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MODI 3.0: BANKING SECTOR
OPTIMISTIC ABOUT REFORMS

MONEY 10

SENSEX, NIFTY TUMBLE AFTER
FOUR DAYS OF RECORD RALLY

WORLD 9

POLICE OFFICER WOUNDED IN
KNIFE ATTACK IN PARIS

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*Air Surcharge Extra if ApplicableSNEH: INDIA WOMEN'S
TEAM WILL WIN ICC
TROPHY SOON
12 SPORTS

INDIA AMONG MAJOR NATIONS HIT BY MICROSOFT OUTAGE

Flights, banks, media outlets disrupted globally

Indian aviation sector affected

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Microsoft users globally, including several in India, reported massive outages in services, with the outage tracking website Downdetector showing users flagging disruptions across various services. A new update from CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity software firm, is being cited as the cause of the outage, which has impacted Windows-based desktops and laptops. Globally, long queues formed at airports in the US, Europe, and Asia, including India, as airlines lost access to check-in and booking services at a time when many travellers are heading away on summer vacations.

News outlets in Australia — where telecommunications were severely affected — were pushed off air for hours. Hospitals and doctor's offices had problems with their appointment systems, while banks in South Africa and New Zealand reported outages to their payment system or websites and apps.

Some athletes and spectators descending on Paris ahead of the Olympics were delayed as was the arrival of their uniforms and accreditations, but games organisers said

MEITY is in touch with Microsoft
and its associates regarding the
global outage

disruptions were limited and didn't affect ticketing or the torch relay. Amid the massive global outage that hit operations of airlines, banks and businesses across the globe, Microsoft on Friday said it is aware of the issue affecting Windows devices due to an update from a third-party software platform," the spokesperson said. The outage put operations of businesses and systems across the globe in a state of limbo. On outage tracking website Downdetector, users reported problems across Microsoft line-up including Azure, and Teams. Microsoft said it is investigating the issue "impacting users ability to access various Microsoft 365 apps and services". "Our services are still seeing continuous improvements while we continue to take mitigation actions," according

to Microsoft 365 Status post on social media. The glitch caused users to see the Blue Screen of Death error messages, and there are widespread reports of disruptions in international airlines, banks and media outlets. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said MEITY is in touch with Microsoft and its associates regarding the global outage and assured that State run NIC network was not affected. The IT Minister said the reason for this outage has been identified and updates have been released to resolve the issue. CERT too issued a technical advisory. "It has been reported that Windows hosts related to CrowdStrike agent 'Falcon Sensor' are facing outages and getting crashed due to recent update received in the product. The concerned windows hosts are experiencing a 'Blue Screen of Death (BSOD)' related to Falcon Sensor," CERT-In advisory said. A widespread Microsoft outage disrupted flights, banks, media outlets and companies around the world including India. Escalating disruptions continued hours after the technology company said it was gradually fixing an issue affecting access to Microsoft

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Multiple airports and airlines faced major disruptions across the country due to outages of Microsoft Windows cloud service. Several airports suspended operations as services like bookings, check-in and boarding process including issuance of boarding passes were carried out manually, thereby taking longer than expected time and leading to long queues at airports. It caused chaos for several low-cost airlines, posing security concerns. The outage hit booking and check-in services of several airlines, including Air India, IndiGo, Akasa Airlines and SpiceJet. Flyers have been advised to get to the airport well in advance, as manual check-ins take more time. They have also been urged to carry dry food items and water in case the wait stretches. Airlines are posting updates on their social media handles to warn passengers about delays. Advising passengers to cooperate with airport staff during this period of disruption, the Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) said it is "committed" to

minimising inconvenience and ensuring well-being of all travellers. The airports and airline operations, whose systems were based on Microsoft, faced significant disruptions since about 10.40 am on Friday. IndiGo, SpiceJet, Air India and Akasa saw disruptions in their online check-in and boarding processes across their networks, forcing them to

switch to manual mode. Airlines are facing issues in making fresh bookings; urging passengers not to make multiple bookings for a journey and urging them not to contact call centres — which are facing tremendous call volumes due to flight delays — unless their flight is scheduled to depart in 24 hours. Union Minister for Civil Aviation Ram Mohan Naidu

said his Ministry and Airports Authority of India (AAI) are actively managing the situation arising out of a global Microsoft outage, which severely impacted airport and airline operations in the country. The Civil Aviation Ministry in collaboration with AAI has implemented manual backup systems to maintain operational continuity, Naidu said in a statement.



Stranded passengers at the Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru amid Microsoft outage, in Bengaluru, on Friday. IndiGo, Air India Express, SpiceJet and Akasa at the Bengaluru airport began checking in passengers manually on Friday, issuing handwritten boarding passes, after a global Microsoft outage led to the Navitaire Departure Control System stalling PTI

Unease in NDA over
Yogi's fresh orderPIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI/LUCKNOW

A fresh order by Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath directing the businesses in the Kanwar pilgrims route to display nameplates, has caused unease within a section of party as well as the BJP's partners in NDA like JD(U) and LJP. The Uttar Pradesh Government too followed the suit and issued similar directives besides verification of the shops and its owners enroute the Kanwar pilgrimage which originates from Haridwar. The fresh order came after the controversial directives of Muzaffarnagar police which mandated the eateries enroute to display names of owners later to be withdrawn saying it was just optional advisory. Not only the Opposition but senior BJP leader Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Union Minister Chirag Paswan, JD(U) spokesman KC Tyagi amongst several others expressed concern over the communal directives. Congress said it as an "attack on the Constitution" and demanded the order be withdrawn. The BJP, which is in power at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh, has defended the measure, claiming that it allows fasting Hindus who may want to eat at a pure vegetarian restaurant, where the likelihood of them being served 'satvik' food is higher. "Nameplate will have to be put on the food shops on the Kanwar routes across Uttar Pradesh. The decision was taken to maintain the purity of the faith of Kanwar pilgrims. Action will also be taken against those selling products with Halal certification," the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's office said.

UP State Minister Kapil Dev Agarwal said most of the outlets with names of Hindu deities are run by Muslims and they sell non-vegetarian food. He said those outlets must be identified and prohibited.

"This is not a matter about every food cart. Those who carry 'jal' from Haridwar and travel for 250-300 km cross this route to reach their destination. We had urged the district administration that all such people who run their dhaba/hotel after the names of Hindu deities are mostly from the Muslim community. Kanwariyas visit their shops where non-vegetarian food is sold. So, the name of the shop is after a Hindu deity, but non-vegetarian is sold there; all such establishments should be prohibited, they should be identified," the Minister said.

Agarwal said they are not against the sale of non-vegetarian food but Kanwariyas would not eat from such outlets. "We have no objection to the sale of non-vegetarian food, Kanwariyas would not purchase it. We have only urged that non-vegetarian food should not be sold by opening shops after the names of Hindu deities; so the administration has acted accordingly. Politicians are giving it a Hindu-Muslim angle. But it is not a Hindu-Muslim matter, it is a matter of social harmony. People can sit and eat wherever they want, but they should have the knowledge of where they are sitting," Agarwal added. Naqvi slammed the decision and said the hasty orders may give rise to the disease of untouchability. "Faith must be respected, but untouchability must not be patronised," the former Union Minister in Narendra Modi's second term, said.

Centre to introduce six
new Bills in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Centre has listed six new Bills for introduction, including the one which seeks to replace the 90-year-old Aircraft Act, to provide enabling provisions for ease of doing business in the aviation sector, in the upcoming Parliament Session beginning Monday.

Besides the Finance Bill, the Government has also listed 'The Disaster Management (Amendment) Bill' for introduction, consideration and passing. The proposed legislation aims to bring more clarity and convergence in the roles of different organisations working in the field of disaster management, a Lok Sabha bulletin issued Thursday said.

The Bhartiya Vayuyan Vidhaya, 2024 seeks to replace the Aircraft Act of 1934 to provide enabling provisions for ease of doing business in the Civil Aviation sector. The Session beginning July 22 will conclude on August 12. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget on Tuesday, July 23.

Other Bills listed for introduction and passage during the Session are the Boilers Bill to replace the pre-Independence era law, the Coffee (Promotion and Development) Bill and the Rubber (Promotion and Development) Bill.

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has also constituted the Business Advisory Committee (BAC), which decides the parliamentary agenda. The committee chaired by the Speaker has Sudip Bandyopadhyay (TMC), PP Chaudhary (BJP), Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu (TDP), Nishikant Dubey (BJP), Gaurav Gogoi (Congress), Sanjay Jaiswal (BJP), Dileshwar Kamait (JD-U),



Bhartuhari Mahtab (BJP), Dayanidhi Maran (DMK), Baijayant Panda (BJP), Arvind Sawant (Shiv Sena-UBT), Kodikunnil Suresh (Congress), Anurag Thakur (BJP) and Lalji Verma (SP) as members. The Centre has also convened an all-party meeting on Sunday ahead of the Monsoon Session. The meeting has been called by Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, the Ministry said in a statement. This will be Leader of Opposition and Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's first time at the customary Session-eve meeting of the floor leaders from all parties if he attends it. Another large party in the Opposition ranks, Trinamool Congress, has regretted it won't attend the meet. The Opposition parties under the INDIA Bloc too have convened a meeting of their Parliamentarians the same evening and another on July 22 morning ahead of the resumption of Parliament to discuss the strategy to raise the issues during the three-weeks-long Monsoon cum Budget session.

Shah for synergy
among agencies
to dismantle
terror networks

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday chaired a high-level meeting with the various heads of security and law enforcement agencies to review the functioning of Multi Agency Centre (MAC) of IB, responsible for tackling security challenges in the country. Addressing the meeting Home Minister instructed heads of security agencies to adopt a whole-of-the-Government approach towards national security. He stressed upon greater synergy between all the agencies to dismantle the terror networks and their supporting eco-system, to address the evolving security threat scenario of the country. While reviewing the overall internal security situation in the country and the fight against terrorism, Shah impressed upon all the participants to increase engagement in the Multi Agency Centre and make it into a cohesive platform.

SC to review immunity
to Guvs from prosecution

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to examine the contours of Article 361 of the Constitution which grants 'blanket immunity' to Governors from any kind of criminal prosecution. The top court's order came on a plea of contractual woman employee of West Bengal 'Raj Bhavan' who has alleged molestation by Governor C V Ananda Bose and her wrongful confinement by the officials there.

A bench comprising Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and justices JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra also issued a notice to the West Bengal Government on the plea of the woman and granted her liberty to make also the Central Government a party.

It also sought the assistance of Attorney General R Venkataramani in dealing with the constitutional issue.

At the outset, senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for the woman whose name has been redacted from the judicial records, said, "It cannot be that there is no investigation. Evidence has to be gathered right now. It cannot be deferred indefinitely till the Governor demits office." The plea said the immunity granted to the Governors under clause 2 of Article 361 cannot bar the investigation and moreover, the time is the essence in such probes. "The petition raises the issue pertaining to the ambit of the protection which is afforded to the Governor under clause (2)



Photo: Ranjan Dimri

of Article 361 of the Constitution," the bench said in its order of issuing notice to the State Government and others. The Article deals with the protection of President and the Governors and its clause 2 reads, "No criminal proceedings whatsoever shall be instituted or continued against the President, or the Governor of a State, in any court during his term of office." The woman petitioner has also sought directions to frame specific guidelines under which Governors enjoy immunity from criminal prosecution. "This court has to decide whether a victim like the petitioner can be rendered remediless, with the only option being to wait for the accused to demit his office, which delay will then be inexplicable during the trial, and render the entire procedure a mere lip service, without any justice to the victim herein," the plea said.

IAS officer Khedkar's career on the line as UPSC files FIR

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

In twin disciplinary measures, Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) has launched criminal prosecution of a controversial probationary IAS officer Puja Manorama Diliprao Khedkar and also issued a show-cause notice to her for cancellation of her candidature from Civil Services Examination-2022/debarment from future examinations/selections. In a statement issued on Friday, the UPSC said it had conducted detailed investigations against

Puja Khedkar for her alleged "misdemeanour". "From the investigation, it has been revealed that she fraudulently availed attempts beyond the permission limit under examination rules by way of changing her name and the names of her father and mother, her photograph, her email id, mobile number and address," the UPSC said. The UPSC said it had initiated a series of actions against her, including a criminal prosecution by filing a First Information Report (FIR) with the police, and served her a show cause notice.



The UPSC said "in fulfilling its Constitutional obligations, it stringently adheres to its Constitutional mandate, and conducts all its processes, including all examinations, with the highest possible order of due diligence without any compromise." "Te UPSC has ensured the sanctity and integrity of all its examination processes with the utmost fairness and strict observance of rules," the statement said. "The UPSC has deservedly earned the trust and credibility of a very high order from the public,

especially the candidates. The UPSC is unequivocally committed to ensure that such a high order of trust and credibility remains intact and uncompromised," the statement added. It may recalled that on July 16, their daughter and probationary IAS officer Dr Puja Manorama Dilip Khedkar — who is under scanner for alleged misuse of power and privileges — was ordered to return to her alma mater Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration (LBSNAA), Mussoorie.

Jamshedpur readies to play first-time hosts of Durand Cup with ceremonial fervour

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The 'Steel City of India' and home of Indian Super League (ISL) side Jamshedpur FC (JFC), welcomed the 133rd IndianOil Durand Cup to its shores with great ceremonial fervour. The three glittering Durand Cup trophies were showcased here for the first time at XLRI Auditorium in the presence of Hafizul Hassan, Minister of Minority Welfare & Tourism, Arts, Culture, Sports & Youth Affairs, Government of Jharkhand, who was Chief Guest. Also present were Lt Gen RC Srikanth, VSM, Chief of Staff, HQ Eastern Command and Chairman, Durand Cup Organising Committee and Chanakya Chaudhary, Vice-President - Corporate Services, Tata

Steel who was the Guest of Honour.

The three glittering pieces of silverware, the Durand Cup, the original prize and the other rolling Shimla Trophy (presented by residents of Shimla in 1904), as well as the President's Cup which the winners keep permanently, were then taken on a roadshow covering prominent city landmarks, attracting fans and generating immense enthusiasm in the football loving city. Lt Gen RC Srikanth, VSM said, "The Indian Army is proud to host this prestigious tournament in Jamshedpur. It is a city which is home to the Tata Football Academy, a beacon in grassroots development of the game. As we continue to spread the reach of the Durand in these regions, we believe it will not only



pave a new path for a stronger civil-military relationship, but also inspire the youth for a brighter, fitter and productive future. It is in this spirit of hope and positivity that we look forward to a glorious 133rd IndianOil Durand

Cup edition. On behalf of Lt Gen Ram Chander Tiwari, UYSM, AVSM, SM, GOC-in-C Eastern Command and Patron, Durand Cup Organising Committee, I wish the organising committee, the players and everyone

involved in this year's tournament all the very best." Addressing the audience on the occasion, Hafizul Hassan said, "Sports is imbibed in the culture of the state and Jamshedpur has a long and glorious tradition

with football. Some of the best players of Indian Football of the modern era learned their trade from the hallowed TATA Football Academy here. Hosting the legendary Durand Cup for the first time is an honour and this will only increase the popularity of the sport in the city and the state overall. We thank the Indian Army for giving Jamshedpur this privilege. I urge all the football loving people of the state to come and watch the matches like they always do in large numbers. We look forward to some competitive and exciting football matches in the coming days and wish all visiting teams and guests a wonderful time at Jamshedpur." Chanakya Chaudhary, Vice President Corporate Services, Tata Steel, said, "We are happy and proud to

host such a prestigious tournament in Jamshedpur. Sports is a way of life at Tata Steel and we have always supported sports and sportspersons. We wish the teams participating in the Durand Cup all the best." The sports complex is also home of Jamshedpur FC and is also known as 'The Furnace' by their fans. It will host Group D, which consists of the Red Miners themselves, fellow ISL side Chennaiyin FC, the Indian Army Football Team and the Bangladesh Armed Forces Football Team, one of the foreign teams in the tournament. The opening match will be played on 28th July with Jamshedpur FC facing Bangladesh Armed Forces FT. The match is scheduled for 4 PM. The Sports Complex was also where the

trophies were displayed after being taken there from the XLRI Auditorium through Mango Bus Stand, Sakchi Circle and JUSCO Circle. Thereafter it was also displayed at the local P&M Mall. All matches of the IndianOil Durand Cup will be broadcast LIVE on the Sony Sports Network and can also be livestreamed on the SonyLiv OTT platform. A total of 24 teams, including two Services teams from Nepal and Bangladesh, will be seen in action across 43 matches, which will be played in the four host cities of Kokrajhar, Shillong, Jamshedpur (last two named making their debut as host cities) and Kolkata which will also host the grand final on August 31st at the hallowed Vivekananda Yuba Bharati Krirangan.

Awareness Rally organized by GM Evening College on De-Addiction

AVINASH ANJAN : HAZ-ARIBAG

The Awareness rally was organized by the National Service Scheme unit of the college with the aim of making India drug-free. The chief guest of this program was Anupriya Kumari, Director of Anupriya Foundation, who made the students aware of the impact of this event on the society. She gave the message that our goal right now is to free the youth of the country and Hazaribag from drug addiction. The Rally started from the college campus and passed through various routes of the city and ended at Gyan Jyoti College campus.

All the students of Arts, Science and Commerce participated in the morning walk. The morning walk was led by NSS Nodal Officer Mr. Umesh Thakur. Drug De-Addiction Awareness rally



was jointly flagged off from the college campus by GM Group College Director and Secretary Shambhu Kumar, Principal Vinay Kumar and Anupriya Kumari. While flagging off the morning walk from the college campus, the college principal said that "People who have given up drug abuse will have happiness in their lives and road accident deaths will also reduce." College secretary Shambhu Kumar said that "drug abuse invites many kinds of diseases, the body gradually becomes weak, so everyone should stay away from drugs."

were also attracting the people a lot. Through slogans, children were also showing pictures and cartoons of families getting ruined due to drug addiction. The students also took a pledge to spread the message of public awareness about drug addiction everywhere in the society.

In this drug de-addiction awareness rally program, NSS volunteers of colleges Hritik Mishra, Rahul Kumar Singh, Prakash Kumar Das, Neha Kumari, Manisha Kumari, Samridhi Kumari etc. participated enthusiastically. Along with this, college teachers, Ranjan Kumar, Binay Mehta, Ajay Kumar, Kundan Sharma, Krishna Kumar, Manoj Rana, Poonam Kumari, Pushpanjali Kumari, Jayaraj Kumar, Deependra Kumar, Urmila Rana, Neelima Kujur, Shaheen Praveen, Gopal, Riyaz Ahmed made the program successful.

Workshop on rose disease and nutrient management

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

The Horticulture Society Jamshedpur is organizing a One-Day Workshop on "Rose Disease and Nutrient Management" set to take place on 28 July. The workshop, aimed at flower enthusiasts across the city, will be held at the SNTI Auditorium from 9:00 AM to 1:00 PM.

This event comes as a prelude to the upcoming 34th Annual Flower Show and the 41st All India Rose Convention cum Rose Show, underscoring the society's commitment to promoting horticultural knowledge and appreciation within the community.

Atreyee Sanyal, Vice President of Human Resource Management at Tata Steel, will grace the workshop as the Chief Guest. Her presence underscores the importance of community engagement and corporate support in fostering a culture of horticultural excellence.

Leading the workshop will be Sanjay Mukherjee, a renowned rose breeder and the Vice President of East Zone at the Indian Rose Federation, Kolkata. Mukherjee's extensive experience and expertise in rose cultivation and care make him an invaluable resource for attendees seeking to deepen their understanding of rose disease management and nutrient optimization.

Participants can look forward to a comprehensive session covering practical insights and advanced techniques in maintaining the health and vibrancy of rose plants. The workshop will include detailed discussions, hands-on demonstrations, and an interactive Q&A segment, ensuring that attendees leave with actionable knowledge to apply in their own gardens.

Rotary Bokaro Interact Club holds Blood Donation Camp

PNS : BOKARO

At St. Xavier's School in Sector 1, the Rotary Bokaro Interact Club organized a blood donation camp. The camp saw participation from approximately 30 students, 7 teachers, and 2 Rotarians who donated blood. This event was organized by the Interact Club to mark the 59th anniversary of St. Xavier's School.

Club president, Aksha, stated that the aim of the camp was to educate children about the importance of blood donation and to encourage them to donate blood. She further explained that blood donation does not adversely affect health; rather, it stimulates the production and circulation of new blood, which helps to remove impurities and keeps the body healthy and disease-free. The club's secretary, Ayushi Patnaik, was also



present and her assistance was highly commendable. Rotary Bokaro President Rtn. Mahesh Gupta also donated blood to motivate the students, which inspired many others to follow suit. The event was significantly supported by the school's principal, Father Arun Minz. The successful operation of the camp was overseen by Rotary Bokaro's Interact Chairperson Rtn. Chandrima Ray. The camp was organized

with the support of the Blood Bank at Bokaro General Hospital (BGH). Doctors from BGH, Dr. Surendra and Rtn. Dr. Gaurav Vishal, along with 10 other paramedical staff, were present to ensure the smooth running of the camp. Rotary Club Secretary Hardeep Singh, Rtn. Pradeep Ray, Rtn. Inderpreet, and others were also in attendance. Overall, the project was a great success.

Pvt hospital back to normal functioning in Daltonganj

PNS : DALTONGANJ

Maiyya Babu hospital is back to its normal functioning. Its doctor's chamber and operation theatre have been opened under order of the DC Shashi Ranjan. These two were sealed on June 15 by the order of the DC. However this hospital paid a penalty worth rupees 2L for its deficiencies buying time to make an all round development of the hospital in one month.

Doctor in chief Quadir Perwez said our hospital caters to the poor patients and there comes a crowd of attendants with every patient and that tells on our space and hygiene here.

The hospital however continued to remain suspended for 6 months beginning June 11 when the Jharkhand State Arogya Society found this hospital wanting as many as 8 or 10 counts in particular.

The other 5 or 6 counts were just mentionable, like why this hospital has two sets of buildings separated by a road etc. This hospital can't entertain Ayushman card holding patients for treatment asking for Ayushman relief as it stands suspended although this hospital remains on the panel for the health providers under Ayushman coverage.

ACB team arrests Lohardaga DMO taking a bribe

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

Lohardaga District Disaster Management Officer Vibhakar Kumar has been arrested for taking a bribe of Rs 15,000. Ranchi's ACB (Anti Corruption Bureau) team arrested him red handed while taking bribes on Friday. He has been arrested from Vardaan Hospital in Lohardaga urban area. He had demanded a bribe in return for compensation. Along with them, ACB has also arrested a middleman.

A child had died by drowning in the pond. His family members had applied for compensation. When no action was taken after applying, the middleman assured them to get the work done. After this, a bribe was demanded from him in the name of getting compensa-



tion. A bribe of Rs 15,000 was demanded from the victim's family. After the complaint, the Anti Corruption Bureau (ACB) arrested him for taking bribes.

