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CORPORATE FUNDING IN SOLAR SECTOR GLOBALLY DIPS: MERCOM

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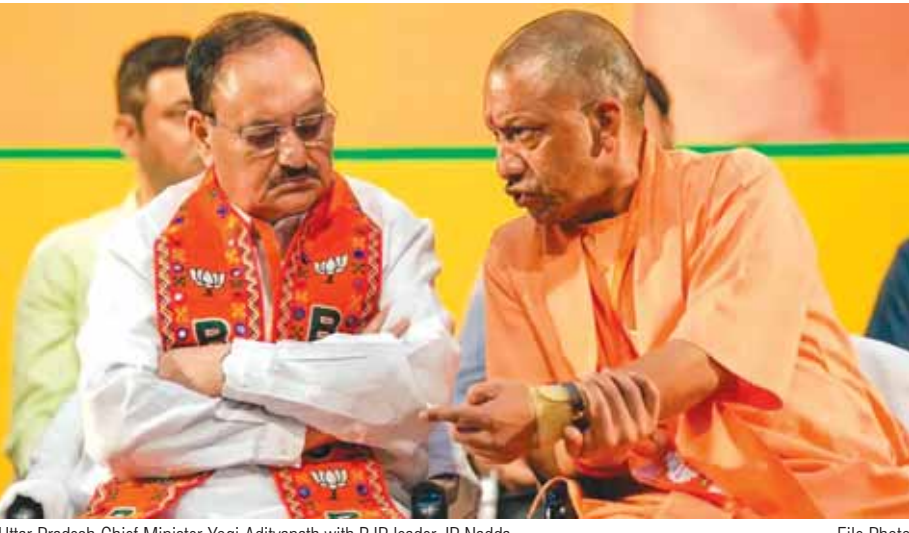
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UP CM Yogi prepares for critical bypolls



Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath with BJP leader JP Nadda File Photo

VIRENDRA NATH BHATT ■ LUCKNOW

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

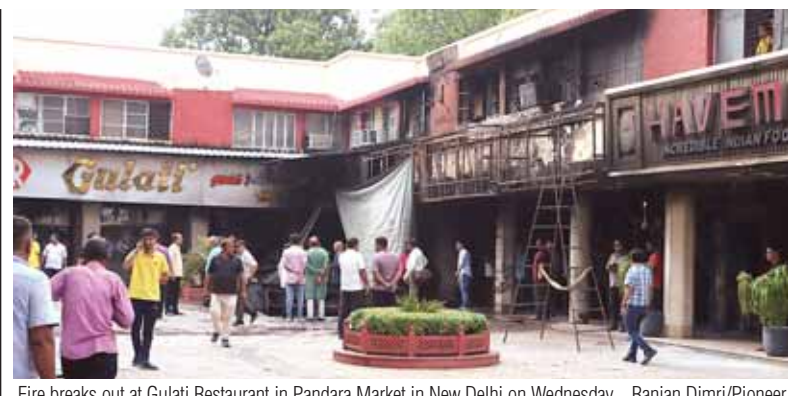
Deputy CM fends off Akhilesh Yadav

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Amid the buzz over possible changes in the Yogi Adityanath Government, the Uttar Pradesh Deputy Chief Minister Keshav Prasad Maurya and main Opposition Samajwadi Party's leader Akhilesh Yadav on Wednesday engaged in a verbal duel after which the latter said the people of UP are fed up with infighting within the BJP Government. In a sharp response, Maurya stressed that the BJP has strong Governments and organisation at the Centre

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

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



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

Iconic Gulati eatery gutted, Delhiites left heartbroken

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

NCP's Ajit Pawar suffers setback



T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

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

Karnataka Government pushes pause button on job quota Bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

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



Chief Minister Siddaramaiah with leaders File Photo: PTI

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

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

Cowardly terrorists from Pakistan on the run in Jammu

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

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



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

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

Stampeding job seekers in Mumbai



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

Haryana Govt announces quota for Agniveers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI/CHANDIGARH

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



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

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

HC reserves order on Kejriwal arrest pleas

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

Law Ministry advocates sunset clause in key Bills

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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



proposal a part of its 100-day agenda, saying steps will be taken in this regard in consultation with concerned ministries. Ahead of the Lok Sabha elections, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had directed all Union Ministries and departments to draw up a 100-day agenda for the next Government. Former Union Law Secretary P K Malhotra explained that whenever the legislature — Parliament or State legislature — want to restrict the life of a

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

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

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

Fierce encounter with Maoists in Saranda, forces recover firearms

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

After a brief lull, the West Singhbhum district witnessed a fierce encounter between police, paramilitary forces, and a Naxal squad in the dense Saranda jungle on Wednesday. The clash, which lasted for several hours with intermittent firing, resulted in the recovery of several firearms left behind by the retreating rebels.

The encounter reportedly took place between paramilitary forces and a Naxal group led by the notorious rebel leader Anmol Da, who is among the top leaders of the

outlawed CPI-Maoist. Anmol Da, known for orchestrating several high-profile attacks, has been evading capture in the Saranda forest for years. He carries a hefty reward of Rs 1 crore on his head.

According to initial reports, the paramilitary forces were conducting a routine patrol when they encountered the Naxal squad deep within the Saranda jungle. The rebels, heavily armed and well-prepared, engaged the forces in a prolonged gunfight. Despite their initial resistance, the Naxals were forced to retreat, leaving behind a cache of weapons.



The firefight, described as intense and sustained, saw the paramilitary forces utilizing superior firepower, which ultimately compelled the Naxals to abandon their positions. Witnesses from nearby

villages reported hearing gunshots and explosions throughout the morning, creating a sense of alarm and urgency in the region.

West Singhbhum Superintendent of Police (SP)

Ashutosh Shekhar confirmed the encounter but refrained from providing detailed information immediately. "There was an encounter with the Naxals in Saranda this morning. The Naxals fled the scene

after a while leaving some of their weapons. The firearms recovered from the encounter scene are being assessed," said the SP, adding that a detailed press release would be issued later.

Anmol Da, a feared and influential figure within the CPI-Maoist hierarchy, has been a thorn in the side of law enforcement agencies for years. His strategic acumen and deep understanding of guerrilla warfare have allowed him to evade capture repeatedly. The Saranda forest, known for its dense foliage and difficult terrain, has served as a perfect hideout for him and his followers.

Under his leadership, the Naxals have orchestrated several attacks on security forces, targeting police stations, paramilitary camps, and government installations. His ability to mobilize and lead large groups of armed rebels has made him one of the most wanted figures in the region. Village elders and local leaders are urging the government to increase security measures and ensure the safety of civilians in the aftermath of the encounter. "We are glad that the security forces are taking action against the Naxals, but we also fear for our safety. The government must ensure that

we are protected from any retaliatory attacks," said a local villager. The encounter in Saranda is part of a broader strategy by the government to combat Naxalism in the region. Security forces have been intensifying operations, conducting regular patrols, and setting up new camps to curb the movement and influence of Naxal groups. Authorities believe that the retreat of the Naxals and the recovery of their weapons is a significant setback for the rebel group. The seized firearms are being analyzed to gather more intelligence on the Naxals' capabilities and future plans.

Dr Ajoy Kumar alleges manipulation in UPSC examinations



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Senior Congress leader and former Jharkhand MP Dr. Ajoy Kumar has launched a scathing attack on the BJP government, accusing it of rigging every competitive exam in the country. Speaking at a press conference, Dr. Ajoy alleged widespread corruption and manipulation in the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) examinations, implicating top officials and political leaders.

Dr. Ajoy urged the media to employ the Right to

Information Act (RTI) to uncover the exact marks of candidates related to BJP leaders. "If the media uses the RTI to find out the exact UPSC exam marks of those candidates who are relatives of BJP leaders, they will be shocked. Everything will come out in the open," he said.

He further referenced the recent NEET exam paper leak scandal, highlighting the adverse effects such incidents have on the aspirants, particularly those from middle-class families. "If the central government is

involved in such scams, where will the children of middle-class families go, as they are heavily dependent on such exams?" Dr. Ajoy questioned, emphasizing the reliance of many on these exams for a fair shot at education and employment opportunities.

Dr. Ajoy specifically cited a case involving an IAS officer from Pune, who allegedly secured an 800th rank in the UPSC exams under suspicious circumstances. "An IAS officer from Pune getting 800th rank and IAS cadre is a big question for UPSC and the central government," he remarked, suggesting that such instances are indicative of deeper systemic corruption.

Concluding his address, Dr. Ajoy stated, "This makes it clear how much corruption is prevalent at the centre under the NDA government." His statements have stirred significant controversy, with calls for a thorough investigation into the alleged malpractices within the UPSC and other competitive exams.

From humble beginnings to prosperity: How one woman's efforts pave way for sustainable livelihood in Jharkhand's villages

PNS : RANCHI

This is a story of a woman's hard work and dedication that changed her life and transformed the lives of many others in her village as well as surrounding areas. Though her humble upbringing and lack of education held her back from exploring options outside her village, it did not deter her from dreaming big. And it was this hunger to do more that led Kanaklata Soren to a training camp organized by the Adani Foundation (AF) near Adani power plant in Motia village of Godda district in Jharkhand.

For Kanaklata, who lives with her family in a small village of Nayabad, about 12 kilometers from the bustling city of Godda, the training camp was an eye opener. Having worked as a Suposhan Sangini (health volunteer under AF's Suposhan project), she knew the role nutrition and a balanced diet



play in a person's good health. At the camp, she learned the harmful effects of chemical fertilizers and health hazards caused by them. AF's training focused on the benefits of organic farming, a sustainable and environment-friendly practice that is not only good for health but also boosts farmers' income. She was accompanied by her friend Bitiya Murmu, who was equally enthusiastic about the training where they learned how to prepare organic fertilizer

from earthworms and cow dung.

The training gave her direction and Kanaklata began her self-employment journey by learning the intricacies of preparing vermicompost. She diligently prepared the compost herself, working tirelessly to perfect the process. Her dedication bore fruit, and she soon began to sell 10 quintals of vermicompost, earning Rs 5,000-6,000 per month. Bitiya, inspired by her friend's dedication, joined

her in this work. Together, they produce vermicompost and sell 4 to 5 kg of earthworms each month that supplements their income.

But Kanaklata was not content with her personal success. She wanted to share her knowledge and expertise with others in the village. She took it upon herself to train her fellow villagers on how to make vermicompost. The Adani Foundation supported her efforts by providing disposable bags and earthworms.

In no time, the villagers learned the compost-making process. They were happy to have found a new source of income. Soon, more than 200 farmers from nearby villages adopted Kanaklata's approach. Many farmers started using vermicompost as organic fertilizer in farming. The earnings of farmers enhanced substantially. Each farmer can now produce about 1,000 kg of vermicompost in a bag measuring 12

feet in length, 3 feet in width, and 2.5 feet in height. It takes around Rs 2,000 to produce a single bag of vermicompost. When sold, it yields a profit of Rs 5,000-6,000.

