling party uses public funds for this purpose through the passage of Appropriation Acts in the state assembly. In the same order, it directed the Election Commission of India (ECI) "to frame guidelines that could govern the contents of the election manifesto of all the recognized political parties as when it had acted while framing guidelines for general conduct of the candidates, meetings, processions, polling day, etc". Further "this can also be included in the model code of conduct - under a separate head for guidelines for election manifesto - for guidance of political parties and candidates". The ECI never came out with any such guidelines. Emboldened by ECI inaction, the political parties who in the past, were placing freebies in a corner of their manifestos, have started catapulting them to the centre stage.

Now, freebies hold the key to winning elections. In February 2020, the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) led by Arvind Kejriwal mesmerized Delhi, voters, by promising free or heavily subsidized electricity and free water, free bus rides for women, free Wi-Fi, and so on. In 2022 in Punjab, AAP promised free electrici-



NOW, FREEBIES HOLD THE KEY TO WINNING ELECTIONS. IN FEBRUARY 2020, THE AAM AADMI PARTY (AAP) LED BY ARVIND KEJRIWAL MESMERISED DELHI, VOTERS, BY PROMISING FREE OR HEAVILY SUBSIDISED ELECTRICITY AND FREE WATER, FREE BUS RIDES FOR WOMEN, FREE WI-FI, AND SO ON

ty to each household for consumption up to 300 units per month, waiver of all outstanding power bills, Rs 1000 per month to every woman aged 18 or above etc. The party won the state with a thumping majority. In Uttar Pradesh also in 2022, BJP promised 20 million smartphones for poor students, two free LPG cylinders every year, Rs 100,000/- for the marriage of girls from poor families, and so on. Meanwhile, the matter came up before the SC through a public interest litigation (PIL). On January 25, 2022, it observed "This is no doubt a serious issue. Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget". It also reiterated that "this disturbs the level playing field". On August 3, 2022, it gave a sense that it is for Parliament, besides the ECI, to take the initiative to enact a law on curbing freebies. It also sought suggestions on the composition of a committee that could go into the issue "dispassionately" and make recommendations.

But, the above decisions haven't been acted upon. Although, on its part, the ECI had sent out questionnaires asking parties to give 'specifics' of what they intend to promise voters, financial impact and how this will be funded, there hasn't been any follow-up. Meanwhile, the freebies continue to proliferate. In Karnataka elections in May 2023, the grand old party (GOP) promised five guarantees viz. Gruha Jyoti, Gruha Lakshmi, Sakhi programme, Yuva Nidhi, and Anna Bhagya. The trend continued during elections in Madhya Pradesh (MP), Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Telangana held in November/December 2023. While, in Rajasthan, Congress promised Rs 10,000 every year to the female head of the family under the Gruha Lakshmi Yojana, in MP, BJP increased the grant to Rs 1,250 per month under Ladli

Behna Yojana; the amount to be hiked to Rs 3,000 per month. Additionally, in MP, under Ladli Lakshmi Yojana, the BJP promised girls Rs 200,000/- till they get married. In Chhattisgarh, it promised Rs 12,000 per year to married women under the 'Mahtari Vandan Scheme'.

In Telangana, the GOP beat all promising 10 grams of gold besides Rs 100,000/- cash to women getting married. In the run-up to the general elections, even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced on December 23, 2023 supply of free foodgrain under the Pradhan Mantri Garib Kalyan Anna Yojana (PMGKAY) to over 800 million persons, Congress gave ten guarantees in its manifesto "Nyay Patra" released in April, 2024. Meanwhile, in Delhi, Kejriwal promised Rs 1000 per month to all women above the age of 18 years under the Mukhyamantri Mahila Samman Yojana (MMSY). For State elections later this year, parties are readying to give another round of big doles.

As mentioned earlier, the BJP-led MahaYuti has already announced a bountiful package for Maharashtra. For others viz. Haryana, and Jharkhand, parties will follow suit. The SC assertion on January 25, 2022 "Budget for freebies is going above the regular budget" is confirmed by facts on ground zero. Whereas, in Delhi, these cost the exchequer around Rs 12,500 crore annually, in Punjab the impact is close to Rs 20,000 crore. In Karnataka, at over Rs 60,000 crore, the cost of five guarantees exceeds the existing fiscal deficit. Redeeming the guarantees promised in GOP's "Nyay Patra" could cost the Central Government a mammoth around Rs 46,00,000 crore.

In Maharashtra, Rs 1,500 per month to eligible women alone

would cost Rs 46,000 crore a year. When the top court says freebies are bad, why doesn't it ban them? A big deterrent is none other than the SC order of July 2013 which says "... it can't be construed as corrupt practice..."

Within the meaning of section 123(1)(A) of the RPA, 1951, the expression 'bribery' has been defined to mean any gift, offer or promise by a candidate or his agent or by any other person with the consent of a candidate or his election agent of any gratification with the object of inducing an elector as a reward to his candidature. The irony is, that when a candidate uses his own pocket money to bribe the voter, it is treated as corrupt practice, but when the party on whose symbol he is seeking election bribes voters using 'public money', the top court doesn't treat it that way.

The Union Government's standards of financial propriety lay down inter alia that "no authority shall exercise its powers of sanctioning expenditure to pass an order which will be directly or indirectly, to its advantage; and the expenditure from public moneys should not be incurred for the benefit of a particular person or a section of the people unless a claim for the amount could be enforced in a court of law or the expenditure is in pursuance of a recognized policy or custom". The reckless spending of the taxpayer's money on freebies is neither a recognized policy/custom nor it is sanctioned in a court of law. It is a blatant financial irregularity that amounts to bribing voters using public money solely to gain electoral advantage. The SC should change its stance to recognize this and force the Parliament to enact a law if it feels existing laws don't provide for it.

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

Transforming healthcare with digital technologies

The health-tech sector is poised for exponential growth, reshaping the future of healthcare for all its citizens

Digital technologies are anticipated to offer swift and personalized clinical services to each patient through their handheld devices. New Age Technologies (NATs), including Artificial Intelligence (AI), the Internet of Things (IoT), mobile technologies, cloud computing, Big Data, and 5G, are becoming essential tools in the realm of "Smart Health." Smart Health refers to an interconnected healthcare system that utilizes NATs for clinical analysis, treatment, medical setups, and hospital management.