The victim's family said that when a bribe was demanded in lieu of giving the compensation amount, they refused to give it. After this the victim's family contacted Ranchi Anti

Corruption Bureau (ACB) and informed them about the entire matter. ACB investigated the matter, investigation found the matter to be true. After this the trap was laid. ACB team arrested the disaster management officer taking a bribe of Rs 15,000. Along with this, ACB has also arrested Abhiraj Rana, younger brother of the operator of Vardaan Hospital.

Bol Ranchi Zone organized grand Kisan Diwas

PNS : RANCHI

Chief General Manager of Bank of India Head Office, Sudhiranjan Padhi is present in Ranchi city on a three-day visit. Taking advantage of this occasion, a grand Kisan Diwas celebration was organized by Bol in Village-Saparom, Nagdi. It is worth mentioning that the Bank of India (BoI) celebrates the entire month of July as Kisan Maah. More than 400 farm-

ers and women entrepreneurs participated in the celebration with great enthusiasm. In his address, Padhi praised the farmers for their unprecedented contribution to the nation. Zonal Manager Sanjeev Kumar Singh boosted the morale of all the beneficiaries by handing over the loan sanction letters and urged all others to join Bol.

In the celebration, everyone was introduced to various agricultural finance

products of Bank of India and a wide display of products made by various self-help groups was also done through the stall. Assistant General Manager AK Pandey appreciated this effort.

Vote of thanks was given by Deputy Zonal Manager, Banita Mohapatra. Chief Manager, Rajesh Kumar and Zonal Marketing Head, Anurag Verma played an important role in making the function successful.

TAC MEETING HELD UNDER THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF DIC AT BSL

PNS : BOKARO

A meeting of the Training Advisory Committee (TAC) was held today under the chairmanship of BSL Director In-Charge B.K. Tiwari. The meeting was attended by the Executive Directors, Chief General Managers, Heads of Departments, and officials from the Human Resources (Learning and Development) Department of Bokaro Steel Plant.

During the meeting, Senior Manager of Human Resources (Learning and Development) Preeti Kumari presented various training programs and other significant achievements accomplished by the department in the last financial year. Additionally, the senior officials were informed about the learning and development plans and priorities for the current financial year. Chief General Manager (MTI, Ranchi) Sanjay Dhar dis-



cussed the 'Future Ready Cell - Future Ready HR.' Director In-Charge Tiwari reviewed all aspects and emphasized aligning learning and development activities with the organization's needs. Discussions also included self-learning and improvement, gap analysis,

and the knowledge bank. Executive Directors shared their thoughts on the training programs.

The meeting commenced with a welcome address by Chief General Manager of Human Resources (Learning and Development) Manish Jalota. Director In-Charge Tiwari congratulated the respective departments and team members for the recent accolades received by BSL, including the National Award for Manufacturing Competitiveness 2023-24, the Greentech EHS Merit Award, and the Samridhi Management and Business Quiz Award.

DISHA meeting held in Bokaro under Chairmanship of MP

PNS : BOKARO

A significant meeting of the District Development Coordination and Monitoring Committee (DISHA) was held today in the auditorium of Nyaya Sadan, Comp-2. The meeting was presided over by the Honorable MP of Giridih Lok Sabha Constituency, Chandraprakash Chaudhary.

The assembly witnessed the presence of several dignitaries including MP of Dhanbad Lok Sabha Constituency, Dhullu Mahto, MLA of Bokaro Biranchi



Narayan, representatives of the MLA from Chandankiyari, Dr. Lambodar Mahto, and Mithilesh Tiwari, the repre-

sentative of the MLA from Bermo. Additionally, key district officials were in attendance: Deputy Commissioner Vijaya

Jadhav, Divisional Forest Officer Rajneesh Kumar, Superintendent of Police Pujya Prakash, Chairperson of the District Council Sunita Devi, Deputy Development Commissioner Girija Shankar Prasad, Director of DPLR Menka, Additional Collector M. Mumtaz Ansari, Sub-Divisional Officer of Chas Om Prakash Gupta, Sub-Divisional Officer of Bermo Ashok Kumar, DTO Vandana and Civil Surgeon Dr. Dinesh Kumar. All district-level officers, block-level officers, and key stakeholders were also present.

3 KG IED recovered from West Singhbhum, forces on alert

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In West Singhbhum district, a region long affected by Naxal insurgency, a significant breakthrough has been achieved by security forces. In an ongoing series of successful search operations against banned Naxalite organizations, security forces recently recovered and destroyed a 3 kg Improvised Explosive Device (IED) planted



ed by Naxalites with the intent to harm law enforcement personnel. The West Singhbhum dis-

trict, known for its dense forests and challenging terrain, has been a hotspot for Naxal activities for many years. The Naxalites, who aim to destabilize government control in the region, have resorted to planting IEDs and other explosives to thwart security operations and instill fear among the local populace.

On Friday, the security forces, as part of their contin-

uous anti-Naxal operations, conducted a thorough search in the Vanagram Meralgada area, under the jurisdiction of the Goikera police station. During this meticulous search, the forces discovered the 3 kg IED strategically placed by the Naxalites. The device was intended to inflict severe damage on the police and other security personnel operating in the eastern part of the district.

Prepare farmers for alternative agriculture, CM asks officials

Holds review meeting with officers in Giridih

PNS : RANCHI



Chief Minister Hemant Soren holding a review meeting with officials at the guest house in Madhuban regarding various development and public welfare schemes running in Giridih district on Friday. PNS

ALL the development schemes of the state government should be visible on the ground. Ensure that these schemes reach every house at all costs. Chief Minister Hemant Soren gave these instructions to the officials during a review meeting held in Madhuban regarding various schemes running in Giridih district. He told the officials to listen to the problems of the people with full sensitivity and find solutions. It is your responsibility to effectively implement the policies and schemes of the government in the district so that even the last person in the society can get its benefits. There should not be any kind of negligence and carelessness in this.

The CM took information from the officials about the monsoon rains and the status of paddy plantation in the district. During this, he

also became aware of the reality of distribution of seeds and fertilizers among the farmers. He told the officials that if paddy sowing is affected due to less rain, then be fully prepared to prepare the farmers for alternative agriculture. All steps should be taken to pro-

vide relief to the farmers. He said that to ensure that the farmers get the benefit of KCC. The CM also inquired about the Agriculture Loan Waiver Scheme in the meeting. Soren said that concrete steps should be taken towards creating maximum man days in various

schemes running under MGNREGA. So that labourers can get employment in their village and they do not migrate. He said that it should be ensured that the wages of MGNREGA workers are paid on time.

The CM said that a large number of rural youth from

Giridih district migrate to big cities and other states for employment. This is quite worrying. Our government has started many schemes to provide employment to the youth. Connect the youth with these schemes, so that they can get employment in their home-village. He also said that a complete database of those who migrate should also be kept, so that in adverse circumstances, he or his family can be provided proper relief by the government.

He said that by connecting as many farmers as possible with Birsa Hari Gram Yojana, motivates them to plant fruit trees. This is a very ambitious scheme of the state government, which aims to increase the income of farmers. In this meeting, he also took information about the plantation campaign. Forest department officials said that the target is to plant 8 lakh saplings in the entire district this mon-



Chief Minister Hmant Soren along with his wife and Gandey MLA Kalpana Soren performing puja at the presiding deity Shri Bhomiyaji Maharaj temple in Madhuban of Giridih district on Friday. PNS

soon. So far more than 2 lakh 10 thousand saplings have been planted.

The CM instructed the concerned officials to improve all other systems including electricity and water in the district. He clearly said that people should get basic facilities in

a better form. Ensure uninterrupted power supply in the district. The work of water supply schemes should be completed as soon as possible so that people get pure drinking water. Also took information about the construction of a corridor for safe movement of elephants.

Rajya Sabha MP Sarfaraz Ahmed, MLA Mathura Prasad Mahto, MLA Sudivya Kumar Sonu, MLA Kalpana Soren, District 20-Point Vice President Sanjay Singh, Deputy Commissioner and Superintendent of Police of the district and other officers were present in this meeting.

ED takes selective action on people against BJP: JMM



JMM General Secretary Supriyo Bhattacharya during a press conference in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

PNS : RANCHI

Welcoming Union Home Minister Amit Shah to Jharkhand, JMM today attacked Babul Marandi and BJP. The party said that ED action in Jharkhand is taken by identifying people despite having evidence against those who are with BJP or are BJP supporters, no action is taken whereas ED takes selective action against those who oppose BJP.

Addressing a press conference JMM General Secretary cum Spokesperson, Supriyo Bhattacharya said that before the Lok Sabha elections, Jharkhand and the Country saw two types of pictures. "Jharkhand CM Hemant Soren, Delhi CM and many such people who opposed BJP and Modi were put in jail. This is because in Jharkhand, apart from all the ED officers, there is another ED Special Director, whose name is BL Marandi (Babul Marandi)," he added.

Bhattacharya said that Marandi decides in Jharkhand against whom ED action is to be taken and against whom it is not. "In

the middle of the Lok Sabha elections, this Special Director BL Marandi introduced Vishnu Agarwal, accused in the land scam and out on bail, to Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. Not only this, former journalist and land dealer Kamlesh, who did not appear before ED despite notice after notice, was also introduced to the Finance Minister by ED Special Director BL Marandi. Everyone knows that ED comes under the Finance Ministry. Therefore, now on July 22, the Home Minister of the Country is coming, who is also a member of the PM's Special Affairs Cabinet," he added.

The party General Secretary said that which tainted and accused will this Special Director BL Marandi introduce to the Home Minister? "Which infiltrators will he introduce to him? If their names were made public today itself, it would have been better because BJP President Babul Marandi and the Leader of the Opposition are infiltrators in their own party. These things were said by the

Spokesperson while releasing the photo of both the accused with the Finance Minister. Marandi is also present in both these photos, he added.

Bhattacharya said that a letter has come to the Jharkhand Government from the DGP of the Police Department of the Assam Government. "This letter has now become a document for JMM. It is said in this letter that Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma is the BJP's co-assembly election In-Charge in Jharkhand along with the Chief Minister of Assam. Who is provided with Z plus security. He will keep coming and going to Jharkhand for the time being. He has been provided this security by the order of the Home Ministry. Therefore, if the Jharkhand Government has a problem, then the Assam Government is ready to bear the expenditure being made on his travel and security," he added.

The party Leader further said that this letter in itself is giving rise to many questions. "Should it be assumed that after the election bond, this will become a big case of misuse of Government money? Will Himanta Biswa Sarma, who is a Chief Minister, work for the BJP organization in Jharkhand and his expenses will be paid from the treasury of Assam. This letter itself is an admission of how Government money will be used for the party organization. The Home Minister will also have to answer this because he is also the head of BSF and Police," he added.

Bhattacharya said that on July 20, the Home Minister will not give election tips to thousands of BJP workers, but tips of lies because he is an expert in lying and

Marandi writes to CM on declining tribal population in Santhal region

PNS : RANCHI

Former Chief Minister and Jharkhand BJP chief Babul Marandi has written to Chief Minister Hemant Soren on declining population of tribal communities in the Santhal Pargana region.



In the letter Marandi has said that the population of the tribal community in Santhal Pargana is continuously decreasing. Due to illegal migration of Bangladeshi intruders, the tribal society here is engaged in saving its existence and resources. The intruders are rapidly settling here and are endangering the water, forest and land of the tribal community, and are torturing mothers, sisters and children with their criminal acts.

Marandi said that even Bangladeshi intruders are forcibly marrying the sisters of the tribal community by luring and threatening them and occupying their land. In this regard, such news is published in newspapers every day. You must also be aware of such incidents. In the year 1951, the number of tribals in Santhal Pargana was 44.67%, whereas today it has come down to only 28.11%. If this continues, the day is not far when the Santhals will become a minority in Santhal Pargana, and this Santhal Pargana, known as the land of tribals, will lose its identity.

On the basis of estimated figures, it is clearly reflected in Santhal Pargana that there is not much difference in the population of tribal community and Muslim community in the year 2021 census, or it can also be said that in the year 2021 census, the population of tribal community and Muslim community has become almost equal. This has been predicted since before and it seems to be proving true. As an example, with this letter, official figures of Santhal Pargana region have been collected from the census conducted by the Central Government, which is attached for your viewing.

The estimated figures of the 2031 census indicate that the population of the Muslim community will exceed that of the tribal community. This is going to be an alarm bell for the tribal community. If the Muslim population continues to grow at the pace of 2001 and 2011, then according to the estimated figures, the population of the Muslim community in Santhal Pargana will be more than that of the tribal community, which is quite worrying. Marandi said, therefore, you are requested to take cognizance of the above serious and sensitive issue and recommend the formation of an SIT and an investigation, so that the mystery behind the decreasing population of the tribal community can be exposed.

NEET UG PAPER LEAK — CBI arrests RIMS student who 'solved' medical entrance paper

PNS : RANCHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) investigating the infamous NEET paper leak has arrested a medical student from State biggest health hub-Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS).

Surbhi Kumari, a first-year MBBS student of the 2023 batch from Rajendra Institute of Medical Sciences (RIMS) in Ranchi was arrested by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) today. The girl allegedly solved question papers for the candidates and has been sent to CBI for three days.

The arrest of a medical student from RIMS has exposed the paper leak gang having links with students of the medical institute. The arrest of the girl has been confirmed by RIMS administration.

"The student belonged to the 2023 batch, which is a first-year student, and she is now under the custody of CBI. They initially approached the administration for some initial information from the student and yesterday they again approached for further



investigation in the case and then they proceeded with the custody of the student," Rajiv Ranjan, the RIMS Public Relations Official said to media. "The CBI had approached us for further information in this case. The administration will give full support and whatever information is needed will be given to them whenever they approach but till now after the custody, there is no such thing..." he added.

After about eight hours of questioning on Thursday, the CBI finally arrested her in the evening. RIMS PRO Dr. Rajiv Ranjan confirmed that the student is now in CBI custody.

The RIMS administration will fully cooperate with the CBI in the investigation of the case as and when required, he added.

Sources also claimed that the CBI has seized the student's mobile phones, laptops, other electronic gadgets, and documents.

She is being considered part of the question solvers gang that solved the 2024 NEET question papers after they were leaked from Hazaribagh in Jharkhand.

The arrest of a medical student from the state's biggest health hub follows the arrest of a student from AIMS Patna a few days back.

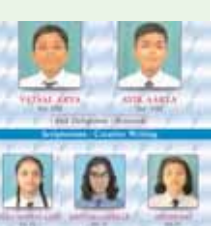
Earlier on Thursday, four MBBS students from AIIMS Patna were arrested and remanded in CBI custody in connection with the NEET UG paper leak case. The group — identified as Karan Jain, Kumar Sanu, Rahul Anand and Chandan Singh — had allegedly solved papers for the main accused, Pankaj Singh.

The CBI has sealed the rooms of all four students and they have been remanded to CBI custody. The AIIMS Patna students have been accused of helping the notorious 'solver gang' of Nalanda solve the leaked question papers.

Four students of AIIMS Patna, who were arrested in connection with the NEET-UG scam, had allegedly travelled to Hazaribagh in Jharkhand to solve the leaked question paper.

SBPS students shine at aspirations 2024

The students of Sarala Birla Public School, Ranchi performed phenomenally in Aspirations-2024: Inter-school Online Discursive Thinking Exploration held in Varanasi. It was a National level event in which more than 35 schools all over the country participated. In Plurilogues-Multi-Format Debates, Vatsal Arya and Avik Aarya of Std. VIII won the Best Delegation-Research. For Scriprium-Creative Writing Competition, Adzka Nakhat Aarif, Kritika Sarkar and Arushi Raj of Std. IX secured the third position for Best Delegation. Principal, Paramjit Kaur, appreciated the concerted efforts of students and teachers. She said that participating in such competitions enriches them and nurtures their creativity and encourages others to actively participate as well.



Police lathicharge on protesting Assistant Police personnel

PNS : RANCHI



A police car vandalised during a clash between police and assistant police personnel in Ranchi on Friday. PNS

Ranchi police had to use mild force against assistant police personnel protesting in support of their demands of job regularisation, increase in salary and other benefits near Sookna Bhawan here on Friday.

As per their plan to gherao the CM residence on Friday about 200 assistant police personnel broke the police barricading and reached near Sookna Bhawan. During this, a clash broke out between the police and the assistant policemen. A Police vehicle was vandalized in the clash.

At Sookna Bhawan police lathicharged on the protesting mob that was not ready to listen to the authorities. Several protestors were said to be injured in the clash while the police were continuously trying to control them. The agitators sat on the road and blocked it. However, on the assurance that their demands will be put before the CM, they returned to Morhabadi ground where they are camping for the past 15 days.

Earlier in the day, talks were held between the assis-

tant policemen and the government, where a proposal was given to extend the contract of assistant policemen by 1 year and to give reservation in police recruitment. Senior officers present in the meeting said that the assistant policemen have been assured that their contract ending from August 9 will be extended for another 1 year. Their salary allowance is being increased by 20%. Apart from this, they will be given reservation in the recruitment to be held in Jharkhand Police.

However, the assistant

police personnel did not agree to the proposal and they resorted to their plan to gherao the CM residence.

After the clash when the assistant police personnel returned to Morhabadi they found that their tents were ransacked and several food items and other things were stolen.

They alleged that the authorities have been unjust with them and are using immoral ways to break their protest. They even alleged that unknown persons must have tried to kill them by poisoning their food items.

Multilingual programme Palash for 1041 Govt schools in State

PNS : RANCHI

For the past two years, the Jharkhand government has been running a mother tongue based multilingual teaching program in across 259 selected schools of six districts of the State namely Gumla, Simdega, Lohardaga, Khunti, West Singhbhum and Sahibganj.

With the implementation of this program positive results have been seen in the learning of children at the primary level. Encouraged by this, the State government has decided to start the multilingual education program 'Palash' in five local languages - Santhali, Mundari, Ho, Kurukh and Kharia in collaboration with UNICEF and LLF (Language Learning Foundation) in as many as 1041 selected schools in seven districts of the State including Latehar, Simdega, Lohardaga, Khunti, West Singhbhum, Sahibganj and Dumka from the year 2024-25.

The main objective of this program is to achieve the goals of teaching basic education and numeracy along with Hindi by including the



mother tongue of the children in their formal education to improve their basic learning skills.

As a part of the State government's plan to expand this program to 1000 schools from the academic session 2024-25, a linguistic survey was also conducted in two phases in primary and upper primary schools of eight tribal language dominated districts. The districts included were Dumka, Gumla, Khunti, Lohardaga, West Singhbhum, Sahibganj, Simdega and Latehar. The data related to the language of students and teachers was collected and verified by the cluster resource persons (CRP) related to the schools. After the linguistic sur-

vey, the selected schools have been coordinated by representatives of LLF and UNICEF. The distance of the school from the block and district headquarters and other training facilities have been closely monitored by the employees of the institutions. A State Resource Group has also been formed for the successful operation of this program and 32 teachers from eight districts have been included in it. Members of the State Resource Group will timely train and endorse teachers associated with multilingual education of selected schools.

After receiving State level training, members of the State Resource Group will

AFFIDAVIT

I, Chandra Deo Oraon son of Late Chuniya Oraon, resident of village Murki Kumba Toli Post Areya P.S., Senha, Distt. Lohardaga. That in spouse details my wife name is written as Kiran Toppo and her date of birth is mentioned as 01.07.1983 which is incorrect. That I want to get corrected correct name of my wife is Kiran Devi and her date of birth is 30.07.1984 in my Accounts (Pensions), hence this affidavit. Vide Affidavit No. 7963, dated-19.07.2024.

RITES LIMITED (A Government of India Enterprise) Shikhar, Plot No.1, Sector-29, Gurugram-122001 CIN : L74899DL1974GOI007227		
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VC No.	Post	No. of Vacancies
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188/24	Resident Engineer – Mechanical on contract	06
189/24	Resident Engineer – Electrical on contract	03
190/24	AGM (ES&T) on regular basis	02

For details regarding Position, remuneration, qualification, experience, age, date & venue, selection process etc., candidates may see the detailed advertisement posted on RITES website www.rites.com under Career Section.

Written test for VC No. 187/24, 188/24 & 189/24 will be conducted at Guwahati, Kolkata, Bhubneshwar and Gurugram on 18.08.2024.

BRS tops income chart among regional parties, says ADR

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Bharat Rashtia Samithi has topped the income chart among regional parties for the financial year 2022-23 with Rs 737.67 crore, 42.23 per cent of the total, according to poll rights body Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR). The top five parties with the highest expenditure are All India Trinamool Congress which spent Rs 181.18 crore or 37.66 per cent, followed by YSR-Congress which spent Rs 79.32 crore or 16.49 per cent, BRS, which spent Rs 57.47 crore or 11.94 per cent, DMK, which spent Rs 52.62 crore or 10.94 per cent, and the Samajwadi Party, which spent Rs 31.41 crore or 6.53 per cent of the total expenditure, ADR said. In a revealing analysis of the financial health of India's regional political parties, the ADR has disclosed detailed income and expenditure reports for 39 out of 57 regional parties for the fiscal year 2022-23. After BRS, the TMS had the highest income of Rs 333.45 crore or 19.16 per cent, while the Dravida Munnetra



Kazhagam (DMK) reported an income of Rs 214.35 crore or 12.32 per cent of the total income of the 39 regional parties analysed in the ADR report. Collectively, the top five parties accounted for Rs 1,541.32 crore, or 88.56 per cent of the total income of the parties analysed while the total declared income of the 39 regional parties stood at Rs 1,740.48 crore, according to the analysis. The ECI had set October 31, 2023, as the deadline for submission of annual audited accounts of political parties, however, only 16 of them

adhered to the time limit. Twenty-three parties submitted their reports late, with delays ranging from three to 150 days. The audit reports for 18 regional parties, including prominent ones like Shiv Sena (SHS), Bodoland People's Front (BPF), Jammu & Kashmir National Conference, Nationalist Congress Party, and Shiv Sena (UBT), were not available on the ECI website at the time of the report's preparation, the ADR said. A total of 19 regional parties declared unspent income for the fiscal

year. BRS had the highest unspent income of Rs 680.20 crore, followed by Biju Janata Dal with Rs 171.06 crore and DMK with Rs 161.72 crore. Conversely, 20 parties reported expenditures exceeding their income, with Janta Dal (Secular) spending 490.43 per cent more than its income. Voluntary contributions, including donations and electoral bonds, were the primary sources of income for the parties, amounting to Rs 1,522.46 crore or 87.47 per cent of the total income. Of this, Rs 1,285.83 crore came from electoral bonds. Only eight regional parties declared receiving donations through electoral bonds.