Word about the success of Kanaklata's initiative spread to neighbouring villages. Like Sondiha, Motia, Patwa, Basantpur, Rangania, Petvi, Kaudibahiya, Gumma, Belvarna, and Dumariya. All of them embraced this sustainable source of livelihood. Nayabad and its residents became a beacon of hope for rural entrepreneurship. Farmers, who were once burdened with financial woes, now find themselves with a steady and reliable source of income. The transformation has been remarkable. Farmers' willingness to adapt to their new circumstances and their desire to learn as much as they can about farming and organic fertilizers has ensured the health and prosperity of both their farms and their families.

Bokaro BJP leader appointed Member of FCI, State Advisory Committee



PNS : BOKARO

Sanjay Tyagi, the General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Bokaro district, has been appointed as a member of the Food Corporation of India (FCI). He has been nominated to the Jharkhand State Advisory Committee. The Ministry of Consumer Affairs, Food, and Public Distribution of the Government of India issued the appointment letter. Mr. Tyagi has been appointed for a tenure of two years, with the possibility of an extension.

Expressing his gratitude to the central and state leadership, Sanjay Tyagi said, "It is a moment of pride for an ordinary worker to be nominated as an FCI member. This is a joyous moment that can only happen in the BJP." Tyagi further stated that he would fulfill his responsibilities with honesty and dedica-

tion, ensuring that the benefits of government schemes reach the right people. He emphasized his commitment to acting as a bridge between government departments and the public.

Pannalal Kandu, BJP Chas Nagar North President, congratulated Tyagi on his appointment, stating, "This is an honor for all our workers." Others who extended their congratulations included BJP Kisan Morcha District General Secretary Arvind Rai, BJYM Chas Nagar North President Jhantu De, BJP Mahila Morcha Nagar North President Babita Devi, BJP Kisan Morcha Nagar North President Vimal Kumar, former BJYM Bokaro District Secretary Budheshwar Ghoshal and Rajesh Ghoshal, Dilip Pal, Rajesh Rajwar, Pintu Pal, Gautam Singh, Amit Kumar, Kanaiya Gupta, Mithun Laha, and Senti Kandu.

Safety orientation program organised for CGMs and Dept heads

PNS : BOKARO

The Gyanarjan and Vikas Department of Bokaro Steel Plant organized a safety orientation program for the plant's Chief General Managers and Department Heads. The primary objective of the program was to enhance the sense of safety and responsibility among all employees. This initiative focused on creating a safe



working environment, identifying potential hazards, and implementing effective safety measures.

The program included various interactive sessions,

practical demonstrations, and expert talks aimed at providing participants with comprehensive knowledge on different aspects of workplace safety. Vikas Gupta,

General Manager of the Safety Engineering Department, along with Amit Badole, Assistant Manager of the Safety Engineering Department, delivered a presentation covering all aspects related to the Safety Circle. The event was conducted and concluded with a vote of thanks by Devashree Rani Toppo, General Manager of the Gyanarjan and Vikas Department.

BGH launches CT Coronary angiogram services

PNS : BOKARO

In a landmark development for medical services in Bokaro, the Bokaro General Hospital (BGH), operating under the aegis of Bokaro Steel Limited (BSL), has commenced CT Coronary Angiogram (CTCAG) services in its Radiology Department. This advanced diagnostic procedure marks a significant step forward in the hospital's capabilities.

CTCAG is a non-invasive procedure performed on an out-patient basis. It is pivotal in diagnosing blockages, plaques, or congenital anomalies in the coronary vessels that supply blood to the heart. The availability of this test at BGH is expected to greatly enhance the diagnosis and treatment of coronary heart disease, benefiting a large number of patients.

Tiger spotted in north division of PTR

PNS : DALTONGANJ

The north division of the tiger reserve Palamu finds a tiger roaming around in peace and joy.

Chief conservator of forest and field director of the PTR Kumar Ashutosh said as tigers are here our staff and officials are quite alert and vigilant.

Ashutosh said, "PTR has the permission to bring in extra animals here in the PTR from a government zoo in Ranchi. The permission is from the two highest institutions of the government of India one the national tiger conservation authority and the other from the central zoo authority."

He said this bringing in is just to replenish the prey base in the PTR as its north division has more prey for the carnivores than what it has in its south division.



Field director said "Our wild life here has a right to prey. It's to ensure that prey is abundant."

P K Jena deputy director north division of PTR said today "The tiger is having its good time in the north division. It was here in November 2023. It keeps coming in and going out elsewhere in the tiger reserve."

Is this tiger any camera trapped?

Jena said "We are constantly monitoring it. It is coming in our camera traps. Our groundmen are keeping a close tab of its movement."

Asked about its kill Jena said "Although we have not been successful in finding the residue of its kill, the way this tiger is on the move suggests it has no food issue with it." Jena then explained it saying it's rainy time and rains may drift the residue of its kill.

Further as grasses and shrubs are up it's just possible our eyes couldn't have met with the residue he told.

A leftover of the kill by the tiger is relished by a chain of other animals like hynae, golden jackal and other scavengers.

Jena further said "We love and care for our wildlife. So we care for our trackers and daily wagers."

How? To which he said "A fleet of around 350 trackers and daily wagers in the whole of the PTR are now covered by Ayushman card. It's PM Jan Arogya Yojna. It's a visa for good health care."

The Future of Retail: Experiential Shopping and Phygital Integration in India



BY RACHNA TIWARI

The Indian retail landscape is undergoing a metamorphosis. While the traditional "kirana stores" still hold a strong presence, the rise of e-commerce and changing consumer preferences are pushing brick-and-mortar stores to adapt. This has led to the emergence of two key trends: experiential shopping and phygital integration.

The Rise of Experiential Shopping

Gone are the days when shopping was simply a transactional experience. Today's consumers, particularly millennials and Gen Z, crave engagement and interaction. They seek a sensory experience that goes beyond just browsing clothes on a rack.

Examples of Experiential Retail in India

Fabindia Experience Stores: Fabindia, a renowned Indian brand known for its ethnic wear and handicrafts, has incorporated "experience zones" within its stores. These zones allow customers to participate in workshops on traditional textile printing and weaving, creating a deeper connection with the brand's heritage.

Levi's Make Your Mark: Levi's, the denim giant, launched its "Make Your Mark" campaign in India, offering in-store customization options for jeans jackets. This personalization element allows customers to co-

create a unique piece, fostering a sense of ownership and emotional connection with the brand.

Benefits of Experiential Shopping

Increased Customer Engagement: Interactive experiences keep customers in stores longer, leading to a higher chance of purchase.

Brand Storytelling: Experiential elements can effectively communicate a brand's story, values, and heritage, creating a more emotional connection with customers.

Social Media Buzz: Engaging experiences are highly shareable on social media, generating organic brand promotion and attracting new customers.

Phygital Integration: Bridging the Gap

The rise of e-commerce doesn't spell doom for physical stores. In fact, a winning strategy lies in seamlessly integrating the digital and physical worlds. This is where phygital retail comes in.

Examples of Phygital Integration in India

Myntra's "Endless Aisle": Myntra, a leading Indian e-commerce platform, offers an "Endless Aisle" option in select physical stores. Customers can browse a wider online selection through in-store touchscreens and have their chosen items delivered to the store for trial and purchase.

Shoppers Stop's "Click and Collect": Shoppers Stop, a major Indian department store chain, allows customers to order online and pick up their purchases in-store. This caters to customers who prefer the convenience of online shopping but still value the physical experience of trying on

clothes before buying.

Benefits of Phygital Integration

Seamless Customer Journey: Phygital integration allows customers to seamlessly switch between online and offline channels, providing a more convenient and personalized shopping experience.

Data-Driven Insights: By integrating online and offline data, retailers can gain a deeper understanding of customer behavior and preferences, allowing them to personalize promotions and offerings.

Inventory Optimization: Phygital integration allows for better management of inventory across online and offline channels, leading to reduced stockouts and improved efficiency.

The Road Ahead

The future of Indian retail belongs to those who embrace experiential shopping and phygital integration. By creating engaging in-store experiences and seamlessly merging physical and digital elements, retailers can cater to the evolving needs of Indian consumers and build lasting brand loyalty. As India's tech-savvy population grows, we can expect to see even more innovative approaches to retail emerge, blurring the lines between the virtual and physical worlds and creating a truly exciting shopping experience.

Jamshedpur set to host matches of Durand Cup Football Tournament

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The excitement is palpable as the city gears up to host the Group D matches of the prestigious Durand Cup Football Tournament. The matches will be played from 28 July to 24 August at the renowned JRD Sports Complex, bringing together top teams and international talents in a thrilling display of football prowess.

In a prelude to the tournament, a grand "Trophy Tour" has been scheduled for 19 July. The tour will commence from the XLRI campus and will traverse various significant locations across the city, allowing residents to catch a glimpse of the coveted trophy. The District Magistrate cum Deputy Commissioner, Ananya Mittal, conducted an inspection at the XLRI venue in



preparation for the Trophy Tour inauguration. Accompanying him were Colonel Manas Kundu of the Indian Army, Major Mohit Jain, District Transport Officer Dhananjay, SDM Dhalbhum Parul Singh, District Public Relations Officer Panchanan Oraon, and District Sports Officer Avinesh Tripathi.

Group D of the Durand Cup features formidable teams including Jamshedpur FC, Chennaiyin FC, the Bangladesh Armed Forces, and the Indian Army. These matches promise to deliver high-octane football action and are a significant highlight for sports enthusiasts in the region. The opening ceremony for the Group D

matches will be held on 28 July at the JRD Sports Complex, marking the beginning of a month-long football extravaganza. Other groups will compete in Kolkata, Shillong, and Kokrajhar, spreading the excitement of the Durand Cup across various locations.

During the inspection at XLRI, District Magistrate cum Deputy Commissioner Ananya Mittal reviewed several critical aspects to ensure the smooth conduct of the event. This included assessing the law and order situation, player accommodations, traffic management, and arrangements for the arrival of dignitaries throughout the tournament. Mittal provided necessary guidelines to ensure all preparations are thorough and effective.

"It is a proud moment for

Jamshedpur where the sports lovers of the district will get a chance to see international level sports talents playing. All the necessary preparations are being made concrete by the district administration so that the players, sports lovers, and all the dignitaries coming here return with golden memories," stated Mittal, underscoring the significance of hosting such a prestigious event in the city.

Colonel Manas Kundu of the Indian Army echoed similar sentiments, highlighting the collaboration between the army and the district administration to ensure a successful tournament. "The Durand Cup is a symbol of sportsmanship and excellence. We are committed to making this event a memorable experience for everyone involved," he said.