Examples of Smart Healthcare systems include surgical robots, RFID-based supply chains, and integrated health management platforms or Health-stacks. These Smart



CHARRU MALHOTRA

Healthcare systems provide real-time connectivity to doctors, reduce treatment costs, and offer predictive, personalized information to patients. For example, IoT-based wearable smart devices can track patients' progress, help manage medical emergencies, and promptly notify healthcare providers. India's National Health Policy 2017 aims to achieve "Universal Health Coverage for all citizens," grad-

ually transitioning from fragmented healthcare systems to a holistic approach using digital technologies.

The Ayushman Bharat scheme, launched in September 2018, is a notable nationwide public health insurance program that provides health coverage of up to 5 lakh rupees per family per year for secondary and tertiary care hospitalization through the 'Abha-ID' for each patient. Additionally, the National Digital Health Mission (NDHM), launched on August 15, 2020, aims to create an integrated healthcare system linking practitioners and patients digitally, allowing real-time access to health records. Driven by these national initiatives, along with the rise of health startups, increased

healthcare spending, and growing demand for high-quality healthcare services, the health-tech sector in India is experiencing significant growth.

According to recent reports, the health-tech industry in India is expected to reach \$6.5 billion by 2024 and \$78.4 billion by 2033, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 28.67% during this period. India has already implemented initiatives such as the National Health Portal and the Health Management Information System (HMIS), with several state-level initiatives as well. Programs like the CoWIN Vaccine Platform, the Aarogya Setu contact tracing app, and the eSanjeevani National Telemedicine Service Platform



deserve special mention. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, private equity firms are increasingly investing in health tech companies. The health startup ecosystem in India primarily consists of six segments: telemedicine, pharmacy, fitness, wellness, IT healthcare, and home healthcare. Leading telemedicine startups such as Practo, 1mg, mFine, iCliniq, Digi-Doctor, and myUpchar are reporting impressive increases in tele-consultations.

These systems provide information on health indicators, identify individuals, verify them, and connect their health records with informed consent. However, the adoption of these technologies presents significant technical, legal, and socio-economic challenges. There is a lack of a cohesive and robust legal and regulatory framework, particularly in the health-tech domain. Security in smart healthcare is crucial, as it is an ecosystem susceptible to attacks or infiltration by individuals or hackers. The privacy of patients' sensitive health data requires an extra layer of protection beyond what is currently available through India's Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act. Data interoperability and dig-

ital connectivity are essential for the seamless exchange of health data. The emerging 5G communication network in India can address this gap, but technological constraints hinder the widespread adoption of in-home health monitoring services. Healthcare specialists also face challenges such as limited access to and adaptability to digital technologies. These issues are further compounded by inadequate logistics support, a shortage of skilled manpower, and a tech-resistant attitude among various stakeholders. Drawing inspiration from the globally recognized Unified Payment Interface (UPI), a digital public infrastructure (DPI) for healthcare should be made accessible to all. Our anganwadi workers, in partic-

ular, should be supported by additional tech-savvy personnel. Capacity building for our healthcare providers and ensuring their access to digital devices and connectivity should be prioritized through common service centers (CSCs) and Public Health Centers (PHCs). Additionally, it is time for India to expand the scope of its Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, by including special provisions for handling the sensitive health data of patients. With these efforts, every Indian will not only have easy access to but also trust the "Digital Doctor in their pocket."

(The writer is a professor at Indian Institute of Public Administration, New-Delhi; views are personal)

Time to push disinvestment of public sector banks: SBI report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The government should go ahead with disinvestment of public sector banks (PSBs) as they are in good condition, SBI said in its research report on Monday. The report also pitched for the consolidation of existing government-owned banks.

"As banks are in good condition, the government should take stance on disinvestment of PSBs," the report titled 'Prelude to Union Budget 2024-25' said.

With regard to the privatisation of IDBI Bank, it said the government and Life Insurance Corporation of India are selling an almost 61 per cent stake in the lender. "They invited bids from buyers in October 2022. In January 2023, the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM) received several expressions of interest for the



IDBI Bank stake on offer. We expect the government to clarify this in the Budget," it said. Presently, the government owns over 45 per cent stake in IDBI Bank, and LIC has a 49.24 per cent shareholding.

The report also recommended that the government should tweak the tax on deposit interest and make flat tax treatment across the maturity ladder in line with mutual fund and equity markets.

"Household net financial savings has declined to 5.3 per

cent of GDP in FY23 and is expected to be 5.4 per cent in FY24. If we make deposit rate attractive in line with MFs, then this could push up household financial savings and CASA," it said.

As this amount will be in the hands of depositors, the report said, it could unleash additional spending and thereby, more GST revenue to the government.

"Increase in bank deposits will bring not only stability in core deposit base and financial

system but also financial stability in household savings as the banking system is better regulated and having a superior trust as compared to other alternatives with high volatility/risk," it said.

Deposits are taxed on an accrual basis and other asset classes only on redemption and there is also a need to remove this treatment, it added.

The report by the Economic Research Department, State Bank of India (SBI), expressed expectation that the government will look into the concerns over the Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code (IBC) that must be improved and expediting cases under the IBC should be a key change.

Recoveries through IBC in FY24 were 32 per cent, and financial creditors lost 68 per cent of their claims. The time taken to reach a resolution is 863 days instead of the stated 330 days, it said.

Markets settle on flat note in muted trade

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stock market benchmark Sindices Sensex and Nifty ended flat on Monday in a lacklustre trade as investors opted to book profits after the recent record rally in equities. Weak cues from Asian markets also added to the muted trend in domestic equities.

After beginning the trade on a weak note, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 36.22 points or 0.05 per cent to settle at 79,960.38. During the day, it went lower by 264.77 points or 0.33 per cent to 79,731.83. The NSE Nifty dipped 3.30 points or 0.01 per cent to 24,320.55.

Among the Sensex pack, Titan, Adani Ports, Tata Steel, JSW Steel, UltraTech Cement, Asian Paints,

Mahindra & Mahindra and Bajaj Finserv were the biggest laggards.

ITC, Hindustan Unilever, Nestle, HCL Technologies and Tata Motors were among the gainers.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower.

European markets were trading in the positive territory. US markets ended with gains on Friday.

In a volatile session on Friday, the broader NSE Nifty continued its record-breaking run and inched up 21.70 points or 0.09 per cent to close at its lifetime high of 24,323.85. The BSE benchmark, however, dropped 53.07 points or 0.07 per cent to settle at 79,996.60.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.97 per cent to USD 85.70 a barrel.