ADR's report recommended that the ECI enforce stricter deadlines and penalise parties for late or non-submission of audit reports. A full disclosure of donor details under the Right to Information Act is also urged to ensure transparency in political funding. The report calls for rigorous enforcement of laws like Section 13A of the Income Tax Act and Section 29 (C) of the Representation of People Act, which mandate financial disclosure by political parties.

Jaishankar holds phone talks with his Ukrainian counterpart

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday held a phone conversation with his Ukrainian counterpart Dmytro Kuleba less than two weeks after Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Moscow. Jaishankar said the focus of the conversation was to further develop the bilateral relationship. A good conversation with FM @DmytroKuleba of Ukraine this afternoon. Spoke about further developing our bilateral relationship, he said in a social media post. The phone conversation between the two Foreign Ministers came against the backdrop of Ukrainian President Volodymyr



Zelensky's criticism of Modi's visit to Moscow. On July 9, the Ukrainian president described Modi's visit to Moscow as a 'huge' disappointment and a 'devastating blow' to peace

efforts. In a social media post, Zelensky specifically referred to Russia's missile attacks on Ukraine, including on a children's hospital in Kyiv.

'A Russian missile struck the largest children's hospital in Ukraine, targeting young cancer patients. Many were buried under the rubble,' Zelensky had said. 'It is a huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts to see the leader of the world's largest democracy hug the world's most bloody criminal in Moscow on such a day,' he said. Modi visited Moscow on July 8 and 9 in his first trip to Russia since its invasion of Ukraine. In his summit talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Modi delivering an unambiguous message said a solution to the Ukraine conflict is not possible on the battlefield and peace talks do not succeed amidst bombs, guns and bullets.

India calls protests in Bangladesh as its internal matter

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India on Friday described the violent protests in Bangladesh as an 'internal matter of that country. Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said around 15,000 Indians including 8,000 students are currently residing in Bangladesh and they are safe.

As you are aware, there are ongoing protests in Bangladesh. We see this as an internal matter of the country,' he said. 'We have issued an advisory for Indian nationals, including our students, resident in Bangladesh for their safety and assistance if required. Helpline numbers are activated operating on 24x7 basis for people to reach out,' he said.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar is himself following the matter closely, Jaiswal said. 'Our High Commission will be providing regular updates. I will also be posting regular updates. I would urge family members to follow us for latest developments,' he said. 'We remain committed to providing all possible assistance to our nationals in Bangladesh,' Jaiswal said.



Make sure weapons developed, made in India: AP Singh

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict has demonstrated the integration of multiple forces in domains of air, land, sea, cyber, information and space, and how they are 'united' to achieve the goal, Vice Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal AP Singh, on Friday said. In his address at a CAPS seminar here, he also said 'Atmanirbharta' is 'not just a buzzword', it is something that all stakeholders need to put their heart and soul into, and make sure technologies and weapons are developed and manufactured in India, 'so that we are not relying on an outside agency who could change its alliance or stop flow of weapons to our country' when the time comes. During the seminar exhibition on air and missile defence hosted by the think-tank at Subroto Park here, many speakers also spoke about various lessons from ongoing conflicts in the world. 'One thing is certain, if we need to do something, we need to stay... In the game, we need to modernise, we need to continue to grow, continue to innovate and we need to continue being ahead of the curve. Otherwise, we lag behind and we are just chasing,' Air Marshal Singh said. 'Technological advancements, the rapid pace that is being seen in people's normal life, has also infused themselves into our weaponry, defence systems'. Today, what was unthinkable or

unimaginable few years back, is a reality, he said, adding, impact on the defence forces, on the warfighting, has made it clear that 'we need to be agile and flexible in our thoughts as well as actions. The ongoing conflicts that has been alluded about, the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the multi-domain battlespace. It is a 'classic example of what is going on today and what we are likely to face in our future conflicts,' the Vice Chief of the Air Staff (VCAS) said. 'This conflict has also demonstrated the integration of multiple forces in domains of air, land, sea, cyber, information, space and how they are united to achieve the goal. I am sure everyone present here, including my friends from other services will agree that the air domain has clearly emerged as a singular trans-domain link and strong force across domains, a strong method for cross-domain application of force. It is not just an enabler, it has become a force multiplier,' he asserted. The VCAS also referred to the Israel-Hamas war to underline the importance of air domain. Even in the urban warfare construct that is seen in Israel-Hamas war, the air domain has been used extensively, whether it is utilising those fighter aircraft with precision weapons or the formidable Iron Dome (air defence) system or utilising those low-cost rockets and loiter munitions by Hamas in challenging that very formidable and very costly system itself, he said.

Viksit Bharat to be theme of 78th I-Day celebrations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The theme for 78th Independence Day celebrations is 'Viksit Bharat', in sync with the Government's vision to transform the country into a developed nation by 2047. Ministry of Defence spokesperson A. Bharat Bhushan Babu made the announcement in a social media post in which he also shared a poster depicting the Red Fort and the 'Viksit Bharat' slogan. In 2047, India will mark 100th year of its freedom from colonial rule. 'The theme for #IndependenceDay 2024 is 'Viksit Bharat', in sync with Govt's vision to transform country into a Developed Nation by 2047, marking the 100th year of Independence. @giriidhararamane,' the spokesperson said.

SC refuses to entertain remission plea of 2 convicts in Bilkis case

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday refused to entertain a plea of two of the 11 convicts in the Bilkis Bano case challenging the January 8 verdict cancelling their remission. A bench of Justices Sanjiv Khanna and Sanjay Kumar upheld the plea as 'absolutely misconceived' and said how can it sit in appeal over an order passed by another bench of the apex court. 'What is this plea? How is this plea maintainable? This is absolutely misconceived. How can an Article 32 petition be filed? We can't sit in appeal over an order passed by another bench,' the bench said. Advocate Rishi Malhotra appearing for convicts Radheyshayam Bhagwandas Shah and Rajubhai Babul Soni sought permission to withdraw the plea. The bench allowed the counsel to withdraw the plea. Shah has also applied for interim bail. In March, both the convicts moved the top court contending that its January 8 verdict cancelling remission

of their sentence was 'in teeth of' a 2002 constitution bench order and sought the issue to be referred to a larger bench for 'final' adjudication. Shah and Soni, both lodged in Godhra sub-jail after the apex court verdict, said an 'anomalous' situation has arisen wherein two different coordinate benches (benches of the same strength) have taken diametrically opposite views on the same issue of premature release as well as on which policy of the state government would apply to the petitioners for remission. The plea, filed through Malhotra, said while one bench on May 13, 2022, categorically ordered the Gujarat government to consider Shah's application for premature release in terms of the state government's remission policy of July 9, 1992, the bench that pronounced the verdict on January 8, 2024, concluded that it was Maharashtra and not the Gujarat government that was competent to grant remission. 'That with greatest respect the judgment rendered on



January 8, 2024, is directly in teeth of the constitution bench decision in Rupa Ashok Hurra's case of 2002 and the same needs to be set aside, as if the same is permitted then it would lead to not only judicial impropriety but to uncertainty and chaos as to which precedence (sic) of law has to be applied in future.' In other words, if any party being not satisfied with the Supreme Court judgment on an issue, he would be entitled to file a writ petition challenging the said judgment by taking recourse to the law laid down in Bilkis Bano case,' the plea said. It said a fundamental issue

arises for consideration as to whether a subsequent coordinate bench can set aside its judgment rendered by its earlier co-ordinate bench and pass contradictory orders/judgments overruling its earlier view or the proper course would have been to refer the matter to a larger bench in case it felt that the earlier judgment was passed in wrong appreciation of law and facts. The plea sought a direction to the Centre to consider the case of the petitioners for premature release and clarify which judgment of its coordinate benches of May 13, 2022, or January 8, 2024, would apply to them. It said since two benches of the apex court of the same strength have passed conflicting orders, the matter should be referred to a larger bench for final adjudication. On January 8, in a massive setback to the Gujarat government, the top court quashed the remission it had granted to 11 convicts in the high-profile gang-rape case of

Bilkis Bano and the killing of her seven family members while slaming the state for being 'complicit' with the accused and abusing its discretion. It ordered all the convicts, who were released prematurely on Independence Day in 2022, back to jail within two weeks. Criticising the Gujarat government, the apex court said it 'usurped' the power of the Maharashtra government to grant remission to the convicts. It held as nullity the May 13, 2022, judgment of another bench of the apex court, which had directed the Gujarat government to consider the remission applications of the 11 convicts in the case, saying it was obtained by 'playing fraud on the court'. Bilkis Bano was 21 years old and five months pregnant when she was raped while fleeing the horror of the communal riots that broke out after the Godhra train burning incident in February 2002. Her three-year-old daughter was among the seven family members killed.

76 Saudi Naval personnel complete training in India

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Seventy six trainees from the King Fahd Naval Academy of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) completed their Afloat Training Course at First Training Squadron (ITS) of the Indian Navy on Thursday, navy said here on Friday. Giving details here, officials said the three weeks training at Kochi comprised harbour as well as a sea phase. The harbour phase focussed largely on simulator-based training on navigational, fire-fighting and damage control aspects. During the sea phase, the trainees were introduced to nuances of life at sea providing first-hand experience on ship handling, communication procedures and seamanship evolutions. Besides this, the trainees were introduced to sail training at



Watermanship Training Centre and onboard INS Tarangini. Participation of RSNF trainees alongside Indian Naval trainees of 107 Integrated Officers Training Course (IOTC) has immensely contributed towards enhanced bond homie and friendship amongst the trainees of both maritime nations. The training program also facilitated cultural exchange and engagements through organised visits to historical and local places of interest and

friendly sports fixtures with Indian trainees. In an event marking culmination of the training, Rear Admiral Upal Kundu, Chief of Staff, Southern Naval Command, interacted with the trainees and Directing Staff of RSNF. During interaction, the trainees shared their sea experiences and the directing staff expressed their appreciation on the high quality training imparted. During the valedictory function onboard INS Tir course completion certificates and alumni badges were presented to the trainees. A course memoir highlighting the journey of the trainees was also unveiled during the occasion. The conduct of two successive training courses (2023 and this year) with enhanced participation bears testimony to growing maritime partnership between the two Navies.



Vinay Kwatra named India's Ambassador to US

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra was on Friday appointed as India's ambassador to the United States. 'He is expected to take up the assignment shortly,' the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said. The post of India's envoy to the US has been lying vacant since Taranjit Sandhu retired in January. Kwatra served as the foreign secretary from May 1, 2022, to July 14, 2024. He joined the Indian Foreign Service (IFS) in 1988 and served in India's Permanent Mission in Geneva in the initial years of his service. Between 1993 and 2003, he served as a desk officer at the external affairs ministry's headquarters in Delhi dealing with the United Nations, and subsequently in the diplomatic missions in South Africa and Uzbekistan. From 2003 to 2006, he served as the counsellor and later as the deputy chief of mission at the Indian embassy in Beijing.

SC agrees to hear CBI plea against Koli's acquittal

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday agreed to hear separate pleas filed by the CBI and the Uttar Pradesh Government challenging the Allahabad High Court's verdict acquitting Surendra Koli in the sensational 2006 Nithari serial killings case. A bench of Justices B R Gavai, K V Viswanathan, and N Kotiswar Singh issued a notice and sought a response from Koli on the petitions and tagged them with similar pleas which are already pending before the apex court. 'Notice,' the bench said. The top court on July 8 sought a response from Koli on separate pleas filed by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) against the high court's October 16 last year verdict. The apex court in May agreed to hear a plea filed by the father of one of the victims challenging the high court's order acquitting Koli in the case. In this case, Moninder Singh Pandher was acquitted by the sessions court while Koli was awarded the death penalty on September 28, 2010. The high court had acquitted domestic help Koli and his employer Pandher in the Nithari serial killings case in which they were facing a death sentence, holding that the prosecution failed to prove the guilt 'beyond reasonable doubt' and that the investigation was 'botched up'. Reversing the death sentence given to Koli in 12 cases and Pandher in two cases, the high



court had noted that the prosecution had failed to prove the guilt of both the accused 'beyond reasonable doubt, on the settled parameters of a case based on circumstantial evidence' and the probe was 'nothing short of a betrayal of public trust by responsible agencies'. Pandher and Koli were charged with rape and murder and sentenced to death in the killings that horrified the nation with their details of sexual assault, brutal murder and hints of possible cannibalism. The high court had allowed multiple appeals filed by Koli and Pandher, who had challenged the death sentence awarded by a Central Bureau of Investigation court in Ghaziabad. Further digging and searches of drains in the area around the house led to more skeletal remains. Most of these remains were those of poor children and young women who had gone missing from the area. Within 10 days, the CBI had taken over the case and its search resulted in the recovery of more remains.

Budget unlikely to address people's concerns: Congress

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Days ahead of the presentation of the Union Budget, the Congress on Friday alleged that it would be aimed at making a few crony capitalists richer rather than addressing concerns such as unemployment, rising inequalities and 'drying up' of FDI. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is scheduled to present the Union Budget on July 23. Congress spokesperson Supriya Shrinete also alleged that this government has nothing to do with common people, farmers, youth, women and middle class,

and claimed that the upcoming budget, like in the past years of the Modi government, is being prepared to build more monopolies in various sectors. In the wake of the recent train accidents, she also asked what is being done to make the railways safer and will Finance Minister Sitharaman allocate more funds which would in turn be used to protect people. 'On July 23, 2024, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present her seventh budget. Before preparing this budget, she met some industrialists, bankers and farmer organisations and discussed issues with



them but has she met the families who are unable to eat three meals a day? Has she met the women who are struggling with inflation? Has she met the farmers who are struggling to

get fair prices for their crops? Has she met the youth who are suffering due to paper leaks? Has she met the real India? Shrinete asked. 'It is clear that she has not met them. This budget is being prepared to make a few crony capitalists richer,' she said at a press conference at the AICC headquarters here. Displaying slides with economic data at the presser, Shrinete said the foreign direct investment (FDI) is drying up and India has traded deficit with nine of the top 10 trading partners. She claimed that monopolies

have been increasing in sectors such as cement, telecom, aviation and tyres, and said this budget will see more monopolies being built. Citing a farmer's suicide, Shrinete said Finance Minister Sitharaman or Prime Minister Narendra Modi do not know anything about them, hence the budget has not been made for them. Shrinete said the crumbling railings in Gujarat with job-seekers at a hotel and the lakhs of people flocking to Mumbai for aviation jobs exposes the false arguments of this government on unemployment.

DMK moves court against three new criminal laws introduced by Centre

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The DMK on Friday approached the Madras High Court to declare as ultra vires and unconstitutional, the three new criminal laws brought in by the Union government. The three laws-- Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam have come into effect from July 1. They have replaced the Indian Penal Code, The Code of Criminal Procedure Code and the Indian Evidence Act. A division bench comprising Justices S S Sundar and N Senthil Kumar before whom the petition filed by DMK Organising Secretary R S Bharathi came up for hearing, ordered notice to the Centre, returnable by four weeks.



According to the petitioner, the government introduced the three Bills and got them passed by the Parliament without any meaningful discussion. In the absence of any substantive changes, mere shuffling of sections was

unnecessary and will cause a lot of inconvenience and confusion regarding the interpretation of the provisions, he added. He said shuffling of sections will make it very difficult for the judges, advocates, the law enforcing authorities and the

general public to correlate the new provisions with the old ones to search for precedents. It seems the exercise was being done only to "Sanskritise" the titles of the Acts without any devotion to revisit the laws, he contended. Bharathi further said the government cannot claim that it was an act of Parliament. The enactments were made by only one limb of the Parliament viz., the ruling party and its allies, keeping away the opposition parties, he claimed. He said the naming of the Acts in Hindi/Sanskrit was violative of Article 348 of the Constitution, which mandates, inter alia, that the authoritative texts of all Bills to be introduced in either house of Parliament shall be in English.

Three Bills introduced in Arunachal House on first day of Budget Session

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Three bills were introduced on the first day of the Arunachal Pradesh assembly's budget session on Friday, including one that seeks to curb irregularities and use of unfair means in recruitment examinations. Chief Minister Pema Khandu introduced the Arunachal Pradesh Public Examination (Measures to Prevent Unfair Means in Recruitment) Bill, while the Arunachal Pradesh Amending Bill and the Balipara/Tirap/Sadiya Frontier Tract Jhum Land Regulation (Amendment) Bill were tabled by two other state ministers. The bill on recruitment tests is aimed at providing effective measures to prevent and curb offences of question paper leaks and use of unfair means in examinations for the purpose of recruitment to any



post under the state government, officials said. A provision dealing with designation of a special court for speedy trial of such offences has also been provided in the bill, they said. According to the bill, any person resorting to such unfair means would be punished with imprisonment for a term not less than three years, which may be extended to five years, and with a fine up to Rs 1 crore. Law, Legislative and Justice Minister Kento Jini introduced the Arunachal

Pradesh Amending Bill, which will substitute the words Indian Penal Code 1860, Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act 1872, by the words Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam 2023, respectively, in several state acts. The Balipara/Tirap/Sadiya Frontier Tract Jhum Land Regulation Bill in its amended form was tabled by Land Management Minister Balo Raja. The bill deals with land compensation procedures.

Assam will become Muslim-majority State by 2041, claims Himanta



PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday claimed that the Muslim population in his state is growing around 30 per cent every 10 years, and they will become the majority by 2041. Addressing a press conference here, he said Muslims have now become 40 per cent of Assam's population as per "statistical sampling". "By 2041, Assam will become a Muslim-majority state. It's a reality and nobody can stop it," he asserted. The chief minister said the population of the Hindu community is rising by around 16 per cent every 10 years. Sarma said his government has taken steps to reduce population growth among the Muslim community. "Congress has the most important role in arresting the population growth of Muslims... If Rahul Gandhi becomes the brand ambassador of population control, it will be contained as the community only listens to him," he said.

Kerala can expect heavy rain in next few days: IMD

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The India Meteorological Department on Friday said Kerala will receive heavy to very heavy rains in the next few days due to weather conditions and wind patterns prevailing over peninsular India. The IMD said that a low pressure trough located over north Kerala coast to south Gujarat coast, another well marked low pressure

area over northwest Bay of Bengal and the strong westerly/northwesterly winds along the Kerala coast would result in moderate to heavy rains in the southern state for the next five days. The IMD also issued an orange alert in the four northern Kerala districts of Kozhikode, Wayanad, Kannur and Kasaragod for the day and a yellow alert in five other districts.

An orange alert means very heavy rain (6 cm to 20 cm). A yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 to 11 cm. Heavy rains in the state, especially in the northern Malabar region, caused flooding, uprooting of trees, minor landslides and traffic snarls. In Wayanad, due to



flooding of the Muthanga National Highway (NH 766), 25 vehicles with around 400 passengers were stranded there for several hours since midnight, the district administration said. The people were rescued to safety following an over

three-hour long operation by the fire department with the support of the police, forest officials and locals of the area, it said. Besides that, till Friday morning, more than 2,300 people have been relocated to the 42 camps set up in the hill district in view of the incessant rains, which have led to a dangerous rise in water levels of rivers, partially damaged around 29 homes and destroyed crops on 125 hectares of land.

Odisha observes Rasagola Dibasa coinciding with end of Rath Yatra

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Coinciding with Lord Jagannath's 'Niladri Bij' (temple entry rituals) following the annual Rath Yatra, Odisha observed 'Rasagola Dibasa' on Friday to underscore the significance of the sweet dish for its people. The day is observed as 'Rasagola Dibasa' because, according to tradition, Lord Jagannath offers 'Rasagola' to His consort Maa Laxmi on this day to appease her anger. According to mythology, Goddess Laxmi was angry with the Lord for not taking her in the Rath Yatra, said Bhaskar Mishra, a researcher in Shree Jagannath Culture. Since July 30, 2015, people of Odisha have celebrated 'Niladri Bij' ritual as 'Rasagola Dibasa'. On this occasion, the Trinity is offered 'Rasagola' as 'bhog'



before being taken into the sanctum sanctorum in the ceremonial 'Pahandi' procession. Researcher Asit Mohanty explained that 'Rasagola' originated from Shri Jagannath Temple in Puri as 'Khira Mohana', which later evolved into 'Pahala Rasagola'. It has been traditionally offered as 'bhog' to goddess Lakshmi at the

temple. According to local legend, Goddess Laxmi locks Jai Vijay Dwar, one of the temple gates, and prevents the Lord's entry into the sanctum sanctorum of the temple. Historically, references to 'Rasagola' can be traced to the late 15th century in Odia Ramayana written by Balaram Das, also known as Dandi Ramayana or Jagamohana Ramayana. Over the years, 'Rasagola Dibasa' has evolved into a widely celebrated event, from the villages to cities, with people exchanging the sweet dish to mark the occasion. Sweet shops also participate by preparing 'Rasagola' in different flavours, sometimes hosting competitions to showcase their culinary skills. In 2019, Odisha received the Geographical Indication (GI) tag for its version of 'Rasagola'.

Student unions take out rally in Kolkata in solidarity with Bangla protests

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Several Left-aligned student unions and human rights organisations staged a protest march near the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission in Kolkata on Friday to express solidarity with the ongoing stir in the neighbouring country against quota system. The activists were seen holding placards against alleged action by security forces on student protesters during street demonstrations in Bangladesh in the last few days, and raising slogans in solidarity with the agitators across the border. Hundreds of activists, including women, assembled near the Academy of Fine Arts and tried to move towards the Bangladesh Deputy High Commission before being stopped by the police near the Exide crossing, where the police had put up barricades. A scuffle broke out between the police and the protesters,

following which several agitators were arrested and taken to Kolkata Police Headquarters of Lalbazar. "The demonstrators included not only students but also members of human rights organisations. Several protesters were arrested and taken to Lalbazar police headquarters," a police officer said. Police and security officials in Bangladesh fired bullets and tear gas shells at protesters and banned all gatherings in capital Dhaka on Friday, as internet and mobile services were cut off after days of deadly clashes over the allocation of government jobs. The protests, which began weeks ago but escalated sharply on Monday, present the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since she won a fourth consecutive term in a January election that was boycotted by the main opposition parties.