WITH A CAREER SPANNING TEN YEARS, THE WRITER HAS SOLIDIFIED HER EXPERTISE IN HR, ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM DEVELOPMENT. SHE IS A PRINT AND RAMP MODEL WHO WAS ALSO FEATURED IN VOGUE AND GLADRAGS MAGAZINES.

CM fiat to take strict steps to control crime in State

Asks officials to complete processes for implementation of welfare schemes

PNS : RANCHI

Chief Minister Hemant Soren today held a high-level meeting with senior officials at the Chief Minister's Residential Office regarding law and order, implementation of new welfare schemes, Jharkhand Police and Jharkhand Excise Constable Competition Examination and other ongoing recruitment processes. The Chief Minister reviewed important topics and gave many important instructions to the officials.

The Chief Minister said that maintaining law and order in the state is the top priority of the state government. To maintain a fear-free environment in the entire state, take all concrete steps to control crime and criminals. He said that identify the criminals involved in criminal cases and take strict action against them. No laxity will be tolerated in the direction of crime control. The Chief



Chief Minister Hemant Soren holds a high-level meeting with senior officers of State in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

Minister directed to keep the security arrangements tight during the upcoming festivals. He said that during festivals, make special arrangements

for monitoring such anti-social elements who try to conspire to spread unrest.

The Chief Minister said that the state government is

going to start many new welfare schemes. This also includes an important scheme to provide financial assistance to women between 21 and 50

years of age. He said that all the processes of starting this scheme and selection of beneficiaries should be completed without delay, so that one more step can be taken towards empowering the women of this state. He asked the officials to work in mission mode to take the benefits of the welfare schemes of the government to the last person of the society. The result of these welfare schemes should be visible. The schemes of our government are to take the people here forward as well as to speed up the development of the state.

The Chief Minister took complete information about the ongoing process of Jharkhand Constable Competition Examination-2023 and Jharkhand Excise Constable Competition Examination-2023 in the meeting. He said that the appointment process of constable and excise constable should be completed as soon as possible. The Chief

Minister said that complete transparency and confidentiality should be maintained in these appointments. Ensure that there is no irregularity and disturbance in this. The Chief Minister said that the concerned officials were instructed to bring uniformity in the appointment process of uniform services like police, home guard, forest and excise. He said that it is very important to speed up the appointment process of uniform services. This will also help the youth to prepare for the competitive examinations of Uniform Services.

Chief Secretary L. Khiantge, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Principal Secretary Vandana Dadel, Director General of Police Ajay Kumar Singh, ADG RK Malik, ADG Suman Gupta, Secretary Manoj Kumar, IG Prabhat Kumar and IG Pankaj Kamboj were present in this meeting.

BJP begins preparations for Jharkhand Assembly polls

Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Himanta Biswa Sarma address workers meet at Hatia and Ranchi Assembly



Union Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan addresses a gathering during the Vijay Sankalp Sabha in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS



Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma being welcomed by Ranchi MLA CP Singh during a programme in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

The BJP leaders have underscored the need to redraw the party's outreach towards the tribal communities as well as Other Backward Classes and other caste groups in urban constituencies in Jharkhand.

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has drawn a two-pronged strategy of sharpening its outreach in the tribal community and retaining support of the urban electorate by highlighting the deficiencies of the state government. The State BJP in this connection on Wednesday had an organisational meeting at Jharkhand, Hatia and Ranchi assembly segment.

Union Agriculture and Rural Development Minister and Election In-charge of Jharkhand, Shivraj Singh Chouhan addressed Vijay Sankalp Sabha in Hatia Assembly. During this, Chouhan said that today is not a day to welcome leaders but a day to honor the workers. The workers of Bharatiya Janata Party are the foundation stones. The party gets strength from the workers. At the same time, Chouhan said that I am not a guest, I am uncle and brother, a member of your family. We all are a family, so we have to work with intimacy. In the coming assembly elections, the government of dishonest people has to be uprooted and Jharkhand has to be saved.

Chouhan, while attacking the Hemant Soren government, said that the Soren government has reached the peak of corruption in Jharkhand. A new definition of corruption is being coined every day in the state. The public is suffering from scams and corruption in the state. Chouhan said that

crime is also at its peak in Jharkhand. Citing NCRB data, he said that in the last four and a half years, 7,812 murders took place. 7,115 rapes took place in his government. 6,937 kidnappings took place on the land of Jharkhand. There were 8,592 riots. There were 2,721 robberies. There were 485 dacoities. And 2,73,261 crimes were committed. Criminals in this government break into pieces not one but 50 pieces and throw them away.

This government should be ashamed, which cannot protect the honour of sisters and daughters. It insults them. Not only this, in this government, infiltrators are marrying tribal daughters and grabbing lands and are even fighting elections in their name.

Assam government's Chief Minister and Jharkhand BJP's Assembly Election Co-incharge Himanta Biswa Sarma today addressed the Ranchi Assembly constituency's Karyakarta Samman and Assembly level Vijay Sankalp Sabha at Swagatham Banquet Hall in Harmu Ranchi. He honoured the hard work of the workers from the booth level and said that the Modi government for the third time is the result of the hard work of the party's booth level workers.

He said that we do not have to rest now. We have to work hard. We have to go door to door and expose the failures of the Hemant government, breach of promise, corruption, atrocities against women, ruined law and order, looting of mines, minerals, sand, stones.

He targeted Hemant Soren and said that Hemant Soren does not want the development of the people, he only wants his chair.

Mango Stone Decorticator designed by BAU scientist gets patent



PNS : RANCHI

The Patent Office of Government of India has granted patent to Manual Mango Stone Decorticator designed by Dr Sushil Kumar Pandey, Assistant Professor, Department of Agricultural, Engineering, Birsa Agricultural University (BAU). Certificate to this effect was issued by the Comptroller General of Parents, Designs and Trade Marks, working under the Union Ministry of Commerce and Industry. Mango seed kernel containing high quality protein is used in different kinds of bakery products, food processing industry and cosmetic industry. This machine is likely to boost these industries by value addition and simultaneously reducing time and labour costs involved in mango seed decortication. Dr Pandey said one unit of the machine would cost around rs 18000 thousand and 18 kg mango seed could be decorticated per hour. BAU Vice Chancellor Dr SC Dubey has congratulated Dr Sushil for this achievement.



Request for safe return of Jharkhand workers stranded in South Africa



PNS : RANCHI

The Jharkhand government has requested the authority responsible for protecting the interests of Indian workers going abroad under the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, for the safe return of 27 workers of Jharkhand stranded in South Africa. For this, the Secretary, Department of Labor, Employment, Training and Skill Development has written a letter to the authority. In the letter, the authority has been told that 27 workers from Giridih, Bokaro have informed the State Migrant Control Room operated under the Department of Labor, Employment, Training and Skill Development that all of them

have been working on the Vinayak Construction Project at Larsen & Toubro Limited, Face Gendarmerie, Apres Auditorium Jean Paul II, Mabanklo, Yaounde, Cameroon, South Africa since March 29, 2024.

The workers have said that their payment is pending and they want to return to Jharkhand. In the above context, the department has written a letter requesting to ensure the workers their legitimate dues and make necessary arrangements for their safe return to Jharkhand. The workers are residents of Hazaribagh, Giridih and Bokaro districts. The state government has expected cooperation and assistance from the authority in this matter.



Shia Muslims take part in a Mourning procession during Muharram, in Ranchi on Wednesday. PNS

CID arrests cyber fraud for cheating people of Rs 5 crore

PNS : RANCHI

The CID has arrested the cybercriminal who cheated many people of Jharkhand of about five crore rupees. The Cyber Cell team has taken this action on the instructions of CID DG Anurag Gupta.

The cybercriminal has been identified as Amit Jaiswal, a resident of Shankar Garden in Vikaspuri, Delhi. CID DG Anurag Gupta gave this information in a press con-

ference on Wednesday.

This case is of November 2023, when the plaintiff had registered a case in the Cyber Cell police station. It was said in the registered complaint that the accused Shashi Shankar Kumar alias Vicky provided monetary benefits through gold bonds. Due to which the plaintiff started trusting the accused.

During this time, Shashi Shankar and his friend Amit Jaiswal asked the plaintiff to earn more money by investing in cryptocurrency. Amit

Jaiswal lured people to earn more money in less time through the official website OroPay.

The cybercriminal did data mining through AI technology and assured investors of up to 300 per cent return by making them profit from 0.6 per cent to 1.2 per cent per day through Trader Pack and Pro Trader Pack according to their investment amount. Falling into this trap, people started investing more and more money. Initially, as per the

assurance to the investors, profit up to 300 per cent was returned on the primary investment. Due to which the confidence of the investors started increasing and the investors started motivating other people to invest in it.

The accused Shashi Shankar Kumar, Amit Jaiswal and other associates organized many big events in many cities of Jharkhand like Ranchi, Bokaro, Jharkhand and other places and told people about

Oro Pay. In this, free food and refreshments were arranged for the people. Not only this, an attempt was made to tell that the era of this money is over by tearing bundles of fake notes in the event.

Now is the era of cryptocurrency and will be in the future too. Seeing the increasing investment of people, the accused suddenly shut down the fake website one day. Due to this, the investors had to suffer huge losses.

State readies to welcome devotees for Shravani Mela in Deoghar

PNS : RANCHI

Shravani Mela, one of the largest religious congregations in India's eastern region, will be organised on July 22. In this event, devotees from various parts of the country and abroad visit Deoghar during the month of Shrawan and offer prayers at Baba Baidyanath Dham temple.

The Deoghar district administration has left no stone unturned for the preparations. This is because a high number of Kawanriyas are likely to arrive at the event this year. Kawanriyas pilgrims walk barefoot to Deoghar to pour the water on the shivling chanting Bol Bam. The city council has penned a letter to the district administration regarding the Shravani Mela's proper management. The administration has assured that they will take proper steps for the successful execution of the fair.

To ensure law and order, crowd and crime control in the fair, the posting of trainee sub-collectors of Jharkhand Administrative Service is from 18th July to 19th August. All the officers have been given the power of Executive Magistrate and they will be under the Deputy Commissioner.



Shravani Mela is going to start from 22nd July. Preparations are going on for this on a war footing. The administration has also started preparing for security in the fair. Deoghar district has got 12000 additional police forces for Shravani Mela. Whereas 3000 additional security forces will be deployed in Basukinath. Apart from this, about 1000 DSPs, Inspectors, SIs and ASIs will be on Shravani Mela duty at both places.

The officers who have been deputed to Deoghar includes Rajesh Kumar, Manoj Kumar, Mukesh

Kumar, Om Priyadarshi Gupta, Sanjay Kumar Shukla, Pramod Kumar Gupta, Kanchan Mukherjee, Lalit Narayan Tiwari, Sanjay Kumar, Manoranjan Jha, Laxman Yadav, Kamlesh Kumar Das, Mohammad Hussain, Shri Ravinandan Oraon, Shrawan Kumar Bhagat, Vijay Oraon, Murari Nayak, Manoj Kumar Ravi, Ambika Kumari, Vijay Ranjan Tirkey, Khep Lal Ram, Vijay Ram, Dev Lal Karmali, Jaya Kumari, Deepak Kumar Mishra, Man Kujur, Vijayalakshmi Sinko, Somnath Oraon.