Rupee falls 1 paisa to 83.50 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee pared initial gains to settle 1 paisa lower at 83.50 against the US dollar on Monday, as muted domestic equities weighed on investor sentiments.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.45 and hit the intraday high of 83.44 and a low of 83.50 against the American currency during the session.

It finally settled at 83.50 against the dollar, registering a loss of one paisa over the previous close.

On Friday, the rupee settled at 83.49 against the US dollar.

Forex traders said the rupee gained on a weak dollar and decline in crude oil prices. However, weak domestic markets put pressure on the domestic unit.

"The US Dollar declined on disappointing non-farm payrolls report on Friday, which raised expectations that US Federal Reserve may cut

interest rates in its September Federal Open Market Committee (FOMC) meeting," said Anuj Choudhary — Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading at 104.90, higher by 0.03 per cent. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, declined 0.88 per cent to USD 85.78 per barrel.

"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias on the weak tone in the US Dollar and FII inflows. However, a correction in the domestic markets and political uncertainty in France as the election results indicate a hung parliament may cap the sharp upside," Choudhary added.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex ended the day 36.22 points, or 0.05 per cent, lower at 79,960.38 points.

Mercedes-Benz India posts record half-yearly sales at 9,262 units



PTI ■ NEW DELHI
German luxury carmaker Mercedes-Benz on Monday reported a 9 per cent growth in sales at 9,262 units in India in the first half of 2024, its highest ever half-yearly sales in the country, riding on strong demand across categories and availability of volume models.

The company had posted sales of 8,528 units in the January-June period of 2023, which was its previous highest half-yearly sales, Mercedes-Benz India said in a statement.

It plans to launch six new products in the second half (H2) of 2024.

SUV penetration was at 55 per cent in H1 2024, while the TEV (top-end vehicle) segment priced above Rs 1.5 crore comprised 25 per cent of total sales, it added.

The SUV segment saw robust performance from the GLA, GLE, GLE and GLS models, while the sedan portfolio comprising the A-Class, C-

Class, outgoing LWB E-Class and S-Class topped customer preference for luxury sedans, it added.

The BEV (battery electric vehicle) portfolio grew by 60 per cent in H1 24, comprising 5 per cent of total sales volumes, Mercedes-Benz India said.

"New and updated products, elevated customer experience at retail and ease of ownership, combined with positive customer sentiments boosted our best-ever H1 sales performance," Mercedes-Benz India Managing Director & CEO Santosh Iyer said.

The company further said availability of volume models also played a part in delivering record sales in the first half of this year.

On the outlook for the rest of the year, Iyer said, "We have new products coming up for the upcoming festive season. So we feel we should be able to close the year with a double-digit growth as projected earlier."

Tata Consumer Products to accelerate growth of core businesses

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Leading FMCG company Tata Consumer Products Limited (TCPL) will continue to invest in its brands and accelerate the growth momentum of the core businesses, tea, coffee and salt, the company's annual report said.

In the annual report for 2023-24, TCPL said that to strengthen and accelerate core businesses, contribution of modern trade to total sales within the country was 14 per cent driven by the growth of

new businesses.

During 2023-24, the company continued to undertake focused brand-building efforts and launched several products. TCPL said that central to the company's growth strategy was on focusing on the core businesses of tea, coffee and salt.

TCPL (formerly Tata Tea) said the company strengthened the tea and coffee businesses and also created new vectors of growth. The company was also successful in driving profitable growth in the key international markets of UK, USA and



Canada.

The company's focus on innovation lay in its belief that it is a strong strategic pillar and plays a significant role in meeting future ambitions, both on top line (revenue) and bottom line (profit).

TCPL said in the report, "We aspire to be a leading player in the FMCG industry by expanding our play in the existing categories and venturing into new spaces", adding that the company has taken both organic and inorganic routes to capitalise on industry trends and tap new

consumers and markets.

The company clocked a revenue of more than Rs 15,000 crore during the last fiscal. TCPL acquired Capital Foods and Organic India to address the needs of the diverse consumer spectrum.

In the last four years, TCPL's compounded annual growth rate of the tea business in India was nine per cent while revenue from coffee grew 29 per cent year-on-year.

The CAGR of salt during the last four years was 17 per cent, while that of packaged foods in India was 31 per cent.

Event on integration of AI in digital skills development a hit

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The Artificial Intelligence (AI)-Powered Skill India Digital Hub (SIDH) Masterclass, held last week, showcased remarkable global participation, with notable engagement from South African countries.

Interestingly, a few from Pakistan and China also took part under India's flagship skilling platform SIDH.

This significant event on July 4, focusing on the integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in digital skills development, witnessed substantial turnout from various continents, reflecting growing international interest in AI and digital education.

Organised by the National Skill Development Corporation (NSDC) in collaboration with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the World Bank, and UNESCO, the masterclass brought together



global experts and enthusiasts.

It was attended by key dignitaries including Jayant Chaudhary, Minister of State (Independent Charge), Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), Dr Haja Ramatulai Wuri — Minister of Technical and Higher Education, Sierra Leone; Ruben Sargsyan, Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs, Armenia; Atul Kumar Tiwari, Secretary, Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship; Ved Mani Tiwari, CEO, NSDC and MD and others.

NBCC to execute incubation centre at NIT Patna

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
NBCC (India) Limited has been entrusted with the execution of construction and development of Incubation Centre at NIT Patna (Bihta Campus). The estimated cost for the same is approximately Rs 36 Crore.

The Incubation Centre, spanning in an area of 6,500 sqm, shall be a state-of-the-art facility. The facility is designed as basement + ground + 4 floors structure, accommodating various essential amenities and advanced infrastructure.

As per the scope of work, NBCC shall be responsible for the conceptual planning, detailed architectural & structural design, drafting, including the supervision of construction for buildings, electrical systems, furniture, IT networking, and more.

Two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue this fiscal: CareEdge Ratings

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The two-wheeler industry is expected to sustain a steady volume growth this fiscal driven by improved domestic sales and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles, a report said on Monday.

According to CareEdge Ratings, post-Covid, sales volume of two-wheelers had consistently declined during FY20, FY21 and FY22 before starting to recover from FY23, with sales momentum continuing in FY24 as well.