Ruckus in Karnataka Assembly over Valmiki Corporation scam

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka Legislative Assembly witnessed ruckus on Friday over the alleged financial irregularities in a state-run corporation, with opposition BJP and JD(S) staging a protest against the government, accusing it of "loot" and demanding the resignation of Chief Minister Siddaramaiah. Amid the opposition's continued sloganeering from the well of the House, Siddaramaiah sought to defend himself and his government, while accepting that the scam had indeed taken place. He assured that strict action would be taken against the culprits involved. He tried to turn the tables on the opposition listing out the alleged scams during their tenure, especially the BJP, calling the opposition party "Pitamaha of corruption". He asserted that his government will get them probed and

ensure that they "pay for it", by sending "those who committed wrong to jail." Questioning the demand for his resignation, he asked if Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman would take responsibility for irregularities that have happened in a nationalised bank, and quit as banks come under the Finance Ministry. "Allegations are being made to bring a bad name to the Chief Minister and the government. It is not possible. They are alleging that ST community funds have been looted -- it is not Rs 187.33 crore (scam), that much amount has come to the Union Bank of India, in that Rs 89.63 crore has gone to Andhra (Pradesh) and Telangana, efforts are on to recover them," Siddaramaiah said. He said: "Whoever is the culprit, whoever the thieves are, whoever the looters are, we will ensure that they are

punished. There is no question of protecting anyone. There is no compromise with corruption. Our fight against corruption will continue." "To hide their mistakes, the theft, loot and corruption that happened during their tenure, the opposition is making allegations against my government," he said. Opposition BJP and JD(S) members shouted slogans accusing the Chief Minister and his government of "theft", "loot", "injustice to SC/ST", and demanding Siddaramaiah's resignation. Claiming that the opposition is unable to digest that he will reveal the facts behind the allegations and seven crore people of the state will know the truth, the Chief Minister said: "So they are making noise coming into the well of the House. People have decided you are thieves and have made you sit there (in the opposition)."

Lokayukta raids 13 officials including Mangaluru City Municipal Commissioner

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Mangaluru City Municipal Commissioner C L Anand was among the 13 government officials raided by Lokayukta sleuths in Karnataka on Friday in connection with disproportionate assets cases, a Lokayukta official said. Anand is a senior grade Karnataka Administrative Services (KAS) officer who was posted as Mangaluru City Corporation Commissioner in June, 2023. The government had transferred him on July 4 after which he appealed to the state government against it. On July 9, his transfer was cancelled. Apart from Anand, premises of Hebbagodi City Municipal Council Commissioner in Bengaluru Rural district and KAS officer K Narasimha Murthy were raided by Lokayukta sleuths. The Additional Director in the Industries and Commerce Department C T Muddu Kumar, who is on deputation as the Chief Operating Officer in the Invest Karnataka Forum, too was the target of Lokayukta sleuths. Yagdir Zilla Panchayat Project Director Balwant Rathod, Senior Veterinary Officer in



Bengaluru Rural district R Siddappa, Commercial Taxes Joint Commissioner Ramesh Kumar, Legal Metrology Deputy Controller Athhar Ali, Antargange Gram Panchayat president Nagesh B Gowda in Bhadravati Taluk of Shivamogga district, Horticulture Department Deputy Director Prakash and Mandya Labour Officer Chetan Kumar were among those raided on Friday. According to the official, the raids were carried out in Bengaluru, Tumakuru, Shimoga, Yadgiri and Kalaburgi. "Officials commenced the raid early this morning at 54 locations involving over 100 sleuths," the official said.

Ensure no structure around Vishalgad Fort is demolished during monsoon: HC

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

Taking serious cognisance of violence that broke out in vicinity of Kolhapur's Vishalgad fort on July 14 after the local authorities pulled down some "60 to 70" structures belonging to the minority community members amid the rains, the Bombay High Court on Friday directed the Maharashtra government to put a complete halt to the demolitions till the end of the monsoon. Less than a week after violence erupted at Vishalgad fort area where the local administration had undertaken demolitions, a HC division bench of Justices B P Colabawalla and Firdosh Pooniwalla pulled up the local police for their complacency in maintaining law and order and also demanded to know from the local authorities as to why they had chosen to demolish the structures during the rainy season. The HC bench made it clear to the state government that it would not "hesitate to send the officials behind the bars, if they undertook further demolitions till the end of monsoon. It also directed senior inspector in-charge of the Shahuwadi Police Station to remain present in the court



at the next hearing of the case to be held on July 29 and inform it what action it had taken against the miscreants seen in the video of the July 14 violence. "We record your statement that you will not demolish till September (rainy season), and if the same is breached, we will not hesitate to send the officer behind bars. We make it clear that if we find any structure demolished from today, commercial or household, we will come down heavily on your officers/ authorities," the bench told Government Pleader Priyabhushan P Kakade present in the court. The government lawyer told the court he had received instructions assuring the HC bench no residential premises of any person in the Vishalgad Fort area shall be demolished,

whether they are petitioners or otherwise, during the rainy season. Reprimanding the police for its failure to check violence, the judges asked: "Who is in charge of the law and order situation in Vishalgad? Are they not your (state police) officers, right? So who are these men? Aren't you not responsible for maintaining law and order in the state? We want to know if any FIR has been lodged in this case?" The HC bench was hearing a petition filed by some residents of Shahuwadi taluka, urging the court to form a special investigation team (SIT) headed by a former high court judge to probe into the alleged violence by right-wing workers. It may be recalled that on July 14, some 60-70 structures belonging to Muslim community were pulled down in the Vishalgad Fort vicinity and also in the nearby Gajapur Village. Following the violence which saw mobs demolish hurl stones at police personnel and damage

properties during an anti-encroachment drive at the Vishalgad fort on July 14 the police have arrested 21 persons and registered against 500-odd people. In a related incident, the Mumbai Congress has termed the Vishalgad violence as 'politically motivated' incident and it has triggered trouble ahead of the State Assembly elections. Talking to media persons, Congress' Mumbai Working President Sufiyan M. Haider said that the police must keep in mind the right-wing political angles in the incident. The Congress accused the right wing parties of seeking to polarise the voters in the run-up to the state elections due in October. "Those who indulged in the violence cannot be followers of the great Chhatapati Shivaji Maharaj. The police and government must find out who exactly were these people and book the real culprits responsible for the riots," Haider said. In his letter to State Director General of Police Rashmi Shukla, Haider said that it was unfortunate how the violence was allowed to continue right in the presence of the Kolhapur Superintendent of Police Mahendra Pandit and sought his suspension for the purported lapses.

Drunk ASI harasses woman for driving without helmet

PTI ■ JODHPUR

An assistant sub-inspector of Rajasthan Police has been suspended for allegedly harassing a woman here in an intoxicated state and threatening her after he caught her driving without a helmet, police said on Friday. The suspension comes after a video of the officer harassing the woman, who runs a beauty parlour near Bhaskar Circle here, surfaced on social media. The victim told PTI that no action was taken despite her complaint right after the incident, which took place on Monday night when Nikita Jain was driving home after work on a two-wheeler. Jain said in her complaint that ASI Amit Meena stopped her near Bhaskar Circle for driving without a helmet. The officer allegedly demanded Rs 5,000 as penalty. When she refused and tried to leave, he held her by her hand and began threatening her. Meanwhile, some people gathered there and Jain escaped the spot. However, moments later she found herself being followed by Meena on his motorcycle, the complaint said.

The ASI hit the woman's two-wheeler a few times, making her lose balance and fall down, it added. Jain said she then immediately informed her family members who rushed to the spot and informed the police. However, a police team reached the spot and took the officer away with them without taking any action. The victim told PTI that she filed a written complaint against Meena at the local police station but no FIR was lodged. She kept visiting the police station for two days but no action was taken in the matter. It was only when senior officials learnt about the matter, the police took action against the ASI, the complainant said. DCP (Headquarters) Sharad Choudhary issued an order on Wednesday, sending ASI Meena to police lines with immediate effect, according to police. The officer was later suspended on Thursday and a departmental inquiry has been initiated against him, they added. SHO (Ratanada) Pradeep Danga said a case was registered against ASI Meena under various sections on



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Taking on terrorism

PM Modi's decision for full deployment in Jammu is a welcome step aiming to ensure the safety of the citizens

In a decisive move to bolster security and address rising concerns over terrorism, Prime Minister Modi has ordered a comprehensive deployment of security forces in the Jammu region. This strategic decision underscores the government's commitment to ensuring peace and stability in one of India's most sensitive areas. Jammu has been a focal point in the nation's ongoing fight against terrorism. The region has experienced a series of violent incidents in recent years, prompting heightened vigilance and response from the security forces. The Prime Minister's recent directive comes amid increasing reports of terrorist activities and attempts to disrupt the region's stability. Recently four army personnel were killed in Doda calling for immediate measures to bring such incidents to a halt. The full deployment will see an increase in the number of troops and resources allocated to the Jammu region. The operation will involve not only the deployment of additional army personnel but also enhanced coordination between various security agencies. This includes intelligence agencies, paramilitary forces, and local law enforcement.

The deployment strategy will concentrate on several key areas. Firstly, there will be an emphasis on enhanced surveillance and intelligence gathering to preempt and disrupt terrorist activities before they occur. Secondly, security forces will establish increased patrolling in vulnerable areas to deter potential threats and provide reassurance to the local population. Lastly, efforts will be made to engage with local communities to gather vital information and build trust, which is essential for effective counter-terrorism operations. No wonder, Prime Minister Modi's decision has got support from various quarters, including political leaders, security experts, and the general public. The government has emphasised that this move is part of a broader strategy to address the challenges posed by terrorism and ensure the safety of the citizens in Jammu. In a statement, PM Modi highlighted the importance of maintaining vigilance and resilience in the face of such threats. He reassured the public that the government's primary objective is to safeguard lives and maintain peace in the region. The full deployment in Jammu represents a significant step in India's ongoing efforts to combat terrorism. It is expected that the increased presence of security forces and improved coordination will help in curbing terrorist activities and restoring normalcy in the region. As the situation evolves, the Government's commitment to a robust security framework will be closely watched. The deployment's effectiveness will depend on the successful execution of the strategies outlined and the ability to adapt to emerging challenges. But it would be a clear signal to the terrorists that India will not tolerate any mischief in its territory.

PICTALK



Devotees perform rituals at Amman temple during the Tamil month of 'Aadi', in Chennai

Modi 3.0: Banking sector optimistic about reforms



VIVEK SHUKLA

Over the years, Indian banks have grappled with scams, loan defaults, and rising NPAs. Recent Govt initiatives have led to significant recovery and a notable reduction in NPAs

The re-election of the Narendra Modi government at the centre has raised hopes for concrete steps to be taken towards making the banking sector more transparent and efficient. In recent years, Indian banks have faced more ups and downs than perhaps any other country's banks. Indian banks have been plagued by numerous scams, loan defaults, frauds, increasing non-performing assets (NPAs), and wrong policies of loan waivers, leading to their sinking or facing huge losses. While previous central governments took some steps to address these issues, their half-hearted implementation did not yield the desired results. Fortunately, the Modi government took swift action to address the irregularities in the banking sector, leading to a gradual improvement in the banks' condition.

Many banks are not only recovering from losses and moving towards profits but also bringing scams under control. Many fraudsters' assets have been seized to recover loans, banks have been recapitalized, and the burden of NPAs has been significantly reduced. Isn't it a positive situation that NPAs, which were 12.47% between 2013 and 2017, have gradually reduced to 3.2% in September 2023, even though the government's recapitalization of banks played a crucial role in this reduction? The question now is whether this current state of improvement in banks will continue in the future or will the adage "The fool returns home" prove true. Indian banks are witnesses to the fact that they have been sinking or suffering huge losses both before and after independence.

This turbulent state compels us to ponder that until the reform process continues for a long time, a permanent solution to the problem is not possible. A recent publication by senior writer Shri Pal Jain, "Bharatiya Bankon Ka Badalta Chehra" (The Changing Face of Indian Banks), analyzes these various aspects in detail. It provides a detailed account of scams, mega-fraudsters, fraudulent tricks, cybercrime in banking, the rise and fall of Yes Bank,



the web of NPAs, etc., both before and after independence. Additionally, it critically discusses the echoes of bank privatization, the economics of agricultural loan waivers, demonetization, the Jan Dhan scheme, the autonomy of the Reserve Bank, the increasing popularity and risks of digital banking, etc.

After independence, both private and public banks existed in the country, but numerous scams and failures occurred within them. Nonetheless, public banks remained a key driver of economic growth and business expansion. Private banks generally did not even open accounts for ordinary people. The nationalization of banks in July 1969 led to increased access to banks for the general public. During this period, many banks merged, which led to some positive outcomes. However, gradually, corruption, bribery, and political interference in public banks led to the issuance of huge loans to genuine and fake companies, many of which went unrecoverable or partially recoverable. This resulted in massive losses for both public and private banks.

In the early 1990s, liberalization policies were adopted, and shortly after, private banks like HDFC, ICICI Bank, Yes Bank, etc., became popular due to their use of modern technology (credit operations, debit



THE MODI GOVERNMENT HAS TURNED PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES INTO OPPORTUNITIES, IN WHICH THE KEY CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESERVE BANK'S SUPERVISION CAN BE SEEN

operations, fast clearing of checks, insurance, mutual fund opening, etc.). The new products, schemes, and modern technology of private banks posed stiff competition to public banks. This forced public and other private banks to adopt new products, schemes, and modern technology. As a result, some improvement in the condition of public and private banks was recorded, but the wave of liberalization also saw a continuation of scams, bribery, corruption, and political interference.

Events like the Harshad Mehta, and Ketan Parekh scams, and the sinking of banks like Global Trust occurred during this period. In the first term of the Modi government, a major crisis arose due to scams in PNB Bank, PMC Bank and other cooperative banks, Yes Bank, and the flight of mega-fraudsters to foreign countries. The burden of NPAs of banks reached record levels. In this context, the commendable initiative of merging smaller banks with large public banks to reduce their number was taken. Meanwhile, India's trade continued to grow rapidly, maintaining liquidity in banks. The Reserve Bank's supervision was made more robust. Demonetization, the Jan Dhan scheme, housing schemes, and significant boosts were given to Atmanirbhar Bharat, manufacturing, and other sectors. In the meantime, the COVID-

19 pandemic struck, giving a severe blow to the economy. However, within a few months, the Modi government made concrete efforts to regain control over the economic front. During the pandemic, transactions via digital banking increased significantly, breaking all records worldwide. UPI is making its mark not only in India but also abroad. Despite this, the health of banks cannot be considered worry-free. Sporadic bank scams are still occurring, digital banking frauds are on the rise, and the network of cyber criminals in banking is constantly expanding. This is causing serious damage not only to banks but also to account holders. A foolproof control over this issue has not yet been established. Shri Pal Jain correctly stated in the conclusion of his book, "Currently, most banks are moving towards profits. The Modi government has turned problems and challenges into opportunities, in which the key contribution of the Reserve Bank's supervision can be seen." However, until corruption, lending based on fake documents, and infiltration of cybercriminals into banking are stopped, the dream of bank strengthening and fool-proof security will remain half-fulfilled.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author of two books; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

YET ANOTHER TRAIN ACCIDENT

Madam — It is shocking and heart-breaking to learn about yet another "heart-attack" train accident in India. This latest incident occurred in Uttar Pradesh on 18 July 2024. This time, the Dibrugarh Express, traveling from Chandigarh to Dibrugarh, derailed near Jhilaahi Railway Station in Gonda, Uttar Pradesh. The derailment of 10 to 12 coaches underscores the severity of this tragic accident. The immediate assistance provided by villagers is a noble and commendable act.

It is high time for the relevant Indian railway experts to convene and brainstorm foolproof solutions to prevent accidents such as train collisions, derailments, fires, rail-track crossings, signaling errors, and trains running late, which jeopardize the safety of passengers and other trains. These measures are crucial to saving lives, properties, and assets. We suggest implementing an additional charge of Re.1 on every train ticket as accident insurance. This small fee could significantly aid commuters from poor and middle-class families in the event of an accident, providing financial support if the family's breadwinner is lost. Additionally, it would contribute to government revenue.

We hope the relevant administrators and the army will promptly provide the necessary assistance, including medical care, financial support, hospitality, and alternative arrangements for the stay and expenses of those accompanying the hospitalized victims.

PV Srinivas Sreelekhaj | Secundrabad

HIGHER EDUCATION REVAMP

Madam — The government has planned to double higher education intake by 2030. This initiative, however, might do more harm than good given that the Indian organized sector currently lacks the capacity to absorb such a large influx of job seekers. While a less educated person can adapt more easily to employ-

Controversial bill withdrawn



The criticism from business and industry forced the Karnataka government to put the contentious reservation bill for

Kannadigas in private firms on hold. The Karnataka State Employment of Local Candidates in the Industries, Factories, and Other Establishments Bill, 2024, was cleared by the state cabinet. According to the bill, "any industry, factory, or other establishment shall appoint 50 percent of local candidates in management categories and 70 percent in non-management categories."

"It's baffling that Karnataka, India's tech hub and one of the best-performing states in terms of ease of doing business, has introduced this regressive bill. NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) has cautioned the Congress government that the restrictions could force companies to relocate as local skilled talent becomes scarce. Karnataka would be well advised to quietly abandon the bill.

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

ment in the unorganized sector, a graduate often develops a distaste for it, potentially becoming a highly frustrated and alienated individual. A possible solution would be to limit college enrollment and instead open thousands of new polytechnics, where humanities courses are mandatory in every semester.

Without such measures, the frustrations of unemployed youths may lead to severe consequences for both individuals and the nation. To avoid widespread frustration and potential social issues, the government should limit college enrollment and establish more polytechnics with mandatory humanities courses.

Devesh Vijay | Delhi

CPR IS A LIFE SAVER

Madam — CPR – or Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation – is an emergency lifesaving procedure performed when the heart stops beating. Immediate CPR can double or triple chances of survival after cardiac arrest.

No one dies of cardiac arrest if attended in a timely manner.

A video of the incident was shared on social media platform X and quickly went viral, garnering millions of views and countless praises from netizens. The doctor's actions were hailed as a testament to the importance of quick response and lifesaving skills in emergency situations. According to reports, the man collapsed on the floor, prompting the doctor to spring into action and begin administering CPR.

With passersby watching in amazement, the doctor asked others to call for emergency services at the airport. Her efforts paid off, as the man began to show signs of revival. The timely medical assistance is a dear life. This was how Ewan Chatfield, who almost felt dead, was resuscitated after being hit by a cricket ball in New Zealand a long time ago. Everyone must be trained to give CPR.

Jayanthi Subramaniam | Mumbai

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Finding focus in an age of information overload



ASHA IYER KUMAR

The relentless influx of information highlights the futility of hoarding content and the ill effect it has on our intellect and well-being

In my weekly routine of phone and computer upkeep, there is a ritual that I detest – clearing my inbox. My mailbox is inundated with dozens of notifications and newsletters from sites that I have subscribed to. I don't understand the logic of getting so many letters delivered to me when I don't find time to open more than half of them.

Yet I desist from unsubscribing to them because all the emails carry loads of matter and meaning, gallons of insight and information, and heaps of dispensable literature. In my over-enthusiasm to stay up to speed with the times, I invite an excess of knowledge which eventually gets junked because my mind and memory are not commensurate with the incoming barrage.

With barrels of scattered information already laid to waste in the brain and fresh bulks languishing in the inbox, I have begun to see the futility of hoarding them. The writer and columnist in me is forever greedy to add fresh knowl-



edge in the hope of widening my horizons, but I am now beginning to burst at the seams with an overload. There is a lot out there to absorb into the intellect, and the attic is smarting, unable to withstand the pressure. All that finds a parking space on the internet is meant to grab attention and impact the reader, and how easily we have fallen prey to the enticements of the information age! We are now in an endless cycle of grazing and chewing anything that we see on our screens. Our decision-making is based on external influences rather than on our convictions. Midway through research, we deviate and branch out to something unrelated, and then

we are all over the place, ferreting about, lost and unsure of what we had wanted in the first place. And oh, how does one deal with the digital amnesia that follows all the binge-reading of fluffy, oversimplified material created with the only intention of grabbing eyeballs and garnering views?

We don't read anymore; we skim through shorts. American journalist and writer Nicholas Carr, in his best-seller, The Shallows: What the Internet Is Doing to Our Brains highlights how the internet is changing us superficially. He writes that browsing through huge quantities of information often results in shallow processing, preventing us from deeply

understanding the subject. It's time to know what I need and what I don't as a professional writer, compassionate human and rational thinker. I need to bring focus and mindfulness into my reading and information-gathering exercises so that I don't bombard my senses with junk.

Why do I need all the facts, figures and findings that exist on the information highway? I must learn to curate and consume stories that strictly contribute to my growth. Trying to catch up with every incident, comment and development around the world in the fear and guilt of missing out is overkill.

Not all that I find there is nourishment to my mind and soul; neither will they enhance my life experience on the whole. If only I can be discreet and prudent enough henceforth, I will perhaps be saved before I become a rubbish dump of useless narratives.

(The author is a columnist and author based in Dubai; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN TRANSCENDING DAILY TRIFLES

We can rise above minor disruptions in life by adopting spiritual path



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

Ravindra Nath Tagore prays for strength to raise his mind high above daily trifles. Why does such an exalted personality do so? Because daily trifles do capture our minds. Aren't we, souls, small, ignorant, helpless and unsafe in absolute terms? The word trifle is defined as something of little value. Trifles are matters that are not very important and those that do not merit a lot of consideration. Still, we are defeated repeatedly by them. Why? Because, as stated earlier, we are small, very small in the overall context, whatever we may feel we are. Sure enough, daily trifles bring us down. We go in cyclic thinking. Our minds drag us to small matters.

What is the solution? The first step is to accept that this happens and is very common. What we consider important may appear insignificant to others, but they are very important to us. Then, as our role model did we must pray for help. It makes a lot of sense for us as small entities. And help is available. We are not helpless in absolute terms; God is there to help. But we have to take His shelter; God will not force Himself on us. Why? Because that will be a violation of our free will. Then, we must avoid cyclic thinking. Can thinking of the same thing repeatedly provide solutions? Solutions come from other sources, mostly from God, if we step outside ourselves. We must not lose to our minds, which unfortunately, are our worst enemies, as warned by Lord Krishna in the Bhagavad-Geeta, "One should uplift self by self; shouldn't degrade self, because otherwise self will be enemy of self." (6.5) Control over the mind requires practice and detachment. (6.35) These are general instructions.

Let me take up some of the most common daily trifles. Someone is not well in the family. Surely, one would be disturbed. But one must go beyond it. There will be duties like getting medical help. What more can be done? Many of us do pray, but the prayer should be more for guidance than just cure. Why? Because major sicknesses are the results of our impious/sinful past acts. God will not act interfere in it, but God can guide us to deal with it effectively. God does also help if one is a devotee of God. Are we? There is nothing to despair, guidance is a great help. The next matter which keeps the mind occupied is financial trouble. Mostly,



it is a paucity of funds, which hurts. The 'Karamphala Principle' is very clear. We get parents, birthplace, minds, looks, intelligence, wealth and lifespan according to what we deserve based on our 'Karmas' in our past lives. Can anyone explain otherwise about someone getting richer by billions in a short period? If it was hard labour, this was impossible. So we have to accept this reality and try to manage with what we have. Yes, wastage in showing off, etc. can be surely avoided. The third trifle, if we can call it as such, is being in trouble.