Apart from these officers who

have been deputed for Basuki fair are Lal Bal Kishan Nath Shahdev, Jayant Kumar Tiwari, Ashutosh Thakur, Sudarshan Thakur, Kalinder Sahu, Manoj Kumar Chaurasia, Shiv Balak Prasad, Bipin Chandra Vishwas, Prabhat Ranjan Gyani, Prem Kumar, Sunil Kumar Murmu, Pradhan Hansda.

The Kanwar Yatra, the defining feature of the Shravani Mela, is a testament to unwavering devotion. Kanwaris undertake a challenging 105-kilometer trek, often barefoot, from Sultanganj to Baba Baidyanath Dham. They carry decorated 'Kanwars,' structures made of bamboo and adorned with colorful fabrics, filled with holy water from the Ganges River. Chanting hymns of 'Bol Bam' (meaning 'Hail Shiva'), these pilgrims demonstrate immense physical and mental dedication.

The Shravani Mela goes beyond the physical act of the Kanwar Yatra. It embodies the core Hindu values of sacrifice, self-discipline, and unwavering faith. Devotees believe that offering the holy Ganges water at the Baba Baidyanath Jyotirlinga, one of the 12 sacred representations of Lord Shiva's light, brings immense blessings, washes away sins, and grants wishes.

RMC intensifies efforts to combat vector borne diseases during monsoon

PNS : RANCHI

For the effective prevention of mosquito-borne diseases during the monsoon season this year, the Ranchi Municipal Corporation (RMC) has been mobilising its efforts across all 53 wards in the City.

"During the monsoon season, a drive to curb diseases has been started from July 2. Efforts to control an outbreak of vector borne diseases is carried out all through the year, they are just intensified during the rainy season. At Present, there are eight teams which are doing door to door surveillance in all the wards and are also creating awareness amongst the residents regarding these diseases. Spraying of larvicide and pesticide for adults mosquitoes is also being carried out on a regular basis," said Dr Kiran Kumari, Assistant Public Health Officer.

The civic body has deployed four personnel with knapsack spray machines in every ward to spray larvicide in all drains. As many as



eight teams and a rooster have also been dedicated to ensure that every area in the City is covered. Pamphlets are also being distributed among the residents in all the wards.

The teams have been instructed to visit every house covering roughly about 15-20 houses per day and check for any abandoned garages, stagnant water in utensils or broken pots, unused tyres, destroy larvae and also create awareness among the people.

Health Department has also been started to keep a check on diseases like dengue, chikungunya and other vector borne diseases.

"A weekly report is also being taken from Sadar Hospital and RIMS regarding dengue and chikungunya. So far no cases have been reported in the City," added the official.

Residents across the City can file complaints if any on the official RMC app- Smart Ranchi Official available for both iOS and android devices and also register on the toll free number 18005701235.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

months of 2024, the RPF has already rescued 4,607 children. "With 3430 children rescued as runaways, the early trends suggest a continued commitment to the operation "Nanhe Farishtey," the Ministry said. It added, "Through their efforts, the RPF has not only rescued children but also raised awareness about the plight of runaway and missing children, prompting further action and support from various stakeholders. The operation continues to evolve, adapting to new challenges and striving to create a safer environment for children across India's vast railway network."

Informing the initiatives of the Indian Railways, the Ministry said, "Track Child Portal contains comprehensive details about aggrieved children. Indian Railway has established child helpdesks at over 135 railway stations. When a child is rescued by the Railway Protection Force (RPF), they are handed over to the District Child Welfare Committee which hands over the child to parents."



Indian CAPF, special commando dogs to secure Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

breeding and training school located on Taralu near Bengaluru, Karnataka, the second officer said. "The Belgian Malinois breed is considered to be the most preferred combat dog by security forces across the globe," he said. The Malinois, a litter of an Israeli male Malinois crossed with an American bitch, shot to fame when it was reported that the dogs assisted US Special Forces in sniffing out Osama Bin Laden's hideout in Abbottabad in Pakistan in 2011. The dog, which has a heavy snout and a big head, can detect suspicious human presence and IEDs with precision and it is intelligent enough to communicate these signals through a nod of its head and not by barking which could lead to alerting of the target.

The Indian dog teams will be deployed as per the requirements of the French Police and security agencies and this deployment is part of the security cooperation between the two countries, the first officer said. The handlers are donning their regular combat uniform with a special patch of the Indian flag on their chest and another on the shoulder provided to the security agencies deployed for the mega games event, he said. According to international media reports, France is deploying around 30,000 police officers each day for the Olympics, which will be held between July 26 and August 11, with a peak of 45,000 for the opening ceremony on the Seine river. About 18,000 members of the military are also helping ensure security, including thousands housed in a huge, special camp erected on the edge of Paris, the reports said. India will be represented by 117 athletes at the Olympics apart from 140 support staff and officials.

Childhood obesity may lead to weakened heart, says UCL research

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

In the midst of a rapid increase in childhood obesity both in India and globally, researchers from University College London have issued a stark warning: individuals who gain excessive weight from their 20s onwards may face weakened hearts by the time they reach their 60s. The study, published in the European Heart Journal, underscores that early weight gain has lasting implications on heart health, separate from the effects of later-life obesity. Alun Hughes, Professor of Cardiovascular Physiology and Pharmacology at UCL, emphasised that while the adverse effects of being overweight on heart health are known, the long-term impact of weight gain across adulthood remains less understood. He said that while it is known that "being overweight is associated with poorer heart health, we know little about the long-term relationship between being overweight over the adult life course and subsequent heart health".

The study holds importance for countries across the globe including in India, given that obesity is one of the major symptoms of diseases like type 2 diabetes, kidney problems, hypertension (high blood pressure), gut issues and even liver diseases. A person is considered obese when their body mass index (BMI, a measure of body fat based on an individual's weight and height) is more than 30. Statistics reveal a concerning trend, with over 1.25 crore children aged 5 to 19 in India now classified as overweight, a significant rise from 40 lakh in 1990. Hughes noted that the research



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

Compensation for IAF soldier infected with HIV after blood transfusion

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Country needs new liberalised approach to political economy: Ramesh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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



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

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

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

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

JP Nadda for global regulatory standards

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

Indian Embassy, OMSC working to rescue cargo vessel crew

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ DARBHANGA/PATNA

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



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

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

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

Fresh arrest in Rajasthan's Jal Jeevan Mission case

PTI ■ JAIPUR

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

Nagaland BJP appeals for early solution to Naga political issue

PTI ■ KOHIMA

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



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

Prakash Ambedkar to launch yatra over quota issue from July 25

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

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



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

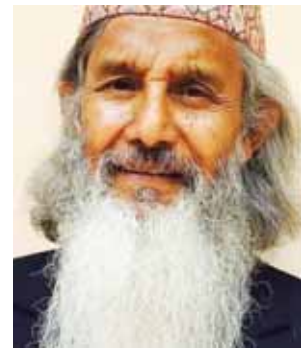
the need to create awareness about the issue among people in villages. The VBA chief said the 'Aarakshan Bachao Janyatra', which will traverse through different villages, will begin on July 25 after his visit to his grandfather Dr B R Ambedkar's memorial 'Chaityabhoomi' in Mumbai and social reformer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

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

Body of former Sikkim Minister found in West Bengal canal

PTI ■ GANGTOK

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



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

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

PTI ■ AHMEDABAD

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



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

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

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

Tezpur Airport in Assam to be shut for maintenance work

PTI ■ TEZPUR

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



improve the facilities at the terminal," he said. The Tezpur Airport is adjacent to the Tezpur Base of the Indian Air Force, and the

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

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

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

PTI ■ BENGALURU

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



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

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

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



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A new lease of life

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

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



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

This reconstitution is seen as a strategic shift from the traditional Planning Commission model to a more dynamic and inclusive NITI Aayog framework. It reflects the government's intention to leverage the collective wisdom of its senior ministers and allies to drive forward its vision of a 'New India'. The Aayog's reconsti-

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

PICTALK



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

Parliament: Duty over disruption

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



PRAFULL GORADIA

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

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

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

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



use of the television channels by speaking for as long as possible. During the question hour between 11 am and 12 pm, only five or six questions and their answers could be completed, instead of all twenty. The reason was that those who had asked the questions spent as long a time as possible over asking their supplementary question, which was a privilege to the Member(s).

The ruling party/parties have a better opportunity of exposure than opposition parties generally get. Yet, the opposition mindlessly throws away a lot of the session time by walking out, protesting otherwise, compelling the Speaker to adjourn the House for several hours or even the rest of the day. July 2 was another example when the Prime Minister rose to thank the President for her inaugural speech. For well over two hours, groups of opposition members took turns shouting slogans in an attempt to drown the Prime Minister's address to Parliament, or perhaps even to prevent him from speaking. Little do they realize that most television channels were telecasting his speech live, duly cutting out the sloganeering.



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

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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

RBI'S NEW GUIDELINES FOR BANKS

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

THE PLIGHT OF GIG WORKERS

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

Defeating global warming



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

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

PV Madhu Nivriti | Secunderabad

tomers' demands.

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

Avinash Godbole | Dewas

STRENGTHENING INDIA-NEPAL RELATIONS

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

2008 introduced challenges.

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

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

Jakir Hussain | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Defying the Western pressure, India prioritises national interests

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

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

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



Russia.

In this context, experts view Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Moscow through multiple lenses, highlighting significant gains for India on strategic, economic, and diplomatic fronts.

India's geopolitical strategy significantly revolves around balancing China's rising influence. Strengthening ties with Russia serves as a counterbalance to China's aggressive posturing in the region. The visit underscored mutual interests in ensuring a multipolar world order, acting as a strategic buffer against unilateral actions by any major power, including China.

Strategic Gains:

A key highlight of Modi's visit was the reinforcement of India-Russia defense ties. Historically, Russia has been one of India's most reliable defense partners. Discussions around the S-400 missile defense system and potential future collaborations in defense technology were central to the visit, enhancing India's military capabilities and contributing to regional stability.

Western sanctions against Russia have led it to seek stronger ties with non-Western countries, including India. Both India and Russia advocate for a multipolar world order, balancing US influence. Modi's visit reflects India's independent foreign policy, maintaining strong ties with both the US and Russia.