"CareEdge Ratings anticipates two-wheeler sales volume growth to continue in FY25 and it would be more driven by improved domestic sales, higher EV sales, launch of CNG powered two-wheelers and good traction in executive and premium segment motorcycles," said



Hardik Shah, Director at CareEdge Ratings.

The growth in the two-wheeler segment in FY25 is also expected to be aided by the likely interest rate cuts in the second half of FY25, strong demand for new model launches coupled with recovery in exports from its low base and favourable monsoon which is likely to

improve rural consumer sentiment and income levels, said Arti Roy, Associate Director at CareEdge Ratings.

In FY23, the Indian two-wheeler industry recorded sales of 19.51 million units, an 8 per cent growth compared to the previous fiscal year's 18.01 million units.

In FY24, the industry continued its upward trajectory, achieving 9.8 per cent growth with a total sales volume of 21.43 million units. However, this was still short of the peak sales volume recorded in FY19, when annual sales volume had reached 24.46 million units, it said.

During FY24, the domestic two-wheeler industry witnessed total sales volume of 17.97 million units, reflecting a growth rate of 13 per cent, while the exports volume experienced a decline of 5 per cent.

High prices of vegetables causing pain to consumers

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Retail prices for vegetables, eggs, and poultry meat remain high in Kolkata markets, causing suffering for the common man.

Tomato prices have soared to Rs 80-100 per kg from Rs 45-50 a month ago, while Brinjal is selling for Rs 110-140 per kg, a jump of nearly 150 per cent from early June, greengrocers in several markets in the city said.

Prices of several other vegetables such as bitter melon, green chilli and bottle gourd have also increased by an average of 50 per cent. Egg and poultry meat prices have risen by 20-30 per cent in local markets.

"Now tomatoes in Bengal are coming from other states. There is a short supply of tomatoes from Bangalore and Himachal Pradesh due to heat waves and heavy rain. The production was hit due to heat waves and disruptions in logistics due to heavy rain," a source in West Bengal Vendors Association told PTI.

Agriculture Minister Sobhandeb Chattopadhyay



said that people are facing price pain since the Centre reduced support for farmers in fertilisers and transport subsidies, while climatic conditions have also aggravated the situation.

"The West Bengal government continues to support our farmers who are facing a rise in input costs. On the other hand, the Centre is reducing various subsidies. Hence, both farmers and commoners are suffering," said Chattopadhyay, also a Trinamool Congress leader.

He said that the state government has a retail distribution network, 'Sufal

Bangla,' the outlets of which sell vegetables and food articles at reasonable prices.

"In Sufal Bangla, tomatoes are priced at Rs 65 per kg against a minimum of Rs 80 in the retail market. Bitter melon is sold at Rs 72 per kg, and brinjal at Rs 102 per kg, which are 10-20 per cent cheaper. We are planning to increase the number of outlets from 484 now," Chattopadhyay said.

"Over the last three weeks, the prices of vegetables, eggs, and poultry have surged. Tomato prices have doubled, and onion prices are also inching higher. Inflation in essential items continues to cause us

pain in one way or another," Manashi Sanyal, a homemaker, said.

Food inflation likely intensified in June from the 8.7 per cent rate observed in April and May. According to Crisil's food plate cost tracker, the cost of a home-cooked vegetarian meal increased by 10 per cent year-on-year, reaching a six-month high, while the cost of non-vegetarian meals hit a seven-month peak.

The RBI has consistently expressed concerns over rising food prices. Retail inflation based on the Consumer Price Index moderated to a one-year low of 4.75 per cent in May. However, inflation in the food basket was 8.69 per cent, marginally down from 8.70 per cent in April.

However, fresh harvests from southern states are set to hit markets soon, which should ease prices within days, the consumer affairs ministry officials expect, adding that summer sowing of key vegetables is expanding robustly on the back of good rains.

Gold rises ₹100; silver rallies ₹870 amid strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices rose Rs 100 to Rs 73,410 per 10 grams in the national capital on Monday in line with strong global trend, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal closed at Rs 73,310 per 10 grams in the previous session.

Silver prices also rallied Rs 870 to Rs 94,270 per kg. It had settled at Rs 93,400 per kg in the previous session.

"In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are quoted at Rs 73,410 per 10 grams, up by Rs 100 from the Friday's afternoon price.

"Gold prices at Multi Commodity Exchange (MCX) traded lower amid risk-averse sentiment and profit booking after surging in the week gone by," Dilip Parmar, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

In the international markets, spot gold at Comex was USD 2,373 per ounce, up USD 10 per ounce from the previous close.

Budget FY25 should focus on tax relief to boost consumption: India Inc

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Union Budget FY25 should focus on offering relief to taxpayers, especially in the lower income brackets, to stimulate consumption, industry players suggested.

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the full Budget for fiscal 2024-25 on July 23 which will be the first major policy document of the new government.

The industry also urged the finance minister to lower corporate tax, phase out tax exemptions, and broaden tax base to boost economic growth.

"Rationalise and simplify the tax system to improve compliance and promote investment. Consider measures such as reducing corporate tax rates, phasing out tax exemptions, and broadening the tax base to make the tax regime more efficient and equitable," ASSOCHAM said.

Rating agency ICRA said the government is likely to set a fiscal deficit target at 4.9-5 per cent for FY25, as against 5.1 per cent estimated in the Interim Budget on February 1,

without compromising the capital expenditure target of Rs 11.1 lakh crore.

"While favourable developments on the revenue front portend positively for the fiscal dynamics in FY2025, ICRA believes that fiscal consolidation will turn quite challenging beyond the current fiscal," the rating agency said.

Mayank Gupta, co-founder and COO of Zopper Insurtech said the Budget is expected to focus on policies to promote economic growth and offer relief especially for the lower income brackets to stimulate consumption.

"From the point of view of insurance, we suggest amending section 80C of the Income Tax Act to permit a greater limit on insurance premium payments, thereby encouraging more individuals to buy insurance products. Additionally, there should also be an allowance of deduction for term life insurance under the new tax regime," he said.

Anish Mashruwala, partner, JSA Advocates and Solicitors said NBFC sector is expecting some ease of doing business considering the multitude of

regulatory compliances.

"Of course a balance needs to be struck in terms of oversight and hopefully this is something that the government ably considers," Mashruwala said.

Rumki Majumdar, economist, Deloitte India suggested that the government must expand the scope of PLI schemes, especially for sectors that can create more jobs, such as textiles, handicraft and leather.