We should swear to ourselves not to act foolishly from now onwards. Troubles will still come but they will be less. Here also God can help, but, as pointed out earlier, we must take shelter from God. Then, not only any trouble but God promises to get us out of all troubles. (18.58) But again there is a rider. We must not continue to act in wrong or bad ways. The fourth problem that gets almost all of us is getting attached to results. This is illogical because what can we control? Is God not the sole controller? We have been advised by Lord Krishna to strictly stick to our role, i.e. to act dutifully. (2.47) Because what we will end up with is not just based on what we have done recently, but earlier like last life. I have given just four examples, but the underlying philosophy is to act properly from now onwards and remain in shelter in God. Then, daily trifles will not bother me so much. We will be able to get over them soon. What do I do? I seek guidance and help from God for anything that bothers me. Surely, God has taken charge of my life. Yes, God is micromanaging it.

(The writer is a spiritual guide; views are personal)

The critical role of family planning in women's health



SUDHA SHARMA

The awareness about contraception can significantly enhance women's health and contribute to better population management in India

World Population Awareness Fortnight, starting from July 11th, brings attention to the fact that India is the most populous country in the world, having surpassed China last year. According to UN projections, India's population is expected to peak at 1.7 billion in 2064, beyond which it will decline. Out of 4 births each second across the world, one birth occurs in India. It is important to understand what can be done to balance the resources with the requirements of the population in the country. With only 2.4% of the world's land, India supports 17.76% of the world's population.

Nowhere is a discussion on contraception and mother and child health services more relevant and meaningful than here. Demographers use a parameter called Total Fertility Rate (TFR), which is the number of children a woman has in her lifetime. The TFR, which should be 2.1 for the population to remain steady, has already dipped below 2 in 2022. But keeping it within that range will require constant efforts to increase the awareness of the youth and adolescents towards these matters. Moreover, family planning offers many more benefits beyond the prevention of pregnancies. Uttar Pradesh ranks first among the states in India with a population of 257 million and a TFR of 2.18 (2015-16). It is relevant to mention here that our country was the first to launch an official family planning program way back in 1952. In the decades that have followed, the options have increased and so have the availability and accessibility.

With the basket of contraceptive choices available at all government hospitals free of cost, social marketing of contraceptives, and home delivery of contraceptives by ASHAs in rural areas, accessibility to these methods has improved. This has translated to an increase in the Couple Protection Rate by 13%, which is 67% at present, and a decrease in unmet need for family planning of 3.5%, which now stands at 9.4%. The country has made substantial progress in the delivery of family planning services across the country. The reach of family planning services has extended from target couples to eligible couples to all women and adolescent girls and should extend to all men of reproductive age.

Their share in decision-making and supporting women in using these methods makes it imperative for them to have this information as well. They can make an important contribution. If the present discussion gives a message that each couple should be forced to use a contraceptive to limit family size to stabilize the population, that is not true. Family planning methods should help to fulfil the unmet needs of 9.5% of couples and help many others plan pregnancy at a proper time. According to the Guttmacher Institute, India Country Profile, 2022, between 2015-and 2019, there were a total of 485 lakh pregnancies annually in India, of which 44% were unintended. Of these, 2/3rd of these unplanned pregnancies ended in abortion. It is these couples who are in dire need of contraception.

These abortions could have been avoided had they received counselling and proper contraceptive measures at the right time. Contraception is not just a method of preventing unwanted pregnancies. It is a means to provide freedom to couples to exercise their reproductive rights. The freedom to choose when to plan a pregnan-



WITH THE BASKET OF CONTRACEPTIVE CHOICES AVAILABLE AT ALL GOVERNMENT HOSPITALS FREE OF COST, SOCIAL MARKETING OF CONTRACEPTIVE, AND HOME DELIVERY OF CONTRACEPTIVES BY ASHAs IN RURAL AREAS, ACCESSIBILITY TO THESE METHODS HAS IMPROVED

cy. It essentially allows responsible voluntary decision-making based on correct knowledge, the right attitude, and access to quality services, which together promote the welfare of the family unit and contribute to the social development of the country. Contraception prevents unwanted pregnancies and many more unwanted situations that follow. For married couples, it allows them to time their pregnancies and help determine the number of children in the family. It also helps in timing the births, particularly the first and last, about the age of the mother, which is particularly important because teenage pregnancies and pregnancies at a maternal age of 35 years or more carry their risks. Each of these aspects is very important for the welfare of all family members. So, family planning has to emerge from whispers in private quarters to a basic human right and an important aspect of family health and social welfare. Contraceptives are primary prevention for pregnancy and primordial prevention for high-risk pregnancies.

These high-risk pregnancies, if not detected in time and managed properly, can lead to serious complications and even deaths. At the individual level, the morbidity and mortality of the mother and newborn associated with an unplanned pregnancy can be avoided. If all couples had access to family planning services, it would help reduce maternal deaths by 25% and infant deaths by 20%.

Apart from deaths, the diseases associated with HRP (20-30%) are also prevented. High-risk pregnancies are those pregnancies where the mother/baby has an increased risk of adverse outcomes. This could be due to anaemia, high BP, or high sugar levels during pregnancy. Pregnant women with obesity, twin or breech pregnancy,

history of preterm labour, or cesarean section are also HRPs.

This is particularly true for teenage and elderly pregnancies because they have a higher share of morbidity. Moreover, pregnancies beyond the age of 35 have a high risk of congenital anomalies. So, preventing these births improves the quality of the population and reduces the burden on parents in particular and society in general. It also reduces early and late fetal deaths.

Women's health also benefitted from the improvement of nutritional status and the reduction of complications by addressing modifiable risk factors before the next conception, like weight reduction, management of medical illnesses, and allowing a reasonable gap of at least 3 years between two deliveries. Proper use of contraceptive methods would also reduce the need for abortions and thus decrease abortion-related complications like septic abortions and even death.

This issue is most sensitive for unmarried girls who are forced to seek abortion services at unrecognized centres and are unable to seek normal pregnancy care. This also calls for greater awareness about emergency contraceptive pills. Good health of the infant and siblings, proper care, nutrition, and reduced vulnerability to diseases are all seen in families with a limited number of children. Hence, contraceptives play an important role in the overall well-being of the family. Thus, the importance of contraception for the health of women and children is clear and government facilities, NGOs, and private providers are all working to offer and improve family planning services.

The availability of better client-friendly methods, from daily pills to once-a-week pills, lactational pills, self-administered three-monthly injections, devices work-

ing for 10 years, along good follow-up facilities, have made modern women's lives easier. What remains is to connect the dots so that maximum benefits can be reaped from the services. What also needs to be worked upon is the change in attitude of not only the clients but also the caregivers. The clients need to work upon the hesitation in accessing these services and the caregivers need to refrain from underscoring the importance of family planning services. Let us all reflect on our roles as stakeholders in this solvable problem which is so important for our health and progress. In conclusion, the discourse on contraception and maternal health underscores the critical need to prioritize reproductive rights and access to family planning services.

As we bridge the gap between rights and reality, it is imperative to foster an environment where informed choices and comprehensive education empower individuals and couples.

Collaborative efforts among government bodies, NGOs, healthcare providers, and the community are essential to ensure that family planning services are accessible, acceptable, and utilized effectively. By doing so, we not only enhance maternal and child health but also reduce the risk to women arising from unplanned pregnancies, high-risk pregnancies, and abortion-related complications which are entirely preventable. So, let us all contribute to the broader socio-economic development of our nation. The journey towards a healthier, more informed society begins with each of us advocating for and embracing the significance of contraception in our collective well-being.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of Community Medicine in MLB Medical College Jhansi UP. Views are personal)

How restaurants can save water and promote sustainability

Initiatives like the 'Blue Star Rating' demonstrate how restaurants can conserve water, writes SONIA GROVER and NATHANIEL BHAKUPAR DKHAR

A restaurant, a place to tantalize one's taste buds and enjoy conversations with friends and family, is the picture that comes to mind, yet no one can imagine that these restaurants can also be a place to conserve a huge amount of water and inculcate water-conscious behaviour. Water often plays a supporting role, unnoticed yet indispensable. Water is needed for everything from kitchen operations to guest services. The world is increasingly becoming conscious of environmental sustainability, and the restaurant sector is one of the main ones where water conservation practices could result in huge water savings. We are witnesses to the recent water stress situation in Bangalore city, where residents had to face a severe water

crisis, and there is almost a perpetual shortage of around 500 million litres every day. Limited water sources, a depleting groundwater table, and erratic monsoon patterns have all conspired to bring Bangalore to this crisis. Demand-side water management strategies are needed to salvage the situation and balance the disproportion of water demand and supply gaps.

This common urban water stress scenario calls for every demand sector, including the hospitality sector, to shoulder the responsibility of water conservation. Mission Life, launched by the Hon'ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, called for lifestyle-related changes for environmental conservation.

Mission LIFE puts an individual and collective duty on everyone to live a life that is in tune with Earth and does not harm it.

As part of this mission, a global call for ideas and papers (GCIP) was launched, and the best 5 entries were awarded to pilot test their ideas. One of the award-winning ideas led by Dr. Sonia Grover focused on - Promoting water conservation in restaurants through the 'Blue Star Rating' system. The team pilot tested this idea in a few restaurants in Delhi that were selected on a random basis in the North Delhi and the New Delhi Municipal Corporation (NDMC) areas of Delhi. Restaurants were in different categories, including fine dining, casual dining, and state canteens. The two main

tasks of this project included developing a star rating system to grade and score the restaurants based on the water-saving interventions adopted by the restaurants.

These included both technical and behaviour change-related interventions. This rating framework is called the 'Blue Star Rating'. This was developed because ratings serve as a powerful tool for quantifying and monitoring interventions toward water-saving practices. This includes behaviour change by providing feedback, promoting awareness, fostering healthy competition, incentivizing action, leveraging social influence, and informing policy decisions, all of which ultimately lead to huge water savings and a ripple effect. The second important



task was to visit the restaurants to identify water-saving potential through simple interventions such as low-flow aerators, which facilitate reducing the flow rate of water from faucets. They achieve this by mixing air into the water stream, which maintains the pressure while using less water.

This results in decreased water consumption without compromising the functionality of the faucet. It's one of the

most cost-effective solutions to save water in both commercial and residential settings. For handwashing taps, it was observed that flow rates at some restaurants were as high as 15 litres per minute. By installing these aerators, the flow rates were reduced on average by a range of 30-60%, which is a significant saving. In addition, for some taps, the flow was regulated by adjusting the pressure valves to optimize the flow. Also, visible leakages were fixed to save the water. With just these few interventions, around 5000 litres per day of water were saved in just less than 50 restaurants. Delhi has around 1,00,000 eateries, both organized and unorganized. If all of these restaurants strive towards water conservation

with such simple solutions, the amount of water saved can help us tide over the water stress situation to a significant level. If a Blue Star Rating is placed in the system, restaurants can be encouraged to take more water-saving interventions that are feasible and economically beneficial for them. Together, this sector can elevate water conservation, which also makes business.

For restaurants, adopting water-saving practices not only helps to mitigate environmental impact but also reduces operational costs. Water savings easily translate into monetary benefits accrued due to reduced utility bills. Simple yet effective measures like low-flow faucets and repairing leaks promptly are small adjustments that yield signif-

icant savings over time. In addition, sensitizing staff ensures the sustainability of the interventions undertaken. By championing sustainability through various interventions, restaurants can inspire consumers to consider the environmental implications of their choices. Restaurants can also be a platform for learning by engaging diners through information, education, and communication (IEC) collateral to raise awareness about the restaurant's water-saving initiatives, which can foster a sense of community around sustainability.

(Dr. Sonia Grover is Senior Consultant and Nathaniel Bhakupar Dkhar is senior research scientist at Mu Gamma Consultants, Gurugram; views are personal)

UK airports, trains, London Stock Exchange impacted

PTI ■ LONDON

The UK's airports and trains experienced delays, with the London Stock Exchange and the National Health Service among the other organisations in the country dealing with the fallout of a global IT outage on Friday that has grounded planes and caused chaos around the world. The outage, related to an issue at US-headquartered prolific cybersecurity firm CrowdStrike and Microsoft, affected Windows PCs globally and also forced 'Sky News' off the air. CrowdStrike, a cybersecurity service designed to stop internet breaches or hacks for the world's biggest companies, has since apologised for the problems caused by a software bug even as it ruled out the possibility of this being a cyberattack. Microsoft has also identified an update to the CrowdStrike Falcon Sensor software as the factor behind the global tech issues. "We're deeply sorry. The update had a software bug in it and caused an issue with the Microsoft operating system," George Kurtz, CEO of CrowdStrike,

GLOBAL IT OUTAGE

told news channels. "We identified this very quickly and remediated the issue," he said. He had earlier taken to X to state that "this is not a security incident or cyberattack." "The issue has been identified, isolated and a fix has been deployed. We refer customers to the support portal for the latest updates and will continue to provide complete and continuous updates on our website," he said. UK Cabinet Minister Pat McFadden said ministerial teams were coordinating their response to the major outage through COBRA, the government's emergency response committee. "Ministers are working with their sectors and respective industries on the issue," he said. London's biggest airport, Heathrow, said in a statement that its "flights are operational though we are experiencing delays". While the airport said it is implementing contingency plans to minimise impact, Gatwick Airport

said passengers "may experience some delays" when checking in and passing through security. Luton and Edinburgh Airport, meanwhile, switched to manual systems to support operations. The London Stock Exchange Group said trading continues to operate as normal while it is working on resolving an issue with its RNS Service, which provides the Regulatory News Service announcements. The IT outage, which is not believed to be linked with a malicious attack or hack, also hit several National Health Service (NHS) general practitioner (GP) surgeries around the UK as they were unable to access patient records or book online appointments. NHS England said the IT outage is "causing disruption in the majority of GP practices" in England but there is currently no known impact on its 999 or emergency services. Royal Surrey NHS Foundation Trust declared a "critical incident" cit-

ing external IT issues, affecting its delivery of radiotherapy treatment. "We are unable to access driver diagrams at certain locations, leading to potential short-notice cancellations, particularly on the Thameslink and Great Northern networks," said Govia Thameslink Railway, one of the train companies impacted. "Additionally, other key systems, including our real-time customer information platforms, are also affected," it added. National Rail, in charge of the country's railway network, said its IT teams are "actively investigating to determine the root cause of the problem". All major UK supermarkets including Tesco, Sainsbury's, Asda, Lidl, Morrisons and Waitrose also reported issues with online services. The first reports of the outage emanated from the United States late on Thursday after a breakdown of Microsoft services such as Azure and 365. In a post on X, Microsoft 365 Status stated that "multiple services are continuing to see improvements in availability as our mitigation actions progress".

Bangladesh security forces fire bullets as protests escalate

PTI ■ DHAKA

Police and security officials in Bangladesh fired bullets and tear gas at protesters and banned all gatherings in the capital on Friday, as internet and mobile services were cut off after days of deadly clashes over the allocation of government jobs. The protests, which began weeks ago but escalated sharply on Monday, represent the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since she won a fourth consecutive term in office after elections in January. Main opposition groups boycotted those polls. Somoy TR, a local television channel, reported that four more people died in the latest clashes. This comes a day after the bloodiest day of demonstrations to date when 22 people were killed, according to local media, as protesting students attempted to impose a "complete shutdown" on the country. Authorities could not be reached immediately to confirm figures for the deaths. The chaos has highlighted cracks in Bangladesh's governance and economy and the frustration of young graduates who face a lack of good jobs. The government has deployed police and paramilitary forces across the capital to lock down campuses and break up protests. On Wednesday, universities including the country's largest suspended classes and closed dormitories, and on Friday Dhaka police said they were banning all gatherings and demonstrations in

the capital. An Associated Press reporter saw border guard officials fire at a crowd of more than 1,000 protesters who had gathered outside the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, which was attacked and set on fire by protesters the previous day. The border guards shot at the right crowd with rifles and sound grenades, while police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Bullets littered the streets, which were also marked by smears of blood. A news producer and reporter at Bangladesh Television on Thursday told the AP that protesters had broken through the main gate and set fire to vehicles and the reception area. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals. "I escaped by leaping over the wall but some of my colleagues got stuck inside. The attackers entered the building and set fire to the building," the producer said by phone. Internet services and mobile data were widely disrupted on Thursday night and remained down on Friday in the capital, Dhaka. Social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were also not loading. It coincided with a widespread internet outage on Friday that disrupted flights, banks, media outlets and companies around the world, but the disruptions in Bangladesh were substantially greater than seen elsewhere. A statement from the country's Telecommunication Regulatory Commission said they were unable to ensure service after their data centre was attacked on Thursday by demonstrators,

who set fire to some equipment. The Associated Press has not been able to independently verify this. Student protesters said they will extend their calls to impose a shutdown on Friday as well, and urged mosques across the country to hold funeral prayers for those who have been killed. Major universities have said they will close their doors until tensions ease. The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30 per cent of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan. They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and they want it replaced with a merit-based system. But Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions to the war regardless of their political affiliation. The Bangladeshi leader is credited for bringing stable growth to Bangladesh, but rising inflation — thanks in part to the global upheaval sparked by the war in Ukraine — has triggered labour unrest and dissatisfaction with the government. Even though job opportunities have grown in some parts of the private sector, many people prefer government jobs because they are seen as more stable and lucrative. But there aren't enough to go around — each year, some 400,000 graduates compete for around 3,000 jobs in the civil service exam.

Houthi rebels claim drone strike that leaves 1 dead, at least 10 injured in Tel Aviv

PTI ■ TEL AVIV

Yemen's Houthi rebels on Friday claimed responsibility for an early morning drone strike that hit a part of central Tel Aviv near the United States Embassy, leaving at least 10 injured and one dead. The aerial strike rumbled through the streets causing shards of shrapnel to rain down and spreading shards of glass over a large radius. The Houthis have repeatedly launched drones and missiles toward Israel throughout the nine-month-long war, in solidarity with the Palestinian people and against Israel. But until Friday, all were intercepted by either Israel or Western allies with forces stationed in the region. Yahya Sare'e, the Houthis' spokesperson, said in a statement published on the social media platform X that the strike was made in retaliation to the war underway in Gaza between Israel and Hamas and had hit one of many of the group's targets. The Houthis claimed that their newest drones can bypass Israel's aerial defence systems. However, a spokesperson for Israel's military said on Friday that the explosive-laden drone had been identified on Thursday and attributed the hit to "human error." The military's assessment of aerial threats has not changed because, the military said, Israel's adversaries have attempted such strikes for months. "It was a terror attack that was targeted to kill civilians in Israel," the Israeli spokesperson said. The Houthi strike hit hours after Israel's military confirmed one of its airstrikes

had killed a Hezbollah commander and other militants in southern Lebanon. Israel has so far not made attacks on the Houthis, allowing its allies instead to take the lead as it focuses its efforts on the war in Gaza and ongoing fighting with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group. It comes as international mediators continue to hold out hope for a cease-fire agreement, pushing Israel and Hamas toward a phased deal that would halt fighting and free about 120 hostages held by the militant group in Gaza. The prospects a deal could improve as Israeli leaders signal their operation underway in Rafah is close to finished. However, fears of potential escalation resurfaced on Thursday after Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, visited Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site on Thursday to pray for the return of Israeli hostages, he said, "without a reckless deal, without surrendering." Local police in Tel Aviv said that the Friday blast sounded at around 3:10 am, reverberating to nearby cities and physically injuring at least 10 people. Tel Aviv District Commander Peretz Amar said officers could not locate the point of contact, suggesting the explosion occurred in the air. "The force of the explosion caused damage that is not great but is spread over a large area. At the moment we don't know what the object was," Amar said. Israel possesses a multilayered aerial defence system, capable of intercepting threats ranging from long-range ballistic missiles to drones and short-range missiles.

Russia convicts US reporter of espionage

PTI ■ YEKATERINBURG

Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich was convicted Friday of espionage and sentenced to 16 years in a maximum-security prison on charges that his employer and the US government have rejected as fabricated. The conclusion of his swift and secretive trial in the country's highly politicized legal system could potentially clear the way for a prisoner swap between Moscow and Washington. Gershkovich, his head shaved, looked calm as he stood in a glass defendants' cage in the Sverdlovsk Regional Court and listened impassively to the verdict. When the judge asked him if he understood it, the journalist replied yes. After the judge finished reading the verdict, someone in the courtroom shouted, "Evan, we love you!" Closing arguments

took place behind closed doors at the trial, where Gershkovich did not admit any guilt, according to the court's press service. Prosecutors requested an 18-year sentence, but the judge opted for a shorter term. "This disgraceful, sham conviction comes after Evan has spent 478 days in prison, wrongfully detained, away from his family and friends, prevented from reporting, all for doing his job as a journalist," Dow Jones CEO and Wall Street Journal Publisher Almar Latour and Editor in Chief Emma Tucker said in a statement. "We will continue to do everything possible to press for Evan's release and to support his family. Journalism is not a crime, and we will not rest until he's released. This must end now," the statement added. Gershkovich, 32, was arrested March 29, 2023, while on a reporting trip to the Ural

Mountains city of Yekaterinburg. Authorities claimed, without offering any evidence, that he was gathering secret information for the US. He has been behind bars since his arrest, which will be counted as part of his sentence. Much of that was spent in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo Prison — a czarist-era lockup used during Josef Stalin's purges, when executions were carried out in its basement. He was transferred to Yekaterinburg for the trial. Gershkovich was the first US journalist taken into custody on espionage charges since Nicholas Daniloff in 1986, at the height of the Cold War. Foreign journalists in Russia were shocked by Gershkovich's arrest, even though the country has enacted increasingly repressive laws on freedom of speech after sending troops into Ukraine. Unlike the trial's opening on June 26 in Yekaterinburg and

previous hearings in Moscow in which reporters were allowed to see Gershkovich briefly before sessions began, there was no access to the courtroom on Thursday when the trial resumed, but media was allowed in court on Friday for the verdict. Espionage and treason cases are typically shrouded in secrecy. Russian courts convict more than 99 per cent of defendants, and prosecutors can in appeal sentences that they regard as too lenient. They even can appeal acquittals. The US State Department has declared Gershkovich "wrongfully detained," committing the government to assertively seek his release. Asked Friday about a possible prisoner swap involving Gershkovich, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refused to comment. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday at the United Nations that Moscow

and Washington's "special services" are discussing an exchange involving Gershkovich. Russia has previously signaled the possibility of a swap, but said a verdict would have to come first. Even after a verdict, any such deal could take months or years. State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel on Thursday declined to discuss negotiations about a possible exchange, but said: "We have been clear from the get-go that Evan did nothing wrong and should not have been detained. To date, Russia has provided no evidence of a crime and has failed to justify Evan's continued detention." Russian President Vladimir Putin hinted earlier this year that he would be open to swapping Gershkovich for Vadim Krasikov, a Russian serving a life sentence for the 2019 killing in Berlin of a Georgian citizen of Chechen descent.