Energy security is a cornerstone of India's economic policy, and Russia plays a critical role with its vast oil and natural gas reserves. Modi's visit focused on long-term supply agreements, investments in energy infrastructure, and collaboration in nuclear energy projects, ensuring a stable and diver-

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

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



K S TOMAR



FIRST COLUMN TAKE THINGS AS THEY COME

Accepting events as they happen brings a great sense of calmness



RAVI VALLURI

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

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

The 4 Ds of Abnormal Behaviour

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

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



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

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

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

Focus on employment, innovation and skill



DINESH SOOD

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



The upcoming Union Budget on July 23 will shed light on initiatives that may reshape economic priorities under the Modi 3.0 government. Amid various expectations and commitments, the government's focus on skills, employment, and innovation emerges as a key strategy in addressing current challenges and shaping future opportunities. The decision to rename the Cabinet Committee on Employment and Skill Development to include livelihood emphasizes a shift to provide employable skills to the most vulnerable 67 per cent of the country's underprivileged population.

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Nikky Haley 'strongly endorses' Trump

PTI ■ MILWAUKEE

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

She said no president can fix all problems alone.

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

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

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

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

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

Biden, she alleged, lifted the sanctions on Iran.

Iran rejects accusations

AP ■ TEHRAN

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

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

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

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

Traces of cyanide in blood of 6 dead Bangkok hotel guests

AP ■ BANGKOK

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

US State Dept. spokesman Matthew Miller in Washington offered condolences to the families of the victims. He said the US is closely monitoring the situation and would communicate with local authorities.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with his Thai counterpart on Tuesday, but Miller said he thought that call happened before the deaths were reported and he didn't know if it came up in their conversation.

Won't stop telling the truth about Trump: Biden

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

"It's time for an important conversation in this country. Our politics have become too heated," Biden said.

That didn't stop him from list-

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

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

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

For the NAACP crowd, Biden



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

"I know what a Black job is. It's the vice president of the United States," Biden said of Vice President Kamala Harris, who he added "could be president."

He also referenced Barack Obama as the nation's first Black president, and his own appointment to the Supreme Court of its first Black and

female justice, Ketanji Brown Jackson.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ DUBAI

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

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

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

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

The captain later reported three separate waves of missile attacks that exploded in close proximity to the vessel.

Later on Monday, in a separate incident off the same coast, the MT Chios Lion, a Liberian-flagged and Marshall Islands-owned oil tanker, was attacked by an uncrewed Houthi aerial vehicle, which "impacted on the port side causing some damage and light smoke," the UKMTO said.

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ JERUSALEM

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

AP ■ BRUSSELS

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

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

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

issue of transparency surrounding the negotiations for vaccines between the EU and big pharmaceutical groups. The EU Commission was mandated by member countries to organize the joint procurement of vaccines during the pandemic and led negotiations with manufacturers. According to the court, the procurement of vaccines on

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

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

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



Post violence, Bangladesh asks all universities to close down

AP ■ BRUSSELS

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

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

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

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

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

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

Court voids US Marine's adoption of Afghan orphan

AP ■ WASHINGTON

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

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

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

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

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

The child's fate is still in limbo: The decision by the appellate court Tuesday does not clarify

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

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

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



Marine Maj. Joshua Mast

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

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

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

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

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

The appellate panel directed the circuit court to dismiss all

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

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

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

Corporate funding in solar sector globally dips: Mercom

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) on Wednesday maintained India's GDP growth forecast at 7 per cent for the current financial year, citing that a rebound in agriculture is expected given above-normal monsoon projections.

The ADB forecast comes a day after the International Monetary Fund revised upward its GDP growth projections for India to 7 per cent compared to 6.8 per cent projected in April.

Last month, the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised upward its growth forecast to 7.2 per cent, from 7 per cent estimated earlier.

The Indian economy is on track to grow by 7 per cent in FY2024 (ending 31 March 2025) and 7.2 per cent in FY2025 (next financial year), as projected in ADO April 2024, said the July edition of the Asian Development Outlook (ADO).

The Indian economy logged a growth rate of 8.2 per cent for the financial year ended March 2024, as against 7 per cent in the previous fiscal



year. Services continued to expand robustly in Q4 of FY24, and the forward-looking services PMI is well above its long-term average, it said, adding, industry is also expected to grow robustly, driven by manufacturing and strong demand for construction led by housing, it said.

"After muted growth in FY2023 (previous fiscal), a rebound in agriculture is expected given the above-normal monsoon projections. This is notwithstanding the slower advance of monsoon in June. A rebound in agriculture will be important to sustain growth momentum

weather events and geopolitical shocks. With regard to inflation, ADO has also retained its forecast at 4.6 per cent for the current financial year and expects it to marginally decline to 4.5 per cent next fiscal.

With regard to developing Asia's growth forecast, ADO said, it is revised up to 5 per cent in 2024 and maintained at 4.9 per cent in 2025.

Growth projections remain broadly unchanged with respect to ADO April 2024, it said, adding, resilient domestic demand along with improved exports and manufacturing will support growth this year.

The region's 2024 growth forecast has been marginally adjusted up by 0.1 percentage points due to upward revisions in the Caucasus and Central Asia along with East Asia, it said.

Meanwhile, the inflation forecast for the region has fallen to 2.9 per cent in 2024, largely due to downward revisions in China and the Caucasus and Central Asia, which offset a slight increase in South Asia, it said.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Total corporate funding in the solar sector globally fell by 10 per cent to USD 16.6 billion in January-June 2024 due to uncertainties in major markets including the US, according to Mercom Capital. In the first half of 2023, the global solar energy sector attracted USD 18.5 billion of investment, the US-based research firm said in a report.

"Total corporate funding, including venture capital/private equity (VC) funding, public market, and debt financing, in 1H 2024 totaled USD 16.6 billion compared to USD 18.5 billion raised in 1H 2023. The number of deals increased 9 per cent to 87 deals in 1H 2024 compared to 80 during the same period last year," the "Solar Funding and M&A Report" said.

"This has happened because of uncertainties in major markets. The financing activity in the solar sector remains restrained despite tailwinds from the Inflation Reduction Act and favourable global policies," said Raj Prabhu, CEO of Mercom Capital Group.



Besides, high interest rates, an uncertain rate trajectory and timeline, increasing trade barriers, supply chain challenges, concerns about the US presidential election's impact on the sector, and constantly evolving trade policies have created an unpredictable and uncertain climate. This has slowed down development, investments, and decision-making, he added.

In the first half of 2024, the global VC funding activity decreased 29 per cent with USD 2.7 billion raised in 29 deals compared to USD 3.8 billion from 33 deals in the first half of 2023.

In India, independent power producer AMPIN Energy Transition secured funding of up to USD 35 million from responsAbility. While Ecozen and SolarSquare raised USD 30 million and 4.2 million in funding rounds to accelerate expansion and meet working capital needs.

The global debt financing activity in the first half of 2024 reached USD 12.2 billion in 50 deals, a 53 per cent increase compared to 1H 2023 when USD 8 billion was raised in 33 deals.

In this space, Jakson Green in India obtained a sustainable trade facility of USD 7.1 million from HSBC India and Husk Power Systems secured a USD 4 million investment in debt financing from Electrifi.

The Union Cabinet will soon take a decision on the commerce ministry's proposal to seek approval for signing of 14-member IPEF (Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity) bloc's agreements on clean and fair economy, an official said.

Last month in Singapore, 13 IPEF bloc members signed these agreements, while India stated that it would ink the deals after getting domestic approval. The official said the commerce ministry has sent both pacts to the cabinet secretariat and soon the cabinet will take it up for approval.

Agreement on a clean economy intends to accelerate efforts of IPEF partners' towards energy security and transition, climate resilience and adaptation, GHG (greenhouse gas) emissions mitigation; find/develop innovative ways of reducing dependence on fossil fuel energy; promote technical cooperation, workforce development, capacity building, and research collaborations.

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

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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Shares of state-owned behemoth Life Insurance Corporation (LIC) have outperformed rivals like HDFC Life and ICICI Prudential Life as it placed bets on India's growth sectors, including infrastructure, while the private sector concentrated bet on tech, consumer and consumer-related BFSI companies.

LIC's stock has gained nearly 79 per cent from Rs 620 on June 18, 2023, to Rs 1,109.15 at the closing on Tuesday, according to stock exchange data.

In contrast, HDFC Life gave a negative return, if Tuesday's closing price of Rs 646.55 on the BSE is compared to Rs 666.55 a year back.

ICICI Prudential Life Insurance Co delivered a return of 12 per cent, considering its stock price rise from Rs 582 on June 18, 2023, to Rs 654.10 on June 16, 2024.

Over the past one year, SBI



Life Insurance shares have risen from Rs 1,314 to Rs 1,621.20, delivering a return of 23 per cent.

Capital market analysts said insurance companies make money in two ways - charging premiums for policies and then investing the premiums into assets. It is the latter that generates the bigger delta in profits, thus impacting value creation and managing risks.

Global majors, including Warren Buffet-owned Berkshire Hathaway, have been successful due to their ability to make superior investments.

Most Indian insurance companies are yet to

capitalise on the emergence of the country's infrastructure sector, analysts said.

Indian insurance companies have concentrated investments in the BFSI, IT, and consumer sectors - all of which have been underperformers in the recent past. Only 8-10 per cent of their investments are in the infrastructure sector. This is far less when compared to global standards.

Large global insurance companies -- such as Allianz, Nippon Life Insurance, and MetLife, and other insurers like Berkshire Hathaway -- have much larger exposure ranging from 15 to 30 per

cent to the infrastructure sector, analysts noted.

Over the past few years, global insurers have been increasingly considering infrastructure investments as 'core' investments as the stable and long-term cash flows of infrastructure assets naturally align with the liabilities of insurers.

Additionally, infrastructure assets have defensive characteristics of high barriers to entry, strong pricing power, structural growth, and predictive cash flows, and listed infrastructure can provide investors with inflation-protected income and solid capital growth.

For India, a strong government focus on the sector with large spending, supporting initiatives and encouraging policies, and improving governance, the infrastructure industry has come off-age. This has helped the infra sector to outperform all other sectors, according to analysts.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

They said the high focus on retail loans, and the strategic reluctance to look at infrastructure for growth opportunities is proving detrimental for the shareholders of such companies.

SBI, with its higher exposure to the infrastructure sector, has seen its stock gain 48 per cent in the year (from Rs 592 to Rs 880.95 on Tuesday), while those of its private counterparts HDFC Bank, Kotak Mahindra Bank, ICICI Bank and Axis Bank have gained only in the range of (-) 3 per cent to 24 per cent.

Kotak and HDFC Banks with negligible exposure to the infrastructure sector are the worst performing, with their shares giving a negative return, stock exchange data showed.

Kotak Mahindra Bank shares were at Rs 1,895 on June 18, 2023, and closed at Rs 1,805.20 on Tuesday. HDFC Bank closed at Rs 1,619.20 on BSE on Tuesday, down from Rs 1,679 a year back.