The schemes must continue in sectors that have seen success, such as electronics, auto and semiconductors, Majumdar added.

On expectations from the finance minister, Vishal Goel, managing director, RX Promellant said the life sciences sector has immense potential and has been drawing global players to not only leverage the strength in contract manufacturing but also establishing global capability centres (GCCs).

"We are optimistic that the upcoming budget announcement will prioritise the life sciences sector, enhancing investment flows and fuelling innovation and success in India," Goel said.

High-scoring Spain faces Mbappé's France with spot in Euro 2024 final on line

AP ■ MUNICH

Spain and France meet in the semifinals of the European Championship on Tuesday. The match pits one of the highest-scoring teams at the tournament against one of the lowest as France's star forward Kylian Mbappé has struggled to get to grips with his mask. Kickoff is at 9 p.m. Local time (1900 GMT) in Munich. Here's what to know about the match:

Match facts: The winner will play England or the Netherlands in the final on Sunday in Berlin. Their semifinal is on Wednesday.

- Spain and France's quarterfinals both went to extra time. Substitute Mikel Merino's game-winning goal in the last minute of extra time handed Spain a 2-1 victory over host nation Germany, while France needed penalties to see off Portugal after the match ended goalless.
- No France player has scored from open play at Euro 2024. The French have only scored through two own goals and a penalty from Mbappé. Spain has netted 11 times.
- Mbappé, who will be facing several of his new Real Madrid

teammates, will again be wearing a protective mask after sustaining a broken nose in France's group opener against Austria.

- Spain, which is chasing a record fourth European Championship title, has been perfect in Germany. It was the only team to win all its group stage matches, while France could only muster draws against Poland and the Netherlands after a narrow win over Austria.
- Team news: Spain paid the price for its dramatic win over Germany and a number of players will miss the semifinal - and in some cases the final should La Roja get there - because of suspension or injury.
- Midfielder Pedri had to come off in the eighth minute against Germany with a knee injury following a hefty challenge from Toni Kroos and has been ruled out of the rest of Euro 2024. He will again be replaced by Dani Olmo - who came on for the 21-year-old and went on to score the opener as well as set up Merino's winner.
- Dani Carvajal was sent off late in extra time for a second yellow card and will be



suspended against France, as will fellow defender Robin le Normand after picking up another booking. Veteran Jesús Navas is likely to be tasked with marking Mbappé.

- France coach Didier Deschamps has no injury problems as Marcus Thuram returned to training on Sunday, alleviating concerns he could miss the semifinal after taking a blow to his thigh at the end of the match against Portugal.
- By the numbers: Spain and France have only conceded three goals between them. The only time France goalkeeper Mike Maignan had to pick the ball out of his net was Poland's retaken penalty in the group stage, while Spain conceded against Georgia and Germany.
- The teams have met 36 times, with Spain winning 16 to France's 13 - including five of the past eight.
- This is Spain's sixth European Championship semifinal. It has only once failed to advance to the trophy match, losing on penalties to eventual champion Italy at Euro 2020.
- France has reached the semifinals on five previous occasions, winning three.

- France has reached the final in three of last four major tournaments, losing 1-0 after extra time to Portugal at Euro 2016 and to Argentina on penalties in the 2022 World Cup, but beating Croatia to claim its second world title in 2018.
- What they're saying "We're in the semifinals and it's something we shouldn't take for granted, even if we may be used to it recently. Now we go to win it." - France coach Didier Deschamps.
- "Very few people gave us a chance and staying under the radar helped us start the tournament with confidence. Spain is a team to respect. I knew we had a great team and that's how it turned out." - Spain defender Marc Cucurella.
- "It's natural for him. He has this gift of carrying the team, the group. He gives ideas, advice to the players. He was born for that. He was born to pull the group up." - France striker Randal Kolo Muani on Mbappé's captaincy.
- "My players are insatiable. There's always room for improvement, of course, but we can't question their pride, quality and commitment."



India eyeing first win against Myanmar in international women's friendlies

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India will aim for a first win against Myanmar when they renew their rivalry against their higher-ranked neighbours in two away women's football friendlies beginning at the Thuwunna Stadium in Yangon, Myanmar on Tuesday.

The 67th ranked Indians are winless in all five of their meetings with Myanmar (WR 54), losing four and drawing once.

But it's been five years since they faced Myanmar with the last one being a 3-3 in the AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers in Mandalay in 2019.

Sandhya Ranganathan, Sanju and Nongmaithem Ratanbala Devi, all of them part of the current squad as well, scored in that fixture.

Prior to that, India suffered defeats on each of the four occasions at the AFC Women's Asian Cup Qualifiers (2013), AFC Women's Olympic Qualifiers (2015, 2018) and the Gold Cup (2019).

"We've played against them before, so we have an idea about them. Myanmar are strong and physically tough. Their mobility and speed is also good," Indian captain Loitongbam Ashalata Devi said in an AIFF release.

However, it's been more than five years since India last faced Myanmar, and the captain believes these two games will mark a fresh start in this rivalry.

"Myanmar's game style has changed a lot since we last played them. In the Asian Games, we watched them play. They have brought in a lot of youngsters, who can generate

more energy on the pitch. Our team has the perfect mixture of senior and young players.

"I believe we can perform better and the Myanmar tour could be a successful one," said the 31-year-old Indian skipper. This will be India's second consecutive FIFA women's international match window facing a higher-ranked opponent.

India had previously faced 48th-ranked Uzbekistan in Tashkent on May 31 and June 4, losing 0-3 and drawing 0-0, respectively.

"Competing against better and higher-ranked opponents is always an advantage. It leaves us with the opportunity to learn more and change strategies according to different situations as we did against Uzbekistan. I'm sure we'll learn a lot from the Myanmar games too," Ashalata said.

Myanmar have been out of action since the Asian Games in China last September.

They were knocked out of the group stage after losing to Korea Republic (0-3) and Philippines (0-3), and their only win came against Hong Kong (1-0).

Before that, Myanmar finished runners-up to Vietnam in the Southeast Asian Games. Head coach Langam Chaoba Devi feels India can match them.

"We closely observed Myanmar's style of play when they faced Korea Republic and Philippines," said Chaoba.

"Physically they are similar to us, with little difference in height and strength. However, they are technically very sound. But again, as I've said, we can surely match them," added the coach.