Japan, Taiwan coast guards hold joint search

Tokyo (AP): Japanese and Taiwanese coast guards conducted what is believed to be their first joint drill off Japan's eastern coast, officials said Friday, a move seen as an effort to expand maritime cooperation amid concern about China's increasingly assertive activity in regional seas. The drill was held amid escalating tension between China and Taiwan. Beijing claims Taiwan as its own territory and has not ruled out using force to take it. China routinely sends coast guard vessels into waters surrounding Japanese-controlled disputed islands in the East China Sea, confronting Japanese patrol ships. However, Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi Friday denied the drill targeted any specific country, including China.

Republicans thrilled with ex-US President, predicting blowout victory after convention

AP ■ MILWAUKEE

The last time Republicans gathered for a full convention, they were plagued by internal division and fear. Morale was near rock bottom. And the party's presidential nominee showed little desire, or capacity, to add new voters to his political coalition. The Republican officials, strategists and activists who packed Milwaukee for the Republican National Convention this week expressed a collective confidence at levels not seen in decades. Boos and infighting marred Donald Trump's first convention in 2016, but this one was defined by overwhelming displays of unity as GOP leaders — Trump skeptics among them — revealed in what most view as an all but certain victory come November. Trump's survival after

nearly being assassinated at a Pennsylvania rally over the weekend, they said, was the last piece to bring everyone together in spite of the former president's extraordinary personal and political baggage. "It feels like 1980," said a smiling New York GOP Chair Ed Cox on the convention's red-carpeted floor this week, referring to Ronald Reagan's landslide presidential victory. Cox pointed to a sense of inevitability building around Trump and the GOP. "We finally came completely together." For Democrats, it is the worst of times. Back in Washington, the party intensified a public and private lobbying effort to force President Joe Biden to drop out of the race after his disastrous debate against Trump last month. Donors, elected officials and leaders within Biden's own campaign believe he cannot

win. And an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll indicated that the vast majority of Democratic voters have lost confidence in Biden's ability to govern and want him to step aside before it is too late to stop Trump. Only about a third of Democrats believe Biden is more capable than Trump of winning in November, according to the poll, which also found that nearly two-thirds of Democrats say Biden should withdraw from the presidential race and let his party nominate a different candidate. By contrast, about 7 in 10 Republicans say Trump is more capable of winning the election. Almost no Republicans think Biden is more capable of winning. The doubters include Black Democrats, who make up the backbone of Biden's political

coalition. Only about half of Black Democrats think Biden is better able to win, according to the poll. Many Democrats now privately expect — or perhaps hope — that someone other than Biden will be on stage to accept the party's nomination when the Democratic National Convention begins in Chicago in a month. Hours before Trump's triumphant convention speech on Thursday, a top Biden campaign official repeatedly pushed back against a flurry of new questions about whether the president is going to step aside. "I do not want to be rude, but I don't know how many more times I can answer that," Quentin Fulks, principal deputy manager of Biden's reelection campaign, told a news conference in Milwaukee when asked whether the president's commitment to his reelection may be softening.

Trump calls for unity post assassination attempt



Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump kisses the helmet of Corey Comperatore during the Republican National Convention Thursday in Milwaukee.

Milwaukee (PTI): In his first major public address since surviving an assassination attempt, Donald Trump gave a clarion call for unity as he accepted his Republican party's presidential nomination with a pledged to deliver a government that will begin four greatest years in American history if he is elected in November. The 78-year-old former US president took to the stage at the Republican National Convention Thursday night to accept his party's nomination for a third consecutive presidential bid. Trump also gave details about the attempt on his life last week and thanked Americans for their "outpouring of love and support." "So tonight, with faith and devotion, I proudly accept your nomination for president of the United States," Trump said to applause. In his speech, Trump urged Americans to help him win the race for the White House on November 5. "Tonight, I ask for your partnership, for your support, and I am humbly asking for your vote.

Every day, I will strive to honor the trust you have placed in me, and I will never let you down," Trump said. "To all of the forgotten men and women who have been neglected, abandoned, and left behind, you will be forgotten no longer. We will press forward, and together, we will win, win, win," he said. In his first speech after the assassination bid on him on Saturday in Pennsylvania, Trump said he stands before Americans with a message of confidence, strength, and hope. "Four months from now, we will have an incredible victory, and we will begin the four greatest years in the history of our country," Trump said. "In an age when our politics too often divide us, now is the time to remember that we are all fellow citizens. We are one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all," he said. The former president basked in the adoring cheers of thousands as he called for unity behind his effort to return to the White House after the attack.



Israeli police investigate the scene of an explosive drone attack in Tel Aviv, Israel, Friday. Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for a drone believed to have exploded above Tel Aviv early Friday morning, leaving one dead and at least 10 injured.

'Israel's settlement policy in occupied territories violates international law'

The Hague (AP): The top United Nations court has ruled that Israel's settlement policy and use of natural resources in the occupied Palestinian territories violate international law. The panel of 15 judges from around the world at the International Court of Justice said "the transfer by Israel of settlers to the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as Israel's maintenance of their presence, is contrary to article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention". It also said the use of natural resources was "inconsistent" with its obligations under international law as an occupying power. The court's president, Nawaf Salam, was reading out the court's full opinion in a Friday session, which is expected to take about an hour. The top United Nations court has opened a hearing to deliver a non-binding advisory

opinion on the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state, a ruling that could have more effect on international opinion than it will on Israeli policies. International Court of Justice President Nawaf Salam is expected to take about an hour to read out the opinion of the panel that is made up of 15 judges from around the world. Friday's hearing comes against the backdrop of Israel's devastating 10-month military assault on Gaza, which was triggered by the Hamas-led attacks in southern Israel. In a separate case, the International Court of Justice is considering a South African claim that Israel's campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide, a claim that Israel vehemently denies. Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The

Palestinians seek all three areas for an independent state. Israel considers the West Bank to be disputed territory, whose future should be decided in negotiations, while it has moved population there in settlements to solidify its hold. It has annexed east Jerusalem in a move that is not internationally recognised, while it withdrew from Gaza in 2005 but maintained a blockade of the territory after Hamas took power in 2007. The international community generally considers all three areas to be occupied territory. At hearings in February, then-Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki accused Israel of apartheid and urged the United Nations' top court to declare that Israel's occupation of lands sought by the Palestinians is illegal and must end immediately and unconditionally for any hope for a two-state future to survive.

REACTION TO NORTH'S BALLOON LAUNCHES

South Korea restarts propaganda broadcasts across border

AP ■ SEOUL

South Korea said Friday it has restarted blasting propaganda broadcasts into North Korea to retaliate against the North's latest round of trash-carrying balloon launches, a resumption of Cold War-style tactics that are raising animosities between the rivals.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said in a statement that it used frontline loudspeakers to blare anti-Pyongyang broadcasts over the border between Thursday evening and Friday morning.

The broadcasts were the first of their kind in about 40 days. The contents of the broadcasts were not immediately known, but its previous ones on June 9 reportedly included K-pop songs, weather forecasts and news on Samsung, the biggest South Korean company, as well as outside criticism of the North's missile program and its crackdown on foreign video.

The South Korean broadcasts could trigger an angry response from North Korea which is extremely sensitive to any out-

side attempt to undermine its political system. In 2015, when South Korea restarted loud-speaker broadcasts for the first time in 11 years, North Korea fired artillery rounds across the border, prompting the South to return fire, according to South Korean officials. No casualties were reported.

South Korea's military earlier said North Korea floated the balloons on Thursday afternoon in its seventh such balloon campaign in recent months.

Starting in late May, North Korea has floated more than 2,000 balloons carrying wastepaper, scraps of cloth, cigarette butts and even manure toward South Korea, saying they were in response to South Korean activists sending political leaflets to the North via their own balloons. No hazardous materials were found. North Korea last flew such balloons in late June.

In response, South Korea suspended a 2018 tension-reduction deal with North Korea, resuming propaganda broadcasts briefly and front-line live-

fire military drills at border areas.

Earlier this week, the powerful sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un hinted at flying rubbish-carrying balloons again or launching new countermeasures, saying South Korean balloons have been found again at border and other areas in North Korea. In her statement Tuesday, Kim Yo Jong warned that South Korean "scum" must be ready to pay "a gruesome and dear price." That raised concerns that North Korea could stage physical provocations, rather than balloon launches.

South Korea's military said Wednesday it has boosted its readiness to brace for any provocation by North Korea. It said North Korea may fire at incoming South Korean balloons across the border or floating mines downriver.

It wasn't immediately known whether groups in South Korea have recently scattered leaflets in North Korea. For years, activist groups led by North Korean defectors have

used helium-filled balloons to drop anti-North Korean leaflets, USB sticks containing K-pop music and US dollar bills in the North.

North Korea views such activities as a serious security threat and challenge to its ban on foreign news for most of its 26 million people. In 2020, North Korea destroyed an unoccupied South Korean-built liaison office on its territory in a furious response to South Korean civilian leafletting campaigns. In 2014, North Korea fired at balloons flying toward its territory and South Korea returned fire, though there were no casualties.

Tensions between the Koreans have heightened in recent years because of North Korea's missile tests and the expansion of US-South Korean military drills that North Korea calls invasion rehearsals. Experts say North Korea's expanding ties with Russia could embolden Kim Jong Un to stage bigger provocations, particularly ahead of the US presidential election in November.

Another chief of China's strategic missile force under probe for corruption

Beijing (PTI): China's ruling Communist Party has announced an anti-corruption investigation against another head of its strategic missile force, which continues to be plagued by graft at its top echelons, a media report said on Friday.

Former Defence Minister Gen Li Shangfu, who earlier headed the nine-year-old Rocket Force, which handles a host of missiles, including nuclear weapons, was sacked and investigated for corruption along with his successor Gen Li Yuchao, who assumed the role of its commander in 2022.

Li Shangfu, who headed the Rocket (Missile) Force before becoming Defence Minister, is being tried for alleged corruption. Li Yuchao, who was also part of the strategic force, was sacked along with him. On Thursday, the Communist Party plenary meeting, while endorsing the Politburo's earlier decision to expel Gen Li Shangfu and Gen Li Yuchao, also announced the anti-corruption investigation against Gen Sun Jinming, who recently headed the Rocket Force.

Sun is the Chief of Staff of the PLA Rocket Force, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported on Friday. His downfall followed anti-corruption probes since last year into at least seven past or serving senior military officials from the Rocket Force, which oversees the country's nuclear arsenal, in the latest anti-corruption purge in the military since last year, the report said.

Sun, an alternate member of the party's 20th Central Committee, took on the role of chief of staff of the force in 2022 after serving a long stint in its predecessor, the Second Artillery Corps. The rocket force, established in 2015 as part of Chinese President Xi Jinping's military overhaul, has been at the centre of the latest anti-corruption campaign targeting the military.

While most corruption cases involving the PLA appeared to be winding down, the investigations have cast a shadow over the military, the report said.



Chinese tourists visit the Forbidden City with cap and umbrella during a hot summer day in Beijing on Friday AP/PTI

2019 terror attack: SL sends senior police officer on compulsory leave

PTI ■ COLOMBO

A top Sri Lankan police officer, blamed for criminal negligence in the 2019 Easter suicide attacks that killed over 270 people, including 11 Indians, has been sent on compulsory leave, it was announced here.

Senior DIG Nilantha Jayawardena, the number two in the police force, has been sent on compulsory leave with effect from Thursday, the independent police commission announced. This followed the decision to institute disciplinary action against him as recommended by the Supreme Court in connection with the fundamental rights petitions filed in the 2019 Easter Sunday suicide bomb attack investigations.

Jayawardena was one of the top defence officials blamed for criminal negligence in the Easter Sunday suicide bombings which killed over 270 including foreigners.

Nine suicide bombers belong-

ing to the local Islamist extremist group, the National Thowheeth Jama'ath (NTJ) linked to ISIS carried out a series of devastating blasts that tore through three Catholic churches and as many luxury hotels on April 21, 2019, being observed as Easter Sunday that year, killing nearly 270 people, including 11 Indians and other foreigners, and injuring over 500.

The independent police commission said the Supreme Court on January 12, 2023, had recommended disciplinary action, be taken against Jayawardena, who had headed the police's state intelligence service at the time of the Easter Sunday attacks.

The Supreme Court had questioned why the National Police Commission had not initiated action against the former Chief of the State Intelligence Service, as per its court order, said NewsWire.lk.

The commission added that Jayawardena, who is currently

the deputy inspector general of police (administration), was chargsheeted on November 17, 2023 to which he had responded on March 12, 2024. On July 1 this year, the police commission had begun disciplinary proceedings against Jayawardena.

The commission said the order to send Jayawardena on compulsory leave has surfaced given his ability to influence witnesses in his role as the head of police administration.

Jayawardena, along with former President Maithripala Sirisena, is accused of failing to prevent those terror attacks, despite receiving intelligence information, said NewsWire.lk reported. Sirisena and Jayawardena alongside several other top brass were ordered to pay heavy compensation to the kith of the victims. Jayawardena was ordered to pay Rs 75 million while Sirisena was ordered to pay Rs 100 million. Both have paid only part payments so far while pleading for more time.

Police officer wounded in knife attack in Paris; attacker killed

AP ■ PARIS

A police officer was wounded in a knife attack in Paris on Thursday in the high-end Champs-Élysées neighbourhood and the assailant was shot and died of his injuries, authorities said, just days before the opening ceremony of the Summer Olympics.

Paris police chief Laurent Nunez said the attack did not appear linked to the Olympics and no terrorist motive was suspected. French Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin posted on X that the attack happened in the 8th arrondissement of Paris while police were "responding to a call from officers securing a store". Security agents at the flagship Louis Vuitton store on

the Champs-Élysées contacted police after noticing "suspicious behaviour" by a man outside the store, according to a police official.

Speaking in front of the Louis Vuitton store after the stabbing, Paris police chief Laurent Nunez said the assailant "pulled out a knife and threatened them (the officers), tried to stab them multiple times and succeeded in stabbing".

He defended the police response as "totally proportionate. They were facing an assailant who was threatening their lives".

The suspect died of his injuries after being shot, the Paris prosecutor's office said. An investigation was opened into attempted murder of a police officer, the prosecutor's office

said. The police officer was hospitalised but not in life-threatening condition.

The area was thronging with tourists and Parisians when the attack happened around the corner from the Louis Vuitton boutique. Some took photos as police cordoned off the area, while others continued their dining in nearby sidewalk cafes.

Associated Press journalists saw police reinforcements rushing in after the stabbing. At a luxury hotel nearby, guests arriving in a taxi had to pass under police tape to enter their hotel, as a porter wheeled their baggage under the cordon. The Louis Vuitton store often has long lines outside and is among the biggest draws on an avenue packed with luxury

boutiques. Louis Vuitton parent company LVMH did not comment on what happened.

Thursday's knife attack comes just days after a man stabbed and wounded a French soldier patrolling Paris on Monday outside the Gare de l'Est train station in eastern Paris. The man was taken to a psychiatric hospital, according to French prosecutors.

France is under its highest security alert before the start of the Paris Games on July 26. Paris police imposed strict new security measures in the centre of town starting Thursday to prepare for the exceptional opening ceremony, which will be held in the open all along the Seine River instead of in a closed stadium.

Zelensky urges Britain to help it strike deeper inside Russia

AP ■ LONDON

President Volodymyr Zelensky urged Britain's new government to help Ukrainian forces attack deeper inside Russia to stop deadly missile strikes on his country, as he gave a rare address by a foreign leader to a UK Cabinet meeting.

Zelensky said "long-range capability" to destroy sites where Russian weapons are concentrated is key to Ukraine's defence.

"I ask you to show your leadership" in lifting restrictions on Ukraine's use of Western weapons, Zelensky told Prime Minister Keir Starmer.

Russia has deployed devastating firepower as it pursues a summer offensive in eastern Ukraine, reducing villages to rubble and pushing back Ukrainian troops in places. It has also launched missile and drone attacks across Ukraine, killing dozens and hitting targets including a Kyiv children's hospital.

Some of Kyiv's allies are reluctant to let Ukraine use their

weapons to strike Russian territory because of concerns that the West could be drawn into direct conflict with Russia. The British government has said its up to Ukraine how to use missiles supplied by the UK, as long as international law is upheld.

In an interview with the BBC, Zelensky said he was seeking clarification about Ukraine's ability to use Storm Shadow missiles supplied by Britain against targets in Russia. The Storm Shadow is an air-launched cruise missile with a range of more than 250 kilometres.

"We need a decision about long-distance weapons, long range, to use it," Zelensky said. "We need it very much. They're targeting our hospitals, schools. We just want to answer exactly to the point where they target us."

UK Defence Secretary John Healey said Ukraine already has permission to use the missiles against Russia, but the rules for exactly what can be targeted and under what circumstances are "complex ques-



Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky leaves Downing Street after meeting with Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer in London on Friday AP/PTI

tions" that are the subject of intense negotiations.

"We're providing weapons to Ukraine for their defense of their sovereign country, and that does not preclude them hitting targets in Russia, but that must be done by the Ukrainians. It must be done within the parameters and the bounds of international

humanitarian law," Healey told the BBC. The United States, Ukraine's biggest military backer, recently shifted its position, with the Pentagon saying last month that Ukraine could use longer-range missiles provided by the US to strike targets inside Russia if it is acting in self-defence.

Since the beginning of Russia's

2022 invasion, the US had maintained a policy of not allowing Ukraine to use the weapons it provided to hit targets inside Russia for fear of further escalation.

Zelensky received a standing ovation from Starmer's government as he entered the Cabinet room at 10 Downing St. The last foreign leader invited to address a Cabinet meeting in person was US President Bill Clinton in 1997.

Zelensky briefed ministers on the situation in Ukraine and the need for European countries to ramp up defense production in the face of Russian aggression.

Zelensky said Ukraine had repelled Russian attempts to advance on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city, showing that "we can stop any Russian attempt to expand the war."

Starmer, whose centre-left Labour Party government was elected two weeks ago, is keen to stress that the UK's strong support for Ukraine will continue on his watch.

Starmer said the UK would "double down" on support for Ukraine, including with a treaty

that aims to help both countries ramp up military production.

The UK is also giving Ukraine access to 3.5 billion pounds (USD 4.5 billion) of export financing to purchase weapons.

"Ukraine is, and always will be, at the heart of this government's agenda, and so it is only fitting that President Zelensky will make a historic address to my Cabinet," Starmer said in a statement. "Russia's incremental gains on the battlefield are nothing compared with the collective international support for Ukraine, or the strength of ties between our people."

During a visit to Britain that included a summit of the European Political Community on Thursday, Ukraine's president repeated his increasingly urgent calls for more ammunition and weapons and tougher sanctions on Russia.

European leaders at the summit agreed to tighten sanctions against a "shadow fleet" of hundreds of illegitimate and often decrepit ships the West says Russia is using to transport oil and evade sanctions.

Quake hits north Chile

Santiago (Chile): A magnitude 7.4 earthquake hit northern Chile near its border with Argentina late Thursday, according to the US Geological Survey. There were no immediate reports of injuries or major damages. The quake's epicenter was 45 kilometres (28 miles) east-southeast of San Pedro de Atacama, Chile, and it had a depth of 117 kilometres, according to the USGS.

President Gabriel Boric wrote on social platform X that according to preliminary information there were "no reports of injuries or serious damages." The quake did not activate a tsunami alarm. Boric later said that some rocks had come loose and rolled onto the highway connecting the cities of Calama to Tocopilla, east of the epicenter, and there power outages in San Pedro de Atacama. He said authorities were still collecting information. Chile's National Disaster Prevention and Response Service said the earthquake was felt, with different intensities, in several regions of the country including Tarapacá, Antofagasta, Atacama, Coquimbo, Arica and Parinacota.

Tender Notice (ISR/GPS/2024/001)
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Hindus largest minority community in Pak with 3.8 million population

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

The population of Hindus in Pakistan increased from 3.5 million in 2017 to 3.8 million in 2023 to make it the largest minority community in the Islamic nation, according to the official data of last year's census. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) released results of the 7th Population and Housing Census 2023 on Thursday, the Dawn newspaper reported. The country's total population in 2023 stood at 240,458,089. It showed that the share of Muslims in the total population decreased slightly from 96.47 per cent in 2017 to 96.35 per cent in 2023, while the population of all major religious minorities increased in the past six years. However, their share

in the percentage of the total population gives a mixed picture.

The population of Hindus increased from 3.5 million in 2017 to 3.8 million in 2023, but their share in the total population went down from 1.73 to 1.61 per cent, which showed other minority communities increased at a faster rate.

The population of Christians, also increased from 2.6 million to 3.3 million, with their share in the total population also going up from 1.27 to 1.37 per cent. Ahmadis witnessed a decline in their real population as well as their share in the total population. The size of their community was reduced by 29,053, from 191,737 (0.09 per cent) in 2017 to 162,684 (0.07 per cent). The population of the

Sikh community stood at 15,998 and Parsi at 2,348. The data showed that the country's population increased from 207.68 million in 2017 to 241.49 million in 2023 at a growth rate of 2.55 per cent.

At this rate, the data showed that Pakistan's population is expected to double by 2050. According to the population breakdown, the total number of males stood at 124.32 million, compared to 117.15 million females, with a gender ratio of 1.06. The population of transgender has been reported at 20,331. Data showed that 67 per cent of the total population in 2023 was below the age of 30 and 80 per cent below 40. Those of 67 years or above constituted only 3.55 per cent of the total population.

Ramaphosa vows renewed efforts under new govt

PTI ■ JOHANNESBURG

Conceding that the African National Congress government had failed the people of South Africa in his first term as President, Cyril Ramaphosa has vowed to address all the challenges faced by the country as he leads an unprecedented 10-party coalition government in his second term.

Ramaphosa was speaking on Thursday evening at the opening of the seventh Parliament in Cape Town almost two months after the general elections that saw his African National Congress (ANC) lose its majority for the first time since Nelson Mandela led the party to victory in the first democratic elections in 1994 after decades of white minority apartheid rule.

The May 29 election threw a split verdict thanks to a massive anti-incumbency of three decades and the ANC garnered only 40 per cent of the vote. Weeks later, Ramaphosa entered into negotiations with other parties, including the long-term opposition Democratic Alliance, and formed the Government of National Unity (GNU) of 10 parties, and was sworn in on June 19 to lead the seventh government since 1994.

Analysts said this (the multi-party coalition) poses several challenges because of differing party policies on a range of issues, including foreign policy, employment equity laws, and land distribution but Ramaphosa said the parties have agreed on a Minimum Programme as the foundation

for the GNU's work and issued a Statement of Intent.

"Through their votes, (citizens have) determined that the leaders of our country should set aside their political differences and come together as one to overcome the severe challenges that confront our nation," Ramaphosa, 71, said as he justified the decision to establish the GNU. "They sent a clear message that without unity, cooperation and partnership, our efforts to end poverty, unemployment and inequality will not succeed," he added. "In an act that is unprecedented in our democratic history, 10 political parties represented here in our Parliament have agreed to craft a common programme to build a better, more equal and more just South Africa," he said.