Realty firm Alphacorp will invest Rs 350 crore to develop a luxury housing project in Gurugram as part of its expansion plan amid strong consumer demand.

Without divulging the name of the partner, Alphacorp said it has tied up with an entity that owns two land parcels of nearly 2.4 acre each, located in Sector 15, Part 2, Gurugram.

"We will develop a total of 200 apartments on these two land parcels," said Santosh Agarwal, Executive Director and CFO of Alphacorp.

On one parcel of 2.38 acre, the company has launched luxury high-rise project 'Alphacorp SKY1' comprising 100 units. The price is Rs 5 crore per unit. The project on the second plot will also be launched in the next 2-3 months.

When asked about the project cost, Agarwal said the total investment is estimated at Rs 350 crore excluding land cost. He said the investment will be funded through internal accruals and bank loans, if necessary.

"Gurugram, regarded as the Millennium City, exemplifies rapid infrastructure growth and dynamic urban development. This bustling hub attracts a diverse range of residents, businesses, and investors," Agarwal said.

The demand for luxury housing has been very strong

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

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

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Capital markets regulator Sebi's proposal for introducing a new asset class for high-risk profile investors can help them gain access to a newer set of strategies including long-short equity fund and inverse Exchange-traded Fund (ETF).

The new asset class is aimed at bridging the gap between mutual funds and Portfolio Management Services (PMS) in terms of flexibility in portfolio construction.

The Sebi's consultation paper floated on Tuesday on 'new asset class' and creating a structure for differentiated, higher risk strategies looks very promising, Radhika Gupta, MD and CEO of Edelweiss Mutual Fund said.

"India is finally opening up to different investment products, styles and approaches. Passive, factor, inverse ETFs, alts and more. There is no single way to invest," she added.

In its consultation paper, the regulator said the new asset class will provide a regulated product with features like SIP (Systematic Investment Plan), higher risk-taking capability, and a higher ticket size, to meet the needs of the emerging category of investors. The regulator suggested a minimum investment of Rs 10 lakh for the new asset class, which could be permitted to invest in derivatives for purposes beyond just hedging and rebalancing.

This higher threshold will deter retail investors from investing in this product, while attracting investors, with investible funds between



Rs 10 lakh and Rs 50 lakh, who are being drawn to unauthorised and unregistered portfolio management service providers," the regulator said.

"Sebi's consultation paper for introducing new product classes with higher investment minimum than mutual funds and more freedom to invest can help investors gain access to a newer set of strategies like Long-short equities, inverse ETFs, etc which can help them express specific views on the market," Kaustubh Belapurkar, Director - Manager Research of Morningstar Investment Research India, said.

Long-short equity fund seeks to deliver returns by taking long and short positions in equity and equity-related instruments. For example, the fund may be bullish on the automobile sector and bearish on the IT sector and may invest in both these sectors by going long on the automobile sector and short on the IT sector.

Inverse ETF aims to generate returns that are negatively correlated to the returns of

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa is looking forward to tap new and emerging markets through participation in global trade fairs after international tourism was affected due to the Russia-Ukraine war and other problems, minister Rohan Khaunte said on Wednesday.

During COVID-19, the international footfall in Goa was only 33,000, which has now increased to 4.5 lakh for this particular year (calendar year), Tourism Minister Khaunte said in the state assembly.

Responding to a question raised by Goa Forward Party MLA Vijai Sardesai in the assembly, he said after the COVID-19 pandemic, the perception about tourism in the state is changing, taking it away from beaches.

Sardesai said Goa spent Rs 63 crore in the last four years (on various events), including Rs 29.84 crore to promote the state within the country.

Former chief minister late Manohar Parrikar had emphasised on the pre-audit of roadshows and that accountability parameters should be framed, he said.

Khaunte said after the COVID-19 pandemic, the tourism department in 2022 decided to change the perception of Goa "beyond beaches" as earlier the impression about the coastal state was only about its beaches and party life.

"We needed to see that quality people come in. Since 2021-22, Goa tourism board headed by Chief Minister Pramod Sawant discussed



about the emerging markets and tapping of new markets," he said.

"Problems with the UK market and the Russia war impacted international tourism to a big extent," the minister said, adding the Israel military campaign (in Gaza) also resulted in a dip in the number of tourists from that country.

"We had to ensure that we tap the emerging markets like South East Asia, South Asia, the US, UAE and Germany," he said.

The state tourism department participated in the WTM (World Travel Mart) London, ITB, Berlin, IITF and other events, Khaunte said.

"We are presenting ourselves to the world through these events where players from the emerging markets also come," he said.

Earlier, only Goa used to participate in these events but now Ladakh and states like Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Karnataka are attending the international marts, he noted.

"During the events, we have serious B2B and B2C trade meetings. The minutes are placed before an empowered committee before we decide the next course of action," he added.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Indian Chamber of Commerce (ICC) has suggested the government to rationalise customs duties in various sectors including steel, solar battery, aluminum, and lithium cells in a bid to boost domestic manufacturing.

The Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget for financial year 2024-25 on July 23. ICC President Aameya Prabhu said protective measures are needed for the growth of domestic industry in sectors including steel, solar battery, aluminum, and lithium cells.

"There is a need for rationalization of customs duty in these specific sectors in a holistic manner. Huge potential is there to boost domestic manufacturing and make India a global hub for manufacturing," Prabhu said.

He added that levies on raw materials impact domestic players particularly the downstream firms.

He also asked for correction in inverted duty structure by cutting down duty on mixed petroleum gas from 5 per cent to 2.5 per cent.

"To boost domestic manufacturing, there is a need to increase duty on polymers - polyvinyl chloride, polyethylene terephthalate, polypropylene and polyesters to 10 per cent. This will help in reducing import dependency and will drive India towards self-sufficiency in the

petrochemical manufacturing segment," Prabhu said.

Talking about the importance of the aluminium foil sector, the President said the domestic industry has been facing severe losses as there is anti-dumping duty on raw materials whereas the finished goods are not subject to any duties on imports from China.

"This dual effect has resulted in extensive net losses to the companies that have made significant investments into this industry," Prabhu noted.

On the taxation side, the chamber has suggested setting up a commission to review the Income Tax Act 1961 in its entirety and simplify the provisions.

"This is an old Act. Every year in the Budget, amendments are made which has made this Act complex to understand. These amendments have resulted in many anomalies which in turn have given rise to a large number of legal cases," the chamber has said.

Prabhu further recommended the government not to impose tax on dividends.

He added that during his tenure so far the ICC has spread its wings further nationally and internationally and become a truly world-class chamber.

"We have opened 25 chapters globally in countries including New Zealand, the US, Europe, Australia, Korea and Middle East nations," he said.

PwC for extension of beneficial tax regime for new manufacturing firms

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tax consultancy firm PwC has urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to extend the beneficial tax regime for new manufacturing companies and introduce a comprehensive tax amnesty scheme for cases related to Customs.

Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget for 2024-25 on July 23.

"I think the Make in India is the first thing which comes to mind, and you will recall that in 2019, the government introduced a 15 per cent rate for new manufacturing companies, which lapsed on March 31, 2024.

"I think that is one extension, which is being expected, and the expectation is also that instead of giving a year-on-year extension if we can look at the block period, say for the next five years because shifting a manufacturing is a big decision and the corporates may take time before making a decision and make it viable, feasible and that's the first bit," said Sandeep Puri, Partner, Price Waterhouse & Co LLP.

Section 115BAB of the Income Tax Act offers a concessional tax rate of 15 per cent for new domestic manufacturing companies.

Initially, this benefit was available for companies set up and registered after October 1, 2019, and commencing production by March 31, 2023, which was later extended to March 31, 2024, to account for delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

IOA President P.T. Usha on Wednesday came down heavily on the ad-hoc panel that managed the suspended WFI, saying the committee did not do due diligence and missed out on giving the names of wrestler Antim Panghal's coaches in the long list, sent to the Paris Olympic Games organisers. The Indian Olympic Association's reaction came in the wake of delay in visa clearance for Panghal's preferred coaches for the Games.

The 19-year-old Panghal, who trains in Hisar, was the first Indian wrestler to qualify for the Paris Games when she won a bronze at the World Championship in 2023. She wants her coaches Bhagat Singh and Vikas to travel with her along with physiotherapist Heera. The IOA has cleared all

the names but the support staff members attached with Panghal are still awaiting visa clearance.

"Antim won India an Olympic quota as early as in September 2023 by claiming a bronze medal in the World Wrestling Championships in Belgrade. In its wisdom the Ad Hoc Committee, administering wrestling, chose not to include the names of Antim's coach or physiotherapist in the long list of names sent to the Olympic Games Organising Committee," Usha said in a statement.

The wrestlers are supposed to reach Paris on August 3 and the support staff members have got appointment for biometrics for August 2.

IOA had, in December 2023, named its EC member Bhupendra Singh Bajwa as the head of the ad-hoc panel and made MM Somaya and Manjusha Kanwar as the other



members.

The IOA President also took an indirect dig at SAI for not being attentive enough.

"It is strange that the responsible authorities, who approved the long list of athletes, coaching and support staff, did not deem it fit to recommend the inclusion of Bhagat Singh or Heera or Vikas.

"It was only after Antim's father came to IOA a few days ago that I stepped in to have them cleared by the Ministry," Usha said.

Meanwhile, an IOA source told PTI that Panghal instead of going to VFS (Visa Facilitation Services), should have approached IOA for intervention.

"If he had come to us, we would have requested the French Embassy and it would have been done easily since the embassy is very supportive. We would have

intervened and sought a solution but I think they were being misled by someone," the official said.

The IOA chief appreciated the French Embassy for its support.

"Many athletes will vouch that IOA has been proactive in getting their coaches and support personnel accreditations or visas from the Embassy of France in India.

"The Embassy in Delhi and its consulates elsewhere have extended the greatest support in processing visa requests not only from such personnel but also from journalists who do not have accreditation," she said.

"We are confident that despite such misleading reports, IOA will be able to facilitate a speedy processing of visa requests of those coaches and support staff cleared by the Ministry," Usha said.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

India will be represented by a strong 117-member athlete contingent in Paris and the country hopes to better seven-medal count it logged in Tokyo.

"I can't really say for anybody but I can just wish them all the luck and hope we should win more medals this year and that's important," Kapil, who is also the president of Professional Golf Tour of India (PGTI) said here on the sidelines of the launch of second edition of the Trinity Golf Champions League (TGCL).

"My advise to all (Indian athletes) would be to go and express yourself. I cross my finger and why not if we believe it (double digit medal haul) will happen."

Kapil, however, refrained from commenting on Indian cricket and newly-appointed head coach Gautam Gambhir.

"If Gautam Gambhir is taking that position (of head coach of Indian cricket team), I wish good luck to him and the team. I hope they do better than what we have done previously. I want to wish the Indian players all the best."

Kapil, who played a lot of amateur event back in the day,

hoped that the sport will continue to grow in the country.