Never give up, fight till last moment: Sreejesh's learning from Rohit's men

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Playing in his fourth and probably last Olympics, veteran India hockey goalkeeper PR Sreejesh has learnt a valuable lesson from the T20 World Cup-winning cricket team -- 'never give up and celebrate' early and this is something which will be embedded in his mind in the Paris Olympics.

The Indian cricket team rose from the ashes in the final of the T20 World Cup, snatching a seven-run victory over South Africa from the jaws of defeat to end an 11-year ICC title drought.

India's last major ICC title was the Champions Trophy in 2013 under Mahendra Singh Dhoni's leadership.

"I did watch the final. The biggest learning from this World Cup is that don't celebrate before the last ball. South Africa was almost winning till the 15th over but the Indian team did not give up hope and snatched the win from the jaws of defeat," Sreejesh, who has 328 India caps, told PTI Bhasha. "That's what not only us (hockey team) but every Olympic-bound athlete can learn from our cricket team is that never give up, just wait and fight till the last moment, you will achieve it. I will remember



this in the Olympics," he said. Regarded as 'The Wall of Indian hockey', Sreejesh still remembers that one advice he got from "The Wall of Indian cricket", Rahul Dravid. "I met Dravid bhai long back. He told us about the importance of patience and waiting for your moment. That's what I did. I did not become one of the best goalkeepers in the world overnight. I waited for my opportunities. I have also learnt to remain humble from him," he said.

Sreejesh started playing hockey to get grace marks in the board exams but went on to win an Olympic medal -- bronze in Tokyo -- and also became the only goalkeeper

from the country to feature in four Olympics.

"It's a great honour, a proud moment but comes with a lot of responsibilities. You need to guide the youngsters, you need to keep the team together and help to achieve the common goal of winning a medal at the Olympics," said the former FIH player of the year.

"It's a dream journey. I just started playing this game for grace marks in board exams. I never thought that I would play hockey, wear an Indian jersey and participate in the Olympics. I just knew the legendary Dhanraj Pillay, who played 4 Olympics, 4 World Cups, Champions Trophy, Asian Games and today I am

the first goalkeeper going to play my fourth Olympics. It's hard to believe."

Sreejesh was the hero of India's win over Germany in the bronze medal play-off match in Tokyo and he is very well aware of the expectations from him in Paris.

"Expectations come with achievements and we don't have to take it negatively. I believe that it will give us the boost to perform even better in Paris. I want to tell the youngsters in the team that expectations and criticism will be there but on the field you are the boss. Stick to your basics, execute your plans and enjoy the game," he said.

He also acts as a mentor for the youngsters of the team and

loves to throw challenges to get the best out of them.

"Mentoring is very important as you are the one who played this game, failed, succeeded and when you tell these things to the kids, they understand. I always challenge forwards, make fun of them if they don't score. They accept this and try to do better," he said.

"The Olympics are too much pressure. It's like a pressure cooker. You are closely followed by the media, there will be social media, coaches, people give you many ideas and these things distract you. I just tell them to play as a team without hearing these noises."

India are placed in a tough Pool B in the Olympics along side Argentina, Australia, Belgium, New Zealand and Ireland.

"Argentina have good 3D skills, the Australians are very strong and Belgium have very experienced forward line but I feel that on that particular day, it's all about using your experience and knowledge against them," he said.

"For me visualization is the key. You play hockey for 365 days and in the Olympics we are also going to play the same but the ground, the audience and the atmosphere put you under pressure. Those who can play their best hockey under that pressure can win."



Majhi announces ₹15 lakh for two sportspersons from Odisha who will represent India in Olympics

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday announced an incentive of Rs 15 lakh each for hockey player Amit Rohidas and ace javelin thrower Kishore Jena who will be representing India in the Paris Olympics.

The CM expressed hope that the incentive will inspire the two sportspersons from Odisha to excel and bring glory to the country, an official statement said.

Majhi said Jena and Rohidas have made their native places as well as the entire state proud by qualifying for the Paris Olympics.

The effort, willpower, hard work, dedication and perseverance displayed by the two sportspersons will inspire young and budding talents in the state, he said.

"There is no dearth of sports talents in Odisha and the state government is committed to providing the required infrastructure, financial support and all other facilities at the grassroots level for the all-round development of such talents in every corner of the state," he added.

"The Indian men's hockey team won a Bronze in the 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Coco Gauff can't get a new game plan at Wimbledon and loses to Emma Navarro

AP ■ LONDON

Things were not going well for Coco Gauff against Emma Navarro at Centre Court, not well at all, and she kept looking at her guest box for help from her coaches. One, Brad Gilbert, would stand up and gesture, and they would talk back and forth, but a fix did not arrive.

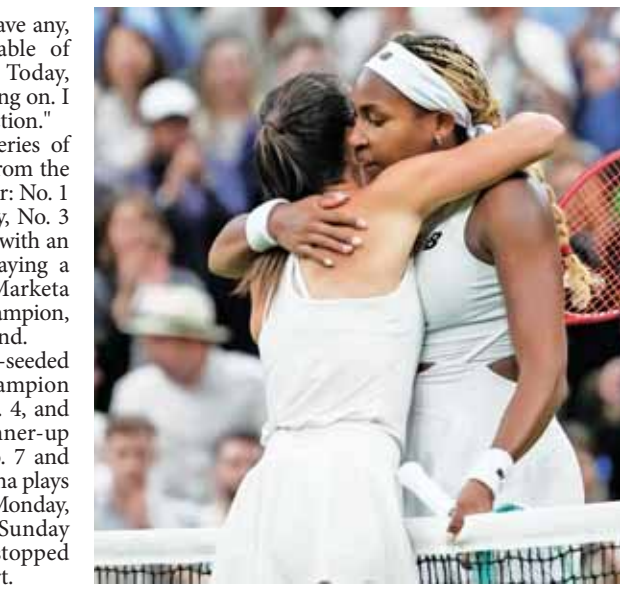
Gauff has yet to make it past the fourth round at Wimbledon, and she exited at that stage again Sunday, eliminated by Navarro 6-4, 6-3 in an all-American matchup.

"We had a game plan going in, and I felt that it wasn't working. I don't always ask for advice from the box, but today was one of those rare moments where I felt I didn't have solutions," said Gauff, the reigning U.S. Open champion and seeded No. 2 at the All England Club. "I

don't want to say I didn't have any, because I think I'm capable of coming up with some. Today, mentally, there was a lot going on. I felt like I wanted more direction."