Sensex, Nifty tumble after four days of record rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Equity benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty tumbled on Friday as investors preferred to book profits after four days of record-breaking rally and weak trends from global markets. Fall in blue-chip Reliance Industries also dragged the benchmarks lower. The 30-share BSE Sensex hit its new all-time high of 81,587.76 in the initial trade but failed to carry forward the winning momentum and tanked 738.81 points or 0.91 per cent to settle below the 81,000-mark at 80,604.65. During the day, it plunged 844.36 points or 1.03 per cent to 80,499.10. The BSE benchmark had hit the 81,000-mark for the first time on Thursday. The NSE Nifty tumbled 269.95 points or 1.09 per cent and ended at 24,530.90 after hitting its fresh record peak of 24,854.80 during the opening



bell. During the day, it declined 292.7 points or 1.18 per cent to 24,508.15. Among the Sensex pack, Tata Steel tumbled over 5 per cent while JSW Steel tanked nearly 5 per cent. Tata Motors, NTPC, UltraTech Cement, Tech Mahindra, Bajaj Finance, Power Grid, Mahindra &

improvement in the IT segment. ITC, Asian Paints and HCL Technologies were the other gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower while Shanghai ended in the green. European markets were trading lower. The US markets ended in negative territory on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.07 per cent to USD 85.05 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 5,483.63 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark Sensex jumped 626.91 points or 0.78 per cent to settle at a fresh closing high of 81,343.46 on Thursday. The broader Nifty climbed 187.85 points or 0.76 per cent to settle at an all-time closing high of 24,800.85.

Rupee falls 3 paise to close at all-time low of 83.66 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee consolidated in a narrow range and depreciated 3 paise to close at its all-time low of 83.66 (provisional) against the US dollar on Friday, weighed down by strong American currency and muted trend in domestic equities. Forex traders said weak domestic markets and elevated oil prices pressured the rupee, however, likely Reserve Bank of India (RBI) intervention prevented a sharp fall in the domestic unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.64, and touched an intra-day high of 83.60 and a low of 83.66 against the dollar during the trading session. It finally settled at an all-time low level of 83.66 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a loss of 3 paise from its previous close. On Thursday, the rupee depreciated 5 paise and settled at a new low of 83.63 against the US dollar.



"We expect the rupee to trade with a slight negative bias on weak global markets and a strength in the US Dollar. Weak Asian and European currencies may also weigh on the rupee," Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas -- said. Choudhary said Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) inflows and any intervention by the RBI may support the rupee at lower levels. "USDINR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.40 to Rs 83.90," he said. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.16 per cent at 104.33. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading marginally lower by 0.07 per cent at USD 85.05 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex tumbled 738.81 points to settle at 80,604.65 and Nifty dropped 269.95 points to 24,530.90. Meanwhile, the Asian currencies were all down after a fall in European currencies as the European Central Bank (ECB) kept rates unchanged in its meeting with a possibility of a cut in September, traders said. FIIs were net buyers in the capital markets on Thursday as they purchased shares worth Rs 5,483.63 crore, according to exchange data.

HDFC Bank CSR spend crosses ₹945 crore in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Private sector HDFC Bank has reported a corporate social responsibility (CSR) spend of Rs 945.31 crore for the financial year 2023-24, an increase of nearly Rs 125 crore from the previous year. The bank's CSR programme, Parivartan, has been active for over a decade and its initiatives, spread across 28 states and 8 Union Territories, have impacted over 10 crore lives, HDFC Bank said in a release. The Parivartan initiatives have reached over 9,000 villages, impacting over 10 lakh households, as per the annual report. The initiatives have covered 85 out of the 112 districts identified in the Aspirational Districts Programme (ADP). "By addressing the critical areas of rural development, education, skill enhancement, healthcare, financial literacy, and the environment, we aim to support sustainable and inclusive growth in the communities in which we operate," Kaizad Bharucha, Deputy Managing Director of HDFC Bank, said. Bharucha, who also looks after CSR and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) functions in addition to his other responsibilities, said the bank has been able to make an impact in the lives of over 10 crore Indians so far. Through a participatory, bottom-up, and consultative approach, Parivartan focuses on creating sustainable impact within marginalised communities, especially women, it said. The initiatives have facilitated the creation of over 9 lakh women entrepreneurs and the formation and revival of more than 10,000 Self-Help Groups (SHGs), it added. Additionally, the bank's skilling programmes have trained over 3 lakh youth, providing essential vocational skills to enhance employability and create sustainable livelihoods. In its efforts towards promoting education, it has trained over 20 lakh teachers and supported 2.86 lakh schools, benefitting more than 2 crore students through remedial classes, learning camps, and scholarships for underprivileged children, it added.

Tata Play's revenue dips 4.3% in FY24

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Leading DTH operator Tata Play (erstwhile known as Tata Sky) has reported widening of its consolidated loss to Rs 353.9 crore, as revenue from operations declined 4.32 per cent to Rs 4,304.62 crore in the financial year ended March 31, according to financial data accessed by business intelligence platform Tofler. In FY23, the company had reported a net loss of Rs 105.25 crore and its revenue from operations stood at Rs 4,499.19 crore. Total expenses of Tata Play, in which Tata Sons now owns 50 per cent share, has increased 1.47 per cent to Rs 4,760.55 crore in FY24. Earlier, it stood at Rs 4,691.25 crore for the financial year ended in March, 2023. Tata Play's total revenue in FY24 also declined 4.47 per cent to Rs 4,327.07 crore. Earlier, the total revenue was at Rs 4,529.97 crore a year ago. On a standalone basis, Tata Play's revenue from operations also declined 6.07 per cent to Rs 3,982.57 crore for the financial year ended



on March 31, 2024. It was at Rs 4,240.04 crore in FY23. After Tata Sons, Network Digital Distribution Services FZ - LLC (NDDS) and TS Investments Ltd are the second biggest shareholders of the company owning 20 per cent share respectively in the company. Baytree Investments (Mauritius) Pte owns 10 per cent in Tata Play. The direct-to-home service provider is not a publicly-listed entity. It has earlier received the nod from the capital market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO). However, it was delayed due to "certain observations" from the Ministry of Information & Broadcasting (MIB). "The company was planning to get its shares listed on National Stock Exchange of

India Ltd and BSE Ltd, and the company had received approval from SEBI on the pre-filed DRHP," as per documents submitted by the company. However, despite an in-principle approval, the MIB in a letter to Tata Play on October 7, 2022, had asked for a change in the equity structure of the company. "In the aforesaid letter, the MIB had mentioned certain observations which states that the company is apparently in violation of the DTH guidelines," Tata Play said. As per the management, the company had obtained prior approval from the MIB and the Foreign Investment Promotion Board (FIPB) for the existing share structure. According to Tata Play, the company has not violated DTH guidelines, it said. "The company had filed a suitable reply dated November 8, 2022 in response to the aforesaid letter from the MIB, on which the reply from the MIB is awaited," it said. Currently, Tata Sons and TS Investments are the two promoters of Tata Play.

Paytm April-June quarter loss widens

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Fintech firm One97 Communications, which owns Paytm brand, on Friday said its loss has widened to Rs 840 crore in the quarter ended June 30, primarily due to continued impact of restrictions on Paytm Payments Bank Ltd. The company had posted a loss of Rs 358.4 crore in the same period a year ago, according to a regulatory filing by the company. The consolidated revenue of Paytm declined 33.48 per cent to Rs 1,639.1 crore during the reported quarter, from Rs 2,464.2 crore in the same period a year ago. Paytm spokesperson attributed the widening of loss and decline in revenue primarily to the disruption in business due to restrictions imposed on associate company Paytm Payments Bank Limited (PPBL) by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). "There were three factors which have led to this (decline in revenue and widening of loss) which are primarily disruption on account of PPBL products like Wallet. We stopped using



Wallet and some of the products," the spokesperson said. The company also temporarily stopped some of the products on which regulators may have concern at an industry-level. "We temporarily stopped a lot of those products and those products are in the process of starting. The third (factor) is that because of the disruption, our merchant base and GMV (gross merchandise value) came down and that has an impact on the profitability overall," the spokesperson said. Paytm's GMV declined by 9.1 per cent from Rs 4.69 lakh crore on a quarter-on-quarter

there is now improvement in the company's operating matrix including GMV, device merchant, recovery in loan distribution business as well as cost optimization. "We are going to be very sharp in terms of cost optimisation. We have communicated that the employee cost has reduced by 9 per cent quarter-on-quarter in line with what we have said in last quarter. "There were certain one-time items in this quarter that will come down sharply in the next quarter. The combination of these factors will lead to financial improvement," the spokesperson said. The employee benefit cost declined to Rs 798.4 crore, from Rs 970 crore on a year-over-year basis and from Rs 966 crore in March 2024 quarter. Paytm reported a 5 per cent increase in average number of sales employees on YoY basis to 31,607 in the reported quarter, compared to 28,479 in June 2023 quarter. The number, however, declined by 13 per cent on a quarter-on-quarter basis. On a year-on-year (YoY) basis, however, Paytm reported GMV of Rs 4.3 lakh crore, up 5 per cent in the reported quarter. The GMV from continued business recorded a 27 per cent jump on YoY basis to Rs 4.26 lakh crore, from Rs 3.36 lakh crore, despite a 15 per cent decline in monthly transacting users on a YoY basis to 7.8 crore. According to the spokesperson, the first quarter has absorbed the impact of PPBL disruption and the performance of companies will take off from the second quarter onwards. The spokesperson said that

Building AI-powered Wipro with human-centric approach: Rishad Premji

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
IT company Wipro is continuously making efforts towards maximising AI's potential and placing a human-centric approach at the forefront of AI development, company's Chairman Rishad A Premji said. Addressing the company's 78th annual general meeting on Thursday, Premji said artificial intelligence is central to the company's growth strategy, and an "AI-powered Wipro" is on the way. "There's been a significant shift in how businesses perceive AI, especially Generative AI. What was once a topic of curiosity has now become a cornerstone of long-term strategies for creating value. AI presents a distinct opportunity to reshape industries, reimagine experiences, enhance efficiencies, and foster innovation. Our goal is to lead this transformation for our clients as well as within our own organization," he said. The company continued to make significant investments in its AI360 strategy throughout FY24, he said. "We are building an AI-powered Wipro, embedding responsible and secure AI into every solution, tool, and process across our organisation. We have broadened our strategic partnerships with leading AI players, such as Microsoft, Google, Amazon and

NVIDIA. Additionally, we've launched our own AI platform through our innovation arm, Lab45, to speed up AI adoption," Premji said. He further said Wipro has partnered with academic institutes like IIT and IISc because developing talent is a crucial and key element for the success of company's AI strategy. "These partnerships are helping us drive research, strengthen the AI talent pipeline, and upskill our workforce. We have trained over 225,000 employees, including me, in GenAI fundamentals. An additional 30,000 employees have received advanced training tailored to their specific roles," Premji added. He said Wipro has incorporated Gen-AI in its internal processes to boost productivity. "For example, WiNow, our AI-powered enterprise chatbot for self-service is used by nearly all our employees, and has processed around 6.5 million queries. This has significantly boosted productivity in crucial tasks like approvals, onboarding, and other administrative functions," he said. Widespread AI adoption demands strong change management and a commitment to inclusivity, he added. Wipro has adopted a human-centred approach that will help it bridge the gap, build trust, and maximise AI's potential, he said.

The Cottage India Pavilion inaugurated

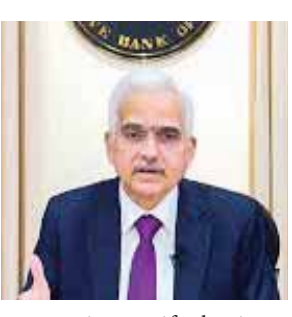


PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The Cottage participated in the Lifestyle Week (Tokyo) (3-5 July 2024) with 10 exhibitors from the Handloom and Handicraft sector. The India Pavilion set up by "the Cottage" was inaugurated by Madhusudan Ravindran Deputy High Commissioner, Embassy of India (Japan) in the presence of Manoj Lal, Managing Director, The Central Cottage Industries Corporation Ltd and Mr. Haime Suzuki, Global Head, Reed Exhibitions. The CCIC participation represented "India Pavilion" showcasing the strength of India in the Textiles sector in particular Handicraft and Handloom segment. The Lifestyle Week Tokyo is the world's leading B2B international trade fair for lifestyle consumer goods, handicrafts, textiles, and fashion in Japan. It had around 1200 No. of participants/exhibitors from 20 countries catering to Lifestyle segment. The CCIC display highlighted Embroidered Home Furnishings and others.

No plans to allow business houses to promote banks: RBI

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Governor Shaktikanta Das on Friday said the Reserve Bank does not have any plan to allow business houses to promote banks at present. Allowing corporate houses to promote banks exposes one to conflict of interest risks and related-party transactions, Das said, speaking at an event organized by the Financial Express here. "At this point, there is no thinking in that direction," Das said, replying to a specific query on whether there is any consideration to

allow business houses. The RBI had disqualified a long list of conglomerates from floating a lender in the last round of licensing around a decade ago. The issue was revived again in 2020, with a Reserve Bank of India (RBI) working group supporting it, given the potential to get the capital for helping meet the country's growth aspirations. Underlining that banks are different from other businesses, he said experience worldover has shown potential conflicts of interest and issues relating to related-party



transactions, if business houses are allowed. India also had business houses engaged in banking fray, Das said, speaking about the time before bank nationalization in the late 1960s. "Experience world over has

shown that it will be very difficult to monitor or to regulate and prevent related-party transactions. The risks involved are very high," Das said. He said, while the economy needs the resources to grow, we do not necessarily require more banks to achieve the aspirations. "What India needs is not proliferation in the number of banks, India needs sound banks, healthy banks, well governed banks which we feel will be able to mobilize savings throughout the country through technology and meet the credit requirements," he said. Das said that licensing of universal banks has been made on tap and added that applications are welcome. Das said that the private credit space is growing rapidly and emerging as an attractive investment avenue for those with high risk appetite at present, and added the RBI is monitoring developments there. "While risks appear to be contained at present, it is important to bear in mind that vulnerabilities and interconnectedness in these markets can amplify negative shocks and pose financial stability concerns," he said.

Green certified office buildings command 12-14% premium in rental values: Vestian

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Office buildings that are green certified command a 12-14 per cent premium in rental values over normal properties, as demand for environment-friendly workspace is high from multinational companies (MNCs), according to Vestian. In its latest report 'India Office Market-Sustaining the Sustainability', real estate consultant Vestian has mentioned that green-certified projects command premium in rental values. "Green-certified buildings command 12-14 per cent premium on average over non-green buildings. This shows that developers benefit from investing more in sustainable development, as they can charge a premium for the same. These buildings are the first choice for large MNCs due to their global agenda to



become carbon neutral," the report said. The consultant noted that these buildings provide sustainable amenities, improved air quality, eco-friendly design and materials, and lower energy consumption. Bengaluru leads the pack with a premium of 23-25 per cent in rental values of green-certified buildings, with Chennai and Hyderabad following at 12-14 per cent and 13-15 per cent, respectively. Developers in Mumbai and Pune charge 8-12 per cent

premium in rentals for green-certified buildings compared to non-certified areas. In Delhi-NCR, the green-certified buildings command a 6-8 per cent premium while the number is 3-4 per cent in Kolkata. "This suggests a strong focus on sustainability in these tech hubs, where companies are willing to pay a premium to promote environmental responsibility and enhance employee well-being," the consultant said. Out of the total 888.5 million square feet of Grade-A office space stock across seven major cities in the country, Vestian highlighted that 577.7 million square feet or 65 per cent of Grade-A office space is green-certified. As India's office market attracts global occupiers, developers are increasingly prioritising international certifications.

Majority of Indian employees experience burnout due to work-related stress: Report

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Around 62 per cent of Indian employees experience burnout, triple the global average of 20 per cent, due to work-related stress and poor work-life balance, as per a report by digital healthcare platform MediBuddy and CII. The report, which was released on Friday, also highlighted that a massive number of job seekers consider employee wellness programmes crucial in their decision-making process. The report 'Mapping India's Corporate Health and Wellness Landscape' emphasised the importance of customised wellness programmes based on employee demographics and personalised prevention

strategies. As per the report, 71 per cent of employees spend an average of 5 per cent of their annual income on out-of-pocket healthcare expenses. This underscores the need for more comprehensive employer-provided healthcare options, the report suggested. It also found that only 24 per cent of employees feel satisfied with their current workplace health options. This indicates a significant gap between employee needs and existing corporate wellness programmes, it noted. The report emphasises the wellness programmes that extend benefits to their loved ones, including dependents, and offer convenient healthcare options like tele consultations.



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

THE ART OF CONTRASTS

Experience the resonance of nature in Seema Pandey's exhibition, "Between these lines in this space I root and grow" captured through the lens of black and white contrasts, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

At the Prestigious Shridharani Art Gallery, Artist Seema Pandey's solo exhibition, "Between These Lines in This Space I Root and Grow," invites viewers into a meditative exploration of black and white contrasts. This collection, a culmination of two years of dedicated artistry, threads personal and environmental landscapes into a visual journey of tranquility and contemplation. Through these lines, Seema Pandey weaves moments, memories and dreams, creating an ever-evolving narrative of being and becoming. The exhibition features over 100 miniature and larger artworks that reflect Pandey's keen observations and creative explorations. Each piece is a tribute to her holistic and free-spirited approach to art, drawing inspiration from diverse surroundings, memories and imaginations. The intriguing title, "Between These Lines in This Space I Root and Grow," encapsulates the essence of her journey, merging the personal with the universal, the immediate with the timeless. The concept behind this exhibition is deeply rooted in Seema's acute observation and



awareness of her environment. Over two years, she meticulously curated this project, with a two-month execution phase that saw her transforming mental images into artistic expressions. From coffee shops to her home surroundings, each locale provided a unique influence that was retrofitted into her studio work. This process resulted in a collection rich in techniques, autobiographical inputs and a celebration of the natural world. Seema Pandey's art is a harmonious blend of personal experiences and natural elements. She finds inspiration in everything around her, particularly nature. Trees, skies and weather changes are recurring motifs in her work, reflecting her deep connection to the

environment. Even indoor structures in her artworks are infused with elements of nature, highlighting her fascination with the organic world. This integration of autobiographical glimpses and natural themes creates a narrative that is both personal and universally relatable. One of the most striking aspects of this exhibition is Seema's use of black and white contrasts. This palette enhances the themes and emotions expressed in her artworks, creating a visual dialogue that is both bold and nuanced. The black and white tones bring out the subtleties of her subjects, allowing viewers to delve deeper into the layers of meaning within each piece. This choice of palette also underscores the exhibition's themes of

resilience and the human spirit, offering a stark yet serene visual experience. Seema's creative process is as captivating as her final pieces. She began with small format drawings and eventually transitioned to larger surfaces, maintaining the same style and technique. One notable piece is a depiction of a tree with flowers, created using thread. This meditative work invites viewers to contemplate the interconnectedness of nature and the human experience. The exhibition also features artworks that move away from box-like combinations to embrace circular motifs. These pieces explore themes of womanhood, personal history, and the fluidity of time, offering a dynamic contrast to the linear compositions and enriching the visual experience with movement and continuity. In addition to trees and circular motifs, Seema's exhibition includes depictions of rock formations, which serve as timekeepers of an orchestrated rhythm. These rocks, both stark and evocative, represent links to the past, present, and future. Seema's minimalist approach is evident in her use of thread and needle, which she

employs to decode a womanly story. These humble materials are transformed into evocative resources, guiding viewers to discover deeper sensibilities through the parallel lines of falling rain, the symmetry of bare trees, and the arrangement of flower forms. Seema Pandey's ability to correlate disparate content into a cohesive whole is a hallmark of her artistic prowess. Her exhibition fuses the vertical with the horizontal, the past with the future, creating a sanctum of art that is both contextual and unconventional. This approach allows viewers to engage with the artworks on multiple levels, uncovering new angles of contrasts and connections with each viewing. Seema Pandey's work is a power of art to reflect, discover and inspire. Through her intricate lines and thoughtful compositions, she invites us to see the world through her eyes, finding beauty and meaning in the spaces between. This exhibition is not just a display of artworks but a journey of discovery, where each piece offers a glimpse into the artist's soul and the endless possibilities of artistic expression.

A Celebration of Nature's Elegance

Laxmi Gupta's exhibition, "The Flower Always Sheds Its Fragrance," beautifully intertwines art and nature, highlighting the resilience and beauty of flowers, says **SAKSHI PRIYA**



Photos: Pankaj Kumar

Stepping into the serene ambience of Triveni Kala Sangam, visitors are transported into a world where art and nature intertwine seamlessly in Laxmi Gupta's latest exhibition, "The Flower Always Sheds Its Fragrance." This alluring showcase of artworks is an attestation to Gupta's deep-rooted admiration for the natural world, particularly the ethereal beauty of flowers and their profound impact on our environment and well-being. The exhibition unfolds like a poetic journey through lush landscapes and vibrant gardens, each artwork a tribute to Gupta's skillful portrayal of nature's splendor. Known for her mastery of color and texture, Gupta's paintings exude a sense of tranquility and wonder, inviting viewers to explore the intricate details and layered compositions that define her work. At the heart of Gupta's artistic exploration lies a profound connection to nature. Her fascination with flowers, sparked during the isolation of the COVID-19 lockdowns, blossomed into a series of paintings that reflect both personal introspection and a broader environmental message. Through her art, Gupta seeks to capture not just the visual allure of flowers but also their symbolic significance as bearers of hope, resilience and natural beauty. The inspiration behind her thematic focus on flowers, Gupta shared, "During COVID-19, confined to our homes, I found solace in daydreams of leisurely walks and the simple joy of gathering wildflowers. It was a time when everyone seemed gloomy and subdued, and the vibrancy of flowers became a beacon of positivity for me. They symbolise resilience and the ability to thrive despite adversity, which resonated deeply with me." Gupta's artistic journey is characterised by a harmonious blend of mediums and techniques.