"When I started playing cricket, I never thought golf will reach this height. I hope to see golf reaching the heights of cricket one day," he said.

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

Buoyed by the resounding success of the inaugural season last year, which featured four teams, TGCL this year will feature eight teams -- seven from India and one from Sri Lanka. The event will be held in Bengaluru from September 2 to 7.

The league is a IPL kind of a venture and will be played in the Ryder Cup format with 20 players in each team, which includes professional, celebrity and amateur golfers playing together.

The winning team will be richer by Rs 30 lakh, while second and third placed sides will get Rs 15 and Rs 10 lakh respectively.

"It's a unique concept, never seen something like this. I hope the prize money for the winners of TGCL will one million dollars in the next five years," Kapil said.

The eight teams participating in this year's TGCL are debutants, Wave Riders, Mumbai Warriors, Chandigarh Titans, Chennai Hustlers, Dakshin Rangers, Lahari Lions, Golfism and Colombo Lions.

Chelsea begins disciplinary action after Fernandez's involvement in Argentina player chants

AP ■ LONDON

Chelsea has begun disciplinary action after midfielder Enzo Fernandez was involved in a video where members of Argentina's Copa America-winning squad appeared to sing about French players with African heritage.

FIFA also said it was also looking into the incident after the French soccer federation pledged to file a complaint with the sport's world governing body over "racist and discriminatory remarks."

Fernandez said he was "truly sorry" and Chelsea said discriminatory behaviour was "completely unacceptable."

"We are proud to be a diverse, inclusive club where people from all cultures, communities and identities feel welcome," the Premier League club said in a statement Wednesday. "We acknowledge and appreciate our player's public apology and will use this as an opportunity to educate."

"The Club has instigated an internal disciplinary procedure."

Argentina beat Colombia 1-0 on Sunday at Miami Gardens, Florida. Afterwards a video posted on



Instagram appeared to show Fernandez and Argentina players chanting about France's team as they celebrated.

The same chants - by some Argentina fans - emerged before the team beat France in the World Cup final in 2022.

The derogatory chants single out France players of African heritage, from several countries, and holding a French passport.

Fernandez apologized for "getting caught up in the euphoria of our

history after joining Chelsea from Benfica for 106.7 million pounds (\$131.4 million) in 2023.

Chelsea's response comes after one of Fernandez's clubmates, France defender Wesley Fofana, posted the video on his social media accounts Tuesday and called it "uninhibited racism."

Fofana has family ties to Ivory Coast and is among several French players who are Black in the Chelsea first-team squad.

FIFA President Gianni Infantino has said soccer and its 211 national federations must have a zero tolerance approach to racism and in May committed to relaunching a task force to monitor incidents.

"FIFA is aware of a video circulating on social media and the incident is being looked into," the governing body said Wednesday. "FIFA strongly condemns any form of discrimination by anyone including players, fans and officials."

It is unclear what jurisdiction FIFA has over the incident on a team bus after a tournament, but the governing body likely could act if the Argentina federation's handling of the case is considered unsatisfactory.

Asian Paralympic Committee appoints Deepa Malik as representative for South Asia

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's first woman Paralympic medallist Deepa Malik has been named sub-regional representative for South Asia by the Asian Paralympic Committee (APC).

This appointment, which was confirmed during the 34th Executive Board meeting of the APC, signifies a significant step forward for gender diversity and athlete-centric leadership in para-sports. She will take up her post immediately.

The former Paralympic Committee of India chief's appointment brings the number of female representatives on the APC Executive Board to five, making it the highest female representation on the board in the history of the organization, according to a media release.

"Having more women during



our Executive Board meetings is a very positive step forward, especially when one voice is of someone with the experience, skills and wisdom of Dr. Deepa Malik," APC President Majid Rashed said.

"The APC acknowledges Dr. Deepa's extensive experience and is confident that our members from the South Asia Sub Region will be excellently represented by you on the APC Executive Board," he added.

Malik's role will involve representing South Asian nations and advocating for the development and promotion of para-sports across the region.

"It is an honor and an

opportunity for me to represent South Asia and be a voice for our region. India for long is a flag bearer of "Vasudev Kutumbakam" and now is also a right time to take a step forward in taking the lead in contributing to this one big family," Malik said.

"It's time for me to represent India at a bigger level and contribute in the collective growth of parasports and 'inclusion through sports' at large," she added.

Malik's appointment also aligns with the Paralympic Committee of India's broader mission to foster excellence and inclusivity in para-sports.

"This is a defining moment for

Indian Paralympics. It is the right step in the overall development of sports in this region. I wholeheartedly welcome this announcement. We will collaborate with Dr. Deepa Malik and the APC to develop para-sports across the region. PCI is truly happy that APC has shown trust in our former president and our champion player," PCI president Devendra Jhajharia said.

This appointment marks a significant milestone in the history of the APC and the PCI, showcasing India's leadership and commitment to the global para-sports community.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

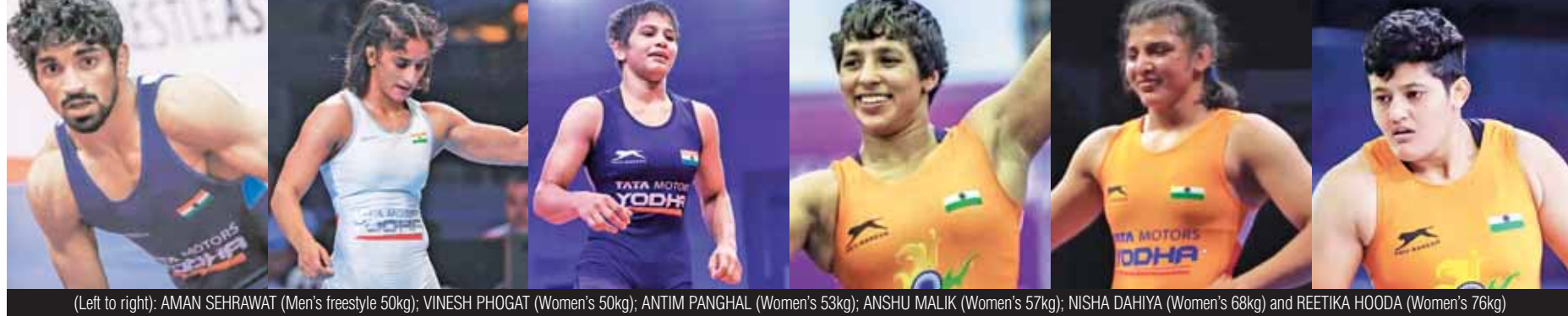
Indian wrestlers have delivered a medal every single time at the Olympics since the 2008 Beijing edition. Success in four consecutive editions has enhanced the status of wrestling as a prime Olympic sport in the country. There was success at junior level too.

The sport also produced U23 world champions. It raised hopes of big success in Paris.

It was Sushil Kumar who changed the way wrestling was perceived in the country by winning a bronze in 2008. He bettered his medal four years later in the London Games, where he fetched a silver.

While Yogeshwar Dutt also won a bronze in the British capital.

Sakshi Malik carried forward the trend by bagging a bronze in Rio in 2016 and Ravi Dahiya and Bajrang Punia made it a double delight in the delayed Tokyo Games (2021). However, the sport which was soaring high and was expected to reach even greater heights, was brought down to earth by the prolonged protests against then Wrestling Federation of India chief by the country's



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

elite wrestlers.

National camps and domestic competitions came to a halt. Confusion prevailed. No one knew how or when normalcy would return. There were allegations and counter-arguments. WFI elections were held and the national body got suspended but finally when UWW lifted its suspension, things began moving.

Only one male and five female wrestlers qualified for the upcoming edition. There is hope, but doubts too.

PTI takes a look at the strength and weakness of all the six contenders.

AMAN SEHRAWAT (Men's

freestyle 50kg): With his steady progress, Aman did what was unthinkable: replacing Olympic silver medallist Ravi Dahiya, the most formidable Indian wrestler, in the men's 57kg weight division.

Aman's biggest strength is his stamina and endurance. If the bout lasts six minutes, it will be difficult to beat him.

However, what is lacking in his game is limited strategy and technique. It was evident when he was pitted against Rei Higuchi in the Ranking Series event in Hungary. He did not seem to have a plan B. At this stage, planing against each rival is key.

His biggest threats are Higuchi and Uzbekistan's Gulomjon Abdullaev.

VINESH PHOGAT (Women's 50kg): Without doubt, Vinesh Phogat is one of the best woman wrestlers that India has produced. A solid defence and equally impressive attack are her strengths.

However, what could trouble her is lack of quality mat time against top wrestlers in the last year or so.

Lowering the weight class to 50kg means more stress on her body. Cutting the weight cut ahead of the bout is a painful process, it sucks the energy out of the body and hers is an

aging body. She is almost 30. Her natural body weight is about 55-56kg. Much would depend on how Vinesh copes with it.

In the recent Grand Prix of Spain, the weight relaxation was 2kg but that won't be the case in Paris.

ANTIM PANGHAL (Women's 53kg): The firebrand wrestler from Hisar was first to lock a Paris Olympics quota. She also challenged Vinesh for a trial with her when the protest controversy was at its peak.

Her biggest strength is flexibility that allows her to wriggle out of her rivals' grip pretty easily. It's difficult to

trap her. She has the spark and fire.

However, she has not competed since the Asian Games. A back injury forced her to miss the Asian Championship this year. The lack of mat time and competitive action could prove to be her bane.

ANSHU MALIK (Women's 57kg): Anshu's career graph has not really taken off the way it was expected after her exploits on the junior circuit and the smooth transition to senior events. Injuries have troubled her and et she is one of the best bets in Paris for India.

Quick movement on the mat

to go with an aggressive game style is Anshu's biggest strength. She also has the experience of competing at the Olympics. She was not ready for the big stage in Tokyo as a teenager but now has a fair idea what is required in such a highly competitive field.

Her fitness, though, is a worrying aspect as she enters the Olympics with a suspected shoulder injury. She claims it's just a neck spasm but she has not been tested.

NISHA DAHIYA (Women's 68kg): Away from the limelight, Nisha Dahiya has quietly made her way into Paris Games. She had shown

promise early but injuries has halted her ascent. Reported dead wrongly in 2021, Nisha has managed to surprise quality rivals with her aggressive game style.

She is seasoned and her fearless approach is her biggest strength. Not having the exposure of competing at big events consistently is her weakness apart from losing steam in the fifth-sixth minute of the bout.

She tends to pour out everything in the first four minutes of her bouts and if an up-and-down bout lasts the distance, she gives away points easily. Handling nerves on debut will also be key.

REETIKA HOODA (Women's 76kg): Reetika has the capability to surprise her rivals. She is not exactly unknown in the circuit but can prove to be a tough nut to crack even for experienced wrestlers due to her explosive strength.