Hers was the latest in a series of departures by top women from the Wimbledon bracket this year: No. 1 Iga Swiatek lost on Saturday, No. 3 Aryna Sabalenka withdrew with an injured shoulder before playing a match and No. 6 Marketa Vondrousova, last year's champion, was defeated in the first round.

Only two of the 10 highest-seeded women remain: 2022 champion Elena Rybakina, who is No. 4, and recent French Open runner-up Jasmine Paolini, who is No. 7 and meets Navarro next. Rybakina plays her fourth-round match Monday, while Paolini advanced Sunday when Madison Keys stopped playing because she was hurt.



The 19th-seeded Navarro, who writes herself notes in her phone to prepare for matches, reached a major quarterfinal for the first time. She showed exactly the type of tennis she's capable of playing in the second round, when she got past four-time major champion Naomi Osaka.

"I'm believing that this is possible as it's happening. I'm starting to think, Why not me? Why not? Why can't I make a quarterfinal run? Why can't I go deep in Grand Slams?" said Navarro, 23, who grew up in South Carolina and won the 2021 NCAA championship in her first year at the University of Virginia.

On Sunday, she noticed the interactions between Gauff and Gilbert - and the player's growing displeasure with her performance. "I don't normally give the other side of the court too much energy. I keep

it on my side of the court. (But) I guess seeing her kind of frustrated and looking at her box, putting her arms up in the air - it's definitely a little bit of a confidence boost," Navarro said. "I guess it maybe gave me a little bit of momentum and just some energy that I needed."

In addition to Gauff's trophy from New York last September, the 20-year-old from Florida has been the runner-up at the French Open and reached the semifinals at the Australian Open.

And while her first big breakthrough came at the All England Club at age 15, when she became the youngest qualifier in tournament history and beat Venus Williams in the first round en route to getting to the fourth, Gauff never has bettered that result.

She also exited in the fourth round in her next appearance, in 2021,

then lost in the third round in 2022 and the first round a year ago.

On Sunday, Gauff kept making mistakes, finishing with more than twice as many unforced errors, 25, as winners, 12. Her biggest issue was the shot that opponents know is Gauff's weakness: the forehand.

Navarro kept hitting to that side, and it worked.

"I really wanted to attack her forehand," Navarro said afterward. Gauff made 16 unforced errors with forehands, and another 16 forced errors, accounting for 32 of the 61 total points won by Navarro.

"I have the ability to raise my level when players play well, and I feel I didn't do that today," Gauff said. She explained that when she's sought a mid-match assist from her coaches in the past, "They usually gave me something," but added: "I don't think we were all in sync."

INDIA EYE IMPROVED BOWLING SHOW IN FINAL WOMEN'S T20I AGAINST SOUTH AFRICA

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Desperate to level the three-match series after the second game was washed out, India would hope weather doesn't play spoilsport, besides eyeing a much-improved bowling effort in the final women's T20I against South Africa here on Tuesday.

India are trailing the three-match series 0-1 after losing the opener by 12 runs. Their problems compounded after the second game here on Sunday was washed out midway due to persistent drizzle.

And with 30 to 40 per cent of rain forecast for Tuesday, the Indians are left on the mercy of weather gods.

In both the matches, the Indian bowlers cut a sorry figure as South Africa amassed 189 for 9 and 177 for 6 respectively.

Barring Pooja Vastrakar, who picked up two wickets each in both the games, and spinner Deepti Sharma, most of the Indian bowlers failed to shine against the Proteas women.

Renuka Singh leaked runs in



and Anneke Bosch have contributed with the bat as well for the visitors.

South Africa's only concern is Chloe Tryon, who has scored identical 12 runs in the two games.

And with the upcoming T20 World Cup in Bangladesh in mind, Tryon will be desperate to prove her detractors wrong.

TEAMS (FROM):

India Women: Harmanpreet Kaur(c), Smriti Mandhana(vc), Uma Chetry(wk), Richa Ghosh(wk), Dayalan Hemalatha, Jemimah Rodrigues, Shafali Verma, Amanjot Kaur, Shreyanka Patil, Sajeevan Sajana, Deepti Sharma, Asha Sobhana, Arundhati Reddy, Renuka Singh, Shabnam Shakil, Pooja Vastrakar and Radha Yadav.

South Africa Women: Laura Wolvaardt(c), Tazmin Brits, Mieke de Ridder(wk), Sinalo Jafta(wk), Anneke Bosch, Nadine de Klerk, Annerie Dercksen, Marizanne Kapp, Sune Luus, Chloe Tryon, Ayabonga Khaka, Masabata Klaas, Eliz-Mari Marx, Nonkululeko Mlaba and Tumi Sekhukhune.



Mentor Yuvraj was very happy when I got out for duck, he must be proud now: Abhishek Sharma

PTI ■ HARARE

India opener Abhishek Sharma has revealed that his mentor Yuvraj Singh was delighted when he got out for a duck on his T20I debut against Zimbabwe here as the swashbuckling former all-rounder, for reasons best known to him, felt it was a "good start".

Making his India debut, Abhishek was out on duck as the Men in Blue lost the first T20I against hosts Zimbabwe by 13 runs on Saturday. But the 23-year-old came back strongly to set the stage ablaze with a blistering maiden century (a 47-ball 100) to fashion India's 100-run win in the second game a day later.

"I spoke to him yesterday (Saturday) also, and I don't know why he was very happy when I got out on zero. He said that's a good start but he must be very happy and proud just like my family," Abhishek said in a video posted by BCCI.

He credited the hero of India's 2011 World Cup triumph for not only helping him hone his skills on the cricket field but also supporting him in his life away from the field.

"It's all because of him as well, the hard work he has put in (shaping) me. (For) two-three years, he has worked really hard not only on my cricket but off the field (life) as well." After Sunday's game, Abhishek called Yuvraj, who couldn't be happier for the youngster.

"Well done very proud, you

Have been living a dream for past few days, filled with gratitude: Bumrah

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah on Monday said he has been "living a dream" for the past few days as he expressed gratitude for the stupendous reception that he and the rest of his teammates got for winning the T20 World Cup in the Caribbean.