From the precise lines of pen and ink to the fluidity of watercolors and the depth of acrylics, each artwork reflects her meticulous attention to detail and her commitment to exploring the interplay of light, color and form. This diversity of approaches ensures that each piece in the exhibition offers a unique perspective on the natural world, inviting viewers to contemplate its beauty from various angles. Central to Gupta's artistic philosophy is her belief in the transformative power of art. Beyond aesthetic pleasure, her paintings convey a subtle yet powerful message about the importance of environmental conservation and the symbiotic relationship between humanity and nature. By highlighting the delicate beauty of flowers and their role in sustaining biodiversity, Gupta encourages viewers to pause and reflect on the fragility of our natural surroundings and the urgency of preserving them for future generations. The exhibition not only showcases Gupta's technical prowess but also invites viewers on an emotional journey through her creative process. Each artwork tells a story, capturing fleeting moments of beauty and inviting contemplation on themes of growth, resilience

and the interconnectedness of all living things. Through her use of vibrant colors and intricate compositions, Gupta creates a visual narrative that celebrates the beauty of nature, inspiring viewers to reconnect with the natural world and appreciate its wonders. As visitors explore "The Flower Always Sheds Its Fragrance," they are greeted by a rich tapestry of emotions and sensations. Gupta's ability to evoke a sense of wonder and reverence for nature through her art is a witness to her skill as a storyteller and her deep-seated passion for the environment. Each painting serves as a window into Gupta's artistic soul, inviting viewers to experience the world through her eyes and discover the profound beauty that surrounds us all. Laxmi Gupta's exhibition is not merely a display of artistic talent but a celebration of nature's timeless elegance. Through her evocative paintings, Gupta invites us to pause, reflect and reconnect with the natural world, reminding us of the importance of preserving its beauty and diversity. "The Flower Always Sheds Its Fragrance" is a tribute to the enduring power of art to inspire, uplift and enrich a deeper appreciation for the wonders of our planet.

FILM REVIEW

Bad Newz: Fresh Trio Saves a Predictable Film

BY SAKSHI PRIYA

Buckle up for laughs with *Bad Newz*, a Bollywood comedy that throws everything at the wall and sees what sticks, resulting in a wild ride of humor and chaos. Directed by Anand Tiwari, the movie stars the charming Vicky Kaushal as Akhil Chadha, National crush Tripti Dimri as Saloni Bagga and everyone's favourite Ammy Virk as Gurbir Pannu. The film is a rollercoaster of craziness and hilarity, with a surprising plot that keeps you engaged from start to finish. The story centers on Saloni, who unexpectedly becomes pregnant without knowing who the father is. The plot takes a wild turn when a paternity test reveals that it is a case of heteropaternal superfecundation - a medical marvel you'll have to look up!

This twist sets the stage for a series of comedic events. The film's greatest strength lies in its humor. The script is sharp and witty, relying on well-timed deliveries from the cast. Discussing the plot's details would spoil the fun, but let's just say it follows a familiar Bollywood arc of love, marriage, divorce and (somewhat predictable) reconciliation. There's even a humorous nod to the famous American TV show *FRIENDS*, where an actor humorously quotes Rachel's (Jennifer Aniston) line, "No uterus, no opinion." Friends fans, keep an ear out for this familiar line delivered with perfect comedic timing. The movie is filled with references to old Bollywood songs and dialogues, which add nostalgic depth to the narrative. These elements are not just thrown in for the sake



of it, they add a layer of depth and connect with the audience on an emotional level. Director Anand Tiwari has skillfully integrated these elements into the narrative, making them feel integral to the story rather than mere add-ons. An unexpected appearance by Neha Sharma wows the audience and Pati Patni Aur Woh actress Ananya Pandey's special entry is an ironic and delightful surprise. Director Anand Tiwari balances comedy with

moments of genuine emotion, exploring themes such as dreams, relationships and familial bonds. Despite its comedic exterior, the movie subtly values these connections. Ammy Virk's performance deserves special mention. His comedic timing and on-screen presence add a lot to the film. The chemistry between Vicky Kaushal and Tripti Dimri is another highlight. They bring a natural ease to their roles that makes their on-screen relationship believable and engaging. Kaushal, in particular, looks incredibly charismatic and handles the comedic elements with finesse. However, it's crucial to manage your expectations. *Bad Newz* might be light-hearted and entertaining, but it doesn't aim to be anything

groundbreaking. Unlike its possible namesake, *Good Newz*, this film isn't a game-changer. It's only the fresh pairing of the trio that saves *Bad Newz* and shines in an otherwise completely predictable film. Despite all its positives, *Bad Newz* is best approached with tempered expectations. It's a fun ride but it won't leave a lasting impact. It is a delightful comedy that entertains with its sharp humor, nostalgic references and charming performances. The film delivers on its promise of comedy but doesn't aim to be anything more. It's a one-time watch, but don't expect too much or your *Bad Newz* movie date might end up being a bad date for you. So grab your popcorn, sit back and enjoy this fun-filled ride, just don't take it too seriously. **Rating:** 3/5

BOOK REVIEW

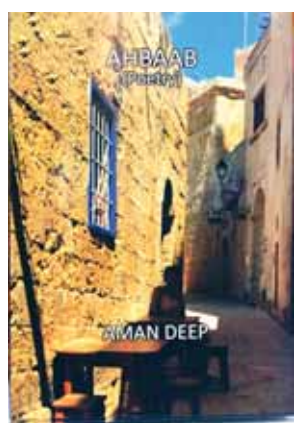
A Triglot Journey Through Poetry and Emotion

Experience the profound depth of human connections in AMAN DEEP'S triglot poetry collection, 'AHBAAB', says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

AHBAAB by the Poet Aman Deep Sidhu Chatha is an eloquent collection of poems that grub around into the rich concept of "Ahbaab" - a term encompassing friends, lovers and loved ones. Presented in a unique triglot format, this collection features couplets in Urdu, Hindi and English, following the precedent set by Deep's earlier work, *Ifsha*. The translations aim to capture the essence of the original verses, allowing for a nuanced and interpretative reading experience rather than a strict word-for-word approach. The publication of *Ahbaab* by Ferntree Publishing attests to the literary value of this collection. The book is thoughtfully divided into sections, each exploring various facets of

human emotions and experiences. Titles such as SHAAAYARI AUR HUM, ISHQ, SHOKHI AUR NAZAAKAT and GUFTGU guide readers through themes of love, beauty, conversation and spirituality. Each poem within these sections resonates with profound emotional undertones, blending traditional poetic forms with contemporary sensibilities. For instance, SHAAAYARI AUR HUM reflects on the nature of poetry itself, capturing the poet's humility and the intrinsic beauty of poetic expression. ISHQ highlights the universality of love while acknowledging the rarity of true passion and SHOKHI AUR NAZAAKAT explores the complexities of friendships and relationships, emphasising

the delicate balance between personal adornment and the nurturing of meaningful connections. GUFTGU celebrates the beauty of conversation, underscoring the joy and liberation found in sincere dialogues. The collection also goes into spiritual and philosophical realms. Sections like BANDAGI examine the profound relationship between the divine and the human, illustrating the poet's sense of being cherished by a higher power. Meanwhile, ROOH KI BAATEN offers reflections on the soul's journey, emphasising its timeless nature and the mysteries that lie beyond human comprehension. Deep's poetic style is characterised by its simplicity and depth, employing everyday language



AHBAAB (Poetry)
Author: Aman Deep | Publisher: Ferntree
₹ 500.00

imbued with profound insights, making her poetry both accessible and thought-provoking. The triglot format



enriches the reader's experience, enabling an appreciation of the lyrical beauty of Urdu poetry alongside the Hindi and English translations. Deep's interpretative freedom is evident as she revisits her original thoughts, presenting them with renewed clarity and emotion. *Ahbaab* is a beautiful journey of shayari that reaches deep into the reader's heart. It

directly captures the essence of the reader's experience, making every section a magical reflection of human emotion. Each piece of poetry in the book brings to light the significance of those who are no longer part of one's life, showcasing the stages of emotions that words often fail to describe. Aman Deep's heart and mind are palpably present in her work, revealing the challenges and beauty of writing a collection so deeply rooted in human connection. The book, originally written in Urdu, carries a profound resonance with the human mind and heart, with each line reflecting a deeper connection. The translations into English and Hindi adding another layer of depth to the work. Each chapter establishes a

profound connection with every line of the poem, touching the reader's heart and evoking wonder at the magic embedded in the words. This intricate interplay of emotion and language makes *Ahbaab* a remarkable and unforgettable literary journey. In addition, it is a poignant and introspective compilation that beautifully captures the myriad shades of human emotions and experiences. The triglot presentation enhances its uniqueness, making it a significant contribution to contemporary poetry. With themes ranging from love and beauty to spirituality and philosophical musings, *Ahbaab* invites readers to embark on a reflective journey, enriching an appreciation for the simple yet profound

moments in life. Deep's authentic poetic voice resonates deeply, making *Ahbaab* a must-read for poetry enthusiasts and anyone interested in exploring the depths of human connections. Arguably, *Ahbaab* stands as a tribute to Aman Deep's literary prowess and her ability to weave complex human emotions into poetic forms. The collection's unique triglot format, combined with its profound thematic explorations, ensures that it will leave a lasting impression on readers, inviting them to reflect on their own connections and experiences. This is a collection not to be missed, offering a rich and resonant journey through the landscape of human emotions.
Photo: Pankaj Kumar

INDIA WOMEN'S TEAM WILL WIN ICC TROPHY SOON, SAYS SNEH

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Rohit Sharma and Co's recent triumph in the T20 World Cup has given the Indian women's team much-needed belief and confidence to continue its pursuit of winning a maiden ICC trophy, says the side's spin-bowling all-rounder Sneha Rana.

While India are once again favourites to retain the title in the Women's Asia Cup, starting in Sri Lanka on Friday, the team's true test will be in the T20 World Cup in October and next year's ODI World Cup which they host.

Rana believes India, who have tripped over near the final hurdle a few times, have worked very hard to win a global competition and glory is not far away.

"The Indian women's cricket team, if you look at the past 2-3 years, they are doing their best," Rana told PTI in an exclusive interview on Friday.

"For (winning) the ICC trophy, let's take the men's (team's example), it took almost 10 years to get the trophy. They have been preparing and working hard for it for a long time.

"To achieve something big, it will not happen overnight. It will take time. It will take a lot

of sacrifices, a lot of struggle, a lot of things in between. But eventually, we will get there," Rana said.

Fielding has been an area of concern which has been acknowledged by the players and coaches, but Rana says there is no lack in intent in order to get better.

"When we play N number of matches, the chances of errors are more. But it doesn't mean that someone is bad at it. Obviously, as a player, when you are on the field, you want to always do your best for your country," she said.

"No one is there to say that it's okay, it will happen (ho jayega). (But) it could also be a matter of a bad day for someone."

"As far as ICC trophies are concerned, for big events, the more matches we play, the more experience we will get," Rana said.

Having made her debut in 2014, Rana had to wait for more than seven years for playing her first Test. Now, the right-arm off-spinner looks back proudly for having added three more to her kitty.

"I'm glad I got the opportunity. It had been a while, right? The scenario for Indian women's Test cricket is changing for good. The number of Tests we're getting to play now, it's

'EVEN MEN'S TEAM HAD TO WAIT MORE THAN 10 YEARS'



the best opportunity for players. "The inclusion of multi-day format in domestic cricket, that is also a big step from the BCCI to take this forward," Rana said. For a team which didn't play any 'home' Tests for nine long years since 2014, Rana credited players' fitness and endurance as the team won each of the three Tests it has played since December 2023. "It's a matter of mindset. Obviously, you've been playing

cricket for so long, the 50-overs and 20 overs. But the long formats that we used to have, the multi-days, that we played was last in 2018," she said.

"You have to be on the field for four days, you need endurance for that. Fitness is very important and as a senior player, it's (even) more important because you have to be there all the time," said Rana, who took a 10-for against South Africa earlier this month in the Chennai Test.

"You have to guide your youngsters as well. It's a bit challenging. But lastly, it's all about the mindset," she said.

The Women's Premier League has made the Indian players busier than before but its versatile nature will help in the longer run, Rana said.

"Since WPL came, we have become a bit more busy. I think the busier, the better. Cricket has got more exposure since WPL came. The match exposure is always good for a player.

"The versatility that WPL brings on the table by sharing dressing rooms with the overseas players. (The) new-found talent of the country, (will bring) a refreshing change to women's cricket," she said. However, Rana faces the

challenge of winning a spot back in the white-ball side as she was not included for the Asia Cup campaign.

"I won't lie. It was a little heartbreaking to be dropped from the team. You want to play for India, be it Test cricket or white-ball cricket," she said.

"But at the same time, it has developed a hunger in me to rejoin the T20 format with my team or the 50-overs game. I'm eagerly waiting for the opportunity," she said.

"I know I have it in me and I have penned down my manifestation (too)," said Rana, who has played 25 T20Is and 27 ODIs.

Rana also appreciated the fact that incumbent head coach Amol Muzumdar is getting a longer run than some of his predecessors.

"Longevity and consistency in the side definitely helps, be it in the regards of coach or a player. With the amount of time one spends with the team, the knowledge about the player and the bonding within, that automatically increases," Rana said.

"He knows each and every player, their strengths... And how he can use that particular player in a match. At which moment, when and where he can use that player... He knows everything," Rana added.

I had skills but Gautam changed my mindset: Harshit

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Competence was not a problem but Harshit Rana, by his own admission, struggled with the confidence part before Gautam Gambhir entered the picture and forced him to face his "fears".

The 22-year-old rookie pacer is on cloud nine right now after being picked for next month's ODI series against Sri Lanka.

To announce his joy to the world, he posted a picture on Instagram in which he was seen lifting his equally jubilant father. But when it came to giving credit to those who shaped him, Rana was clear that "Gauti Bhaiyya" would always be "above everyone else".

"Delhi mein dil toot sakta hai, par humne kabhi hausla nahi haaraa (Delhi can break your heart but I never lost hope)," Rana said after learning about his maiden India call-up.

"I believed in working hard but whenever I used to get hurt after being overlooked in age-group teams, I would sit in my room and start sobbing. My father Pradeep never ever gave up hope," he told PTI in an interview.

The bowler from Delhi's South Extension, who endured a tough time at the junior level, often overlooked,



had finally made it. And all it took for him to be in national reckoning was one stellar IPL season of 19 wickets in Kolkata Knight Riders' triumphant campaign this year.

"If I have to name three people whom I am indebted to in this beautiful journey of mine, then it is my father for his efforts, my personal coach Amit Bhandari sir (former India and Delhi pacer) and above everyone else, Gauti bhaiyya (Gautam Gambhir),"

Rana said. Gambhir was the mentor of KKR this season before taking over as India coach from Rahul Dravid, following the country's T20 World Cup triumph in the West Indies. Rana said his senior state-mate has been a pillar of support ever since he came in contact with him.

"If my outlook towards the game has changed, a lot of it has got to do with Gauti bhaiyya's presence in the KKR

dressing room and how he changed my mindset. At the elite level, you require skills but more than skills, you require the heart to handle the pressure.

"Gauti bhaiyya would always tell me 'Mere ko tere pe trust hai. Tu match jeetake aayega'. (I trust you, you can win the match)," Rana recalled one of his interactions with the firebrand former opener, who is known to speak his mind. Rana had started on a bright note in 2022, when he played seven Ranji Trophy games for Delhi and got 28 wickets but since then, injuries prevented him from playing a lot of red-ball games.

However, in white-ball cricket, he has been phenomenal for Delhi in the Vijay Hazare Trophy, with 22 wickets in 14 games and 28 in 25 T20 matches. Playing at the Eden Gardens in front of 60,000 people, he nailed those block-hole deliveries, wide yorkers and slow bouncers. So how has he managed to back his skills under pressure?

"If you ask about the pressure part, it is Gautam Gambhir's advice. He would say, 'what's the worst thing that will happen? You will get hit and we can lose the match. But if you don't face your fears, how will you overcome them?'

"There will always be a new day, new match and things will fall in place.

That's what you train for," said the lanky player, who trained under Bhandari and Narinder Singh Negi in Delhi's Players' Academy.

BHANDARI HONED SKILLS: "If you talk about my skill-set, then Bhandari sir and Negi sir have been my personal coaches for past two years," he said.

Bhandari, a Delhi stalwart, who played a few ODIs for India between 2000 to 2004, narrated an interesting story. "I didn't know who this boy was. In fact, when he came to me, he had not played for KKR but had played Ranji Trophy. He only called me up and said, 'sir, can you train me?'" Bhandari, who is an assistant coach with Gujarat Titans, recalled.

"The first day he came, I didn't give him a new ball but an old ball and told him the areas (he needed to bowl) along with an instruction. Just bowl and don't look at me or come to me. If I feel, I will call you."

Bhandari was impressed by what he saw and decided to mentor the bowler.

"What I saw was a nice run-up but once he reached the crease, after load-up, everything needed a bit of work. The non-bowling hand, alignment and he was ready to work," he said. Bhandari feels that Rana has the potential to do well at the international level.



Back from brink: India hockey player Sukhjeet eyes dream Olympic debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Six years ago, a back injury had left his right leg temporarily paralysed but Sukhjeet Singh overcame the "toughest" phase of his life to earn a spot in the Olympic-bound Indian men's hockey squad and is determined to prove his worth in the Games beginning July 26.

The 28-year-old forward will be competing in his maiden Olympics.

"Playing in the Olympics has always been a dream for me and my family. It's the pinnacle of any athlete's career, and I am honoured to have this opportunity," Sukhjeet, who made his India debut in 2022, said in a Hockey India (HI) release.

"I believe my hard work and dedication have paid off. Now, I am determined to fulfil my role in the team with excellence and repay the trust of my coach and teammates by giving my all in Paris."

The Jalandhar-born Sukhjeet began playing hockey at the age of six, inspired by his father Ajit Singh, a former hockey player for Punjab Police. Despite the early start, his path to the senior Indian team was not an easy one.

In 2018, Sukhjeet was included in core probables camp for the senior team, but a freak back injury resulted in temporary paralysis of his right leg, putting his dream on hold.

"That period was one of the toughest times of my life. Being bedridden for almost five months was physically and mentally draining. I couldn't walk, let alone play hockey, and even the simplest tasks like eating by myself became impossible.

"Each day felt like my dream of

playing hockey was slipping further away, and it was incredibly disheartening," he recalled.

Sukhjeet said his family, especially father's, unwavering support and belief in his potential kept him going at a time when he "felt like giving up."

"...His refusal to let me lose hope was crucial in helping me get back on my feet. His determination to see me back on the field was infectious, and it gave me the strength to push through the pain and challenges," he said.

After recovering from the injury, Sukhjeet finally donned the coveted blue jersey against Spain during the 2021-22 FIH Pro League season, marking his debut with a goal.

Over the past two years, Sukhjeet has showcased his remarkable talent and consistency, scoring 20 goals in 70 matches that he played for the country.

He played a key role in the 2023 FIH Hockey World Cup in Bhubaneswar, striking three goals in six games. He was also a part of the gold-medal winning teams at the Asian Champions Trophy in Chennai and the Hangzhou Asian Games last year.

Recently, Sukhjeet contributed significantly in the FIH Hockey Pro League, netting five goals.

"The last two years have been incredibly rewarding for me. Every match has been a learning experience, pushing me to improve and contribute more to the team's success," he said.

"My focus is now entirely on the Paris Olympics, and I am determined to give my best performance to help our team achieve the highest honours."



Nadal comes from 4-1 down in 2nd set to beat Norrie, reaches QF of Nordea Open in Sweden

AP ■ BASTAD (SWEDEN)

Rafael Nadal recovered from a tumble and a 4-1 deficit in the second set to beat fifth-seeded Cameron Norrie 6-4, 6-4 in the second round of the Nordea Open.

Nadal fell over in the first game of the second set after attempting to slide on the clay, and needed treatment on a couple of bleeding scrapes. He then went a break down before winning the last five games of the match to reach his first quarterfinal since January.

"Great feelings, it's been a while without playing on the tour since Roland Garros and I had a chance to compete against a great player like Cameron," Nadal said.

"It's part of the journey today. I haven't been competing very often so matches like today help and holding the pressure on the opponent for the whole

game is something I need to improve on because I haven't played enough."

Nadal is playing at the tournament in Sweden for the first time since he won the title as a 19-year-old in 2005 as he prepares for the Olympic tournament on clay at Roland Garros in Paris.

He beat Leo Borg, the son of Swedish tennis legend Bjorn Borg, in the first round on Tuesday. That was his first singles match since he lost in the first round of the French Open to Alexander Zverev. He teamed up with Casper Ruud on Monday to win a first-round doubles match.

The 38-year-old Nadal skipped Wimbledon as he didn't want to switch surface to grass and then back to clay and risk injury. He has been dealing with hip and abdominal injuries over the past 1 1/2 years.

ESFI announces qualifiers to select Indian team for Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Esports Federation of India (ESFI) on Friday opened registrations for the National Esports Championship 2024 (NES24), which will serve as the qualifiers for the esports event at the 6th Asian Indoor and Martial Arts Games in Thailand's Chonburi.

Organised by the Olympic Council of Asia (OCA), the 6th

AIMAG will witness 36 sports plus two demonstration sports. Having been upgraded into a full-fledged medal sport, the esports event at the AIMAG will be held in its entirety at Chonburi's Central Sriracha from November 23 to 28 and will feature three mobile titles - Mobile Legend Bang Bang (Female Category, Team Event), Arena of Valor (Open Category, Team Event), and eFootball (Open Category,

Individual Event). India will compete in the eFootball mobile category only as AOV and MLBB are banned in the country.

The NES24 will be held in the first week of August as an online event (quarterfinals onwards will be streamed live on its YouTube channel) and will present players from India with a chance to demonstrate their skills in the eFootball mobile title.

The selected players will get to train at the venue ahead of the continental games. The 6th AIMAG will commence on November 21, two days before the esports event kicks off, and run until November 30.

The eFootball mobile category will hold group stage matches on November 23 and 24, followed by the playoffs on November 26, and the final, gold medal round on November 27.

One lakh athletes to be identified within 100 days under KIRTI, says Mandaviya

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sports Minister Mansukh S Mandaviya on Friday launched the second phase of the KIRTI project with an aim to identify one lakh young athletes within 100 days, for support.

He felt the nationwide talent hunt under Khelo India Rising Talent Identification (KIRTI) will prove to be a stepping stone to making India one of the top five nations in the Olympic Games by 2047.

"India is full of diversity and potential. There has never been a shortage of brainpower, manpower, or talent in India," said Mandaviya after launching the second phase of the programme at the Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium here.

"Not just the cities, but even in our far-flung areas like the North-East, Coastal,



Himalayan and tribal areas can have a quality sportsperson there."

In the third Phase, the KIRTI program will include all 20 disciplines of the Khelo India scheme. The first phase of KIRTI was launched in Chandigarh on March 12 this year.

"We need to have a steady stream of these

high-performing assets and that's where KIRTI, a stepping stone to sporting excellence, comes into play.

"Everyone will be given opportunities to develop their sports skills, whether they live in a village or a city, and whether they come from a poor background or otherwise."

In Delhi, Sports Authority of India (SAI) shall conduct assessment of over 25000 MCD students in 12 zones and cover 5 major disciplines: Athletics, Football, Volleyball, Kabaddi, and Kho-Kho, for almost one month.

Addressing school-going children, who attended the launch event, Mandaviya said, "Among you, there will certainly be an Olympic champion. I appreciate the fact that your parents have come and are backing you to play sports."

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