She has power and technique but has the habit to concede points in the last 30 seconds of the bout. Even if she builds a lead, she can end up losing those points. Probably losing focus in the fag end of bouts is her weakness.

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

PTI ■ DUBAI

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



Ruturaj Gaikwad has dropped a place to the eighth position in the 'T20 batters' list, which was updated following India's recent 4-1 series triumph over Zimbabwe. Jaiswal was the big winner following his 141 runs in the series as he rose four places, behind No.1 ranked batter Travis Head of Australia and Suryakumar.

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

England's Adil Rashid is leading T20I bowlers' chart ahead of South Africa's Anrich Nortje and Wanindu Hasaranga of Sri Lanka.

In the T20I all-rounders' rankings, India's Hardik Pandya dropped four places to sixth while Axar slipped one rung to 13th.

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



Roshni scores hat-trick as Hockey Jharkhand wins

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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



England great Lucy Bronze joins Chelsea from Barcelona

AP ■ LONDON

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

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

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

Tiger Woods is playing all four majors for the first time since 2019, which at the start of the year would have been cause for great optimism.

The results paint a different picture. He set a Masters record by making his 24th consecutive cut at Augusta National. And then he was gone by the weekend at the PGA Championship and the U.S. Open. He hasn't broken par since a 69 in the second round of the 2022 PGA Championship, and he needed that simply to make the cut. His performance is starting to raise questions of how much longer he will play - how much longer he should play - to avoid lasting memories of a great champion slapping it around. Leave it to Colin Montgomerie to put those thoughts into words found in a Times of London interview ahead of the British Open, when he said at one point, "What the hell is he doing?"

The entirety of what Montgomerie told the Times: "I hope people remember Tiger as Tiger was, the passion and the charismatic aura around him. There is none of that

now. At Pinehurst he did not seem to enjoy a single shot and you think, 'What the hell is he doing?' He's coming to Troon and he won't enjoy it there, either."

Woods already has enjoyed one aspect of his stay at Royal Troon. That came Tuesday when he was asked about Montgomerie's comments. Woods relishes a chance to push back on criticism, particularly when the source is someone known for never winning a major.

"Well, as a past champion, I'm exempt until I'm 60," Woods said, speaking to his time at the British Open. "Colin's not. He's not a past champion, so he's not exempt. So he doesn't get the opportunity to make that decision. I do."

It brought up memories of an Open tradition some 20 years ago. Stewart McDougal was the press officer at the time, and he would ask Open champions who came into the press center to sign the table. At the end of the week, McDougal auctioned off the table for charity. Montgomerie came in one day, saw all the signatures on the table and reached for pen. "I'm sorry, Colin," McDougal told him. "It's only for Open champions."



Poor Monty.

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

The 78 on the Old Course two years ago in what likely will be his final time at St. Andrews.

He still draws the biggest crowd and generates the loudest buzz. And two numbers worth remembering are four and 15. He had four surgeries on his lower back, the last one to fuse his spine, and two years later he won his 15th major at the Masters. Another number worth noting is 59

- the age of Tom Watson when he was an 8-foot par putt away from winning the British Open at Turnberry in 2009. The year before, Greg Norman was 53 when he had the 54-hole lead at Royal Birkdale. Courses for the U.S. Majors might be getting too big for the 48-year-old Woods, whose body is held together by hardware. But there is something about links golf that is timeless.

"The older you get, the less you can carry the golf ball," Woods said. "But over here, you can run the golf ball 100 yards if you get the right wind and the right trajectory. ... You can play on the ground. You can burn it on the ground with a 1-iron, 2-iron, 3-wood, whatever."

"I think that's one of the reasons why you see older champions up there on the board because they're not forced to have to carry the ball 320 yards." Woods always will be linked with Augusta National because of his watershed win at age 21 when he won the 1997 Masters by 12 shots, and it is the major he has won the most times. But for all his power as a younger man, no one hit irons like Woods. The flight of his shots was ideal for the links golf. It still is. Woods showed up Tuesday wearing shorts, with a black compression

sleeve covering his right leg. That was a clear reminder that age isn't as big an issue as health. Woods has been forthright in explaining his dilemma. His body won't allow him to play a full schedule, and when he shows up at the majors, he has to deal with competitive rust.

He could play more and risk not playing where it matters. That's something he will have to sort out. And it was telling that the PGA Tour created an exemption category exclusively for him to play in the \$20 million signature events by adding him to the field - he wouldn't be taking a spot away from another player. How much he plays next year will be worth watching. In the meantime, Woods has been at Royal Troon since Sunday. He has high hopes. Maybe they are unrealistic based on the scores he is posting, but they are his hopes.

"There is a time for all sportsmen to say goodbye, but it's very difficult to tell Tiger it's time to go," Montgomerie said. "Obviously, he still feels he can win. We are more realistic."

The truth is probably somewhere in between. But perhaps Woods still feels he can win because unlike Montgomerie, he has done it before.

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

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

The first stage of Scottie Scheffler's rise to the top of golf felt like warp speed. He went from No. 15 in the world to No. 1 in the span of five tournaments, and that was before he won the Masters for the first time.

Now he's on a level not seen since Tiger Woods was in his prime.

Scheffler is not the biggest draw at the British Open, not with Woods in the field. Rory McIlroy remains a big attraction, especially in the U.K., and he comes into Royal Troon as a sentimental favorite from his sad collapse in the U.S. Open and going 10 years without a major. But any conversation at the final major of the year starts with Scheffler, a heavy favorite as he has been in every major this year. And that has taken him time to fully appreciate his status in the game.

"I never really thought of myself as anything but a golfer," Scheffler said Tuesday. "I was never trying to be famous. I didn't want to be a celebrity or whatever. I just wanted to become a good golfer and get the most out of myself. It's brought me this far, so I continue to just try to keep my head down and put in the work that got me here and just continue to practice and hopefully continue to get better."

His six PGA Tour victories before the calendar turned to



July are the most since Arnold Palmer in 1962. Someone pointed out to Scheffler that Palmer's seventh victory that year was a claret jug he won at Royal Troon. He wasn't sure how to react to that except to shrug his shoulders and say, "Yeah, that would be great."

"I love the history of the game, and there's certain things that I know and certain things that I don't. That was something that for some reason I just never stumbled across," he said, searching for the right answer. "So I had no idea that that was a thing."

The British Open figures to present his biggest test. Scheffler is still relatively new to links golf - everything about his rise to No. 1 is new - having played this style in 2021 for the first time. He has learned to adjust the flight of his ball since

links turf creates a little more spin on certain shots. The greens can be slower. Bunkers are to be avoided.

He is a two-time Masters champion, missed a U.S. Open playoff by one shot at The Country Club and was runner-up in the PGA Championship at Oak Hill. But he has never seriously contended in golf's oldest championship. Even so, the love of the links is there.

He went to the J.P. McManus Pro-Am in Ireland a few years ago and took side trips to Lahinch and Ballybunion. He began this trip across the Atlantic Ocean by skipping the Scottish Open at The Renaissance Club - links style, but not links turf - and going to Turnberry with Sam Burns for a match with their caddies, both good players. "A tremendous amount of

fun," he said. And then it was time for work at Royal Troon, the links renowned for having the longest hole (the 623-yard sixth) and shortest hole (the 123-yard eighth) in the British Open rotation. Most peculiar about Troon is that the outward nine - typically with at least a wee breeze at the players' back - has two par 5s and measures 5,539 yards. The inward nine with the wind in the face has one par 5 and is 3,846 yards.

"It's basically a tale of two nines on this course," McIlroy said. "You feel like you have to make your score on the way out and then sort of hang on coming in."

McIlroy has far more experience on links golf - and a claret jug to show for it from his victory at Royal Liverpool in 2014 - but it still takes time to adjust because "you play 11 months of your golf every year in very different conditions." Players also are preparing for weather described as "mixed," a gentle way of saying it probably won't be terribly pleasant for most of the week. Sunshine gave way to spells of rain on Tuesday, and that was before lunch was served. PGA champion Xander Schauffele might be the second-most consistent player in golf behind Scheffler - nothing but top 20s in his last 10 starts and 51 cuts in a row - and has acquired a taste for less-than-pleasant conditions, particularly in the Open.

AP ■ TROON (SCOTLAND)

Jon Rahm felt like one of the most popular players when he arrived at Royal Troon, even if it had nothing to do with him or with his golf.

Spain is on quite the run at the moment. Carlos Alcaraz won Wimbledon on Sunday for his second Grand Slam title of the year, right before Spain defeated England in the European Championship final. It's the latter that made the Scottish fans celebrate the Spaniard. No one in these parts likes to see England win anything.

"Played all 18 holes, and I think I got more congratulations for something that I didn't do than I ever have in my life," Rahm said Tuesday. "I don't know what they've done, but anytime anybody plays against the English national team, every other country in Europe just unifies against them."

"I think because we've heard 'It's Coming Home' so many times the last few years that nobody wants to see it come home at this point."

Throw in Sergio Garcia winning his first LIV Golf event at Valderrama, and Rahm

Jon hoping to ride Spanish momentum to end drought



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

with the British Open, and Rahm has been a no-show. He was the reigning Masters champion when he left for the Saudi riches of LIV Golf last December and he still hasn't won. His last victory was the Masters some 15 months ago.

He barely made the cut at the Masters. He missed the cut at the PGA Championship. And he didn't even get to play the U.S. Open because of a foot infection. "Last year from the Masters on I didn't really play my best," Rahm said. "Ryder Cup was the only resemblance to maybe the early part of the year. But Nashville and last week (LIV events), I felt closer to getting to a higher level of golf where maybe there isn't as many thoughts on my process. Maybe I'm playing a little bit more freely and seeing the ball flight that I want to see more often."

"I'm getting much closer to what it might have been early last year."

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

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The heat was on for the U.S. Women's soccer team's final exhibition tune-up game before the Paris Olympics, with sweltering temperatures in the air and plenty of chances to score.

The goals did not come in a 0-0 draw against Costa Rica on Tuesday night, just the second time - and first since 2015 - the U.S. Did not win its last game before a major tournament. But the match showed the



Americans could handle the kind of high temperatures that could await later this month. "The last two games have been insane," defender Casey Krueger said, referring to back-to-back exhibition games before the team's cross-Atlantic flight. "I feel like this is going to be even hotter, so if we can play in this, it gives us confidence going into France, for sure." It was 98 degrees Fahrenheit (37 Celsius) at kickoff after Washington tied the hottest

day on record in the nation's capital at 104 (40C) hours earlier. It was still 94 (35C) when the match was over. Coach Emma Hayes figured it would be a nice test for her players, given the forecast for nearly this level of heat during upcoming games in Marseilles later this month. "That's added value," Hayes said Monday. "It's perfect preparation. It's pretty hot down there, so this is a great opportunity for us to experience what we're going to face."

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