The 30-year-old, who picked up 15 wickets in the mega-event that concluded on June 29 in Barbados, was a key figure in India's second overall and first in 17 years world trophy in the shortest format. He was adjudged Player of the Tournament for his performance.

"I am so thankful for the last few



days. I've been living a dream and it has filled me with happiness and gratitude," Bumrah posted on X, along with a video of him enjoying the rapturous homecoming that included a breakfast meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi and a victory parade attended by lakhs of fans in Mumbai.

The 42-second clip featured the audio of Virat Kohli's speech during the felicitation function after the parade last Thursday where the champion batter had lauded Bumrah's contribution.

The fast bowler had combined with all-rounder Hardik Pandya to turn it around wonderfully for India in the final.

The two were brought in for their second spell in the match at a time

when South Africa needed 30 off 30 balls. They wreaked havoc to ensure that the Proteas eventually fell short by seven runs.

Kohli had called Bumrah a "once in a generation" player during the speech at the Wankhede Stadium, prompting the assembled crowd to chant the bowler's name in appreciation.

"What I would like everyone to do is to applaud a guy who brought us back into games again, and again, and again. It was phenomenal. He is a once in a generation bowler. I am so glad he plays for us," Kohli, who retired from T20 Internationals at the end of the World Cup, had said.

Bumrah was welcomed with flower petals after arriving at his Ahmedabad home recently.



Jayasuriya named Sri Lanka's interim coach ahead of limited overs series against India

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Former captain Sanath Jayasuriya was on Monday named the interim head coach of Sri Lanka's cricket team ahead of this month's white-ball home series against India with the country's board saying that he is "well-positioned" to guide the side till a "permanent solution" is found in the next few months.

The Indian team will be touring Sri Lanka for three T20 Internationals and as many ODIs, starting July 27.

Jayasuriya, who has also served as a chief selector in the past, will continue in the post till Sri Lanka's Test tour to England in August-September, comprising three games.

"Sri Lanka Cricket wishes to announce the appointment of Mr. Sanath Jayasuriya as the 'Interim Head Coach' of the national team. He will function in the position until the completion of Sri Lanka's tour of England in September 2024," the SLC said in a statement.

The 55-year-old, a swashbuckling opener in his prime, was named for the interim post after Englishman Chris Silverwood resigned last week as Sri Lanka head coach.

Maldives' tourism body invites T20 world champ Indian team to celebrate trophy there

PTI ■ MALE

The recently-crowned T20 world champion Indian cricket team has been invited to celebrate its triumph in Maldives by the country's tourism association and its marketing and public relations corporation.

The Rohit Sharma-led Indian team won the trophy in Barbados after beating South Africa by seven runs in the final on June 29.

"Maldives Marketing and Public Relations Corporation (MMPRC/ Visit Maldives) in collaboration with the Maldives Association of Tourism Industry (MATI) have jointly extended a special and open invitation to the Indian National Cricket Team," the two bodies said in a joint statement.

Ibrahim Shiuree, the CEO and Managing Director of MMPRC, and Ahmed Nazeer, Secretary General of MATI, said they look forward to hosting the team, which returned to India on Thursday last week.

It was welcomed by frenzied fans in both Delhi and Mumbai, which also played host to a victory parade featuring lakhs of supporters.

"We would be honoured to host you and ensure that your stay is filled with memorable moments, relaxation, and bespoke experiences," Shiuree and Nazeer said in the joint statement.

They said the invitation also highlights the strong and long-standing cultural and sporting ties between the Maldives and India.



Cricketer Ashwin buys team in Global Chess League

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India off-spinner Ravichandran Ashwin has become a co-owner of the American Gambits, a new team which will feature in the second edition of the Global Chess League, a joint venture between Tech Mahindra and the International Chess Federation.

The League on Monday unveiled the six franchises for the second edition to be played in London from October 3 to 12.

American Gambits, owned by prominent business leaders Prachura PP, Venkat K Narayana and Ashwin, will replace Chingari Gulf Titans.

"We're thrilled to introduce the American Gambits to the chess world. With a blend of strategic brilliance and unwavering determination, our team aims to redefine the game. As co-owner, I'm excited to witness their journey and contribute to their success," Ashwin was

Chetry is a truly hard-working cricketer: Indian women's fielding coach Bali

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Indian women's cricket team fielding coach Munish Bali lauded Uma Chetry for her fielding skills, and said the young wicket-keeper is a "truly hard-working cricketer".

Chetry, 21, made her T20 International debut against South Africa in the abandoned second game of the three-match series here on Sunday, and inflicted a stumping off Deepti Sharma's bowling to get rid of a well-settled Tazmin Brits.

This was after Chetry had earlier missed a similar chance against Brits as she collected the ball ahead of the stumps.

easy. She got hit by the ball, but she stood there in pain. She has great attitude and is a truly hard-working cricketer. I was so happy for her to have stumped Brits." Rain washed out the second T20I between India and South Africa with the tourists setting the hosts a target of 178 to level the series.

Despite some slip-ups on the field, Bali was overall content with the team's effort. "It's difficult to grip the ball when it's drizzling. But still, we fielded very well.

We are working on it (fielding) and it's in progress as we keep getting better slowly." No one drops catches intentionally. The players have been practising hard during our (training) sessions, giving their best. At times, things click, and sometimes, it doesn't. Errors happen during matches. So, we keep telling them to keep giving their best and results will follow," he said.

Bali also praised the bowling effort of spinner Deepti Sharma, who returned with figures of 2 for 20.

"She (Deepti) is an experienced bowler. Having played all three formats, she knows where her strength lies, and she keeps backing herself. Also, her experience of bowling at the death is immense, which makes her a truly good bowler."



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PUBLIC NOTICE

Bank of India is organizing **SAMJHAUTA DAY** on 11/07/2024 (Thursday) to settle the NPA loan accounts of borrowers under One Time Settlement (OTS) at all its branches/Zones and FGOs across the country. The **SAMJHAUTA DAY** is specially designed for the NPA Borrowers who could not repay their loan in time due to distress in business/medical condition of the borrower or any other genuine reason. Our Bank is having special OTS schemes to settle small value accounts and mid-size accounts through which special and good discounts are offered to the borrowers whose accounts are NPA. We appeal all the borrowers whose accounts are NPA to come forward to avail this Golden opportunity by settling NPA loan accounts on **SAMJHAUTA DAY** on 11/07/2024.

Sd./ Authorised Officer
Bank of India