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FOR 4TH DAY

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## INDIA Bloc protests over Budget 'bias'

## No State ignored in Budget, Opposition trying to mislead, claims Sitharaman

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■  
NEW DELHI

Opposition parties resorted to vehement protest in and out of Parliament on Wednesday over the alleged discrimination against Opposition-ruled States in the Union Budget. MPs belonging to the INDIA Bloc staged protest in Parliament premises during the day and also walked out from the Rajya Sabha while heated exchange of words between the ruling benches were noticed when issues like Article 356, Emergency cropped up. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman termed the allegations by Opposition benches "outrageous" and said all the States never found a mention in any of the previous Budgets, including those presented by the Congress. Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the Budget is an "assault on the sanctity of India's federal structure". Ruling BJP dismissed the Congress charge of the Union Budget being "discriminatory" towards Opposition-ruled States and asserted that every State and section has been



INDIA Bloc MPs stage a protest in Parliament premises over alleged discrimination in the Union Budget 2024, during the Monsoon Session, in New Delhi, on Wednesday PTI

taken care of by the Modi Government. No State ignored in Budget, Opposition trying to mislead, said Sitharaman. In the protest in Parliament premises besides Rahul, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress Parliamentary Party chief Sonia Gandhi, Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, several MPs of the Congress, TMC, Samajwadi Party, DMK and the Left joined the protest held on the steps leading up to the Makar Dwar of Parliament. Sharing a picture of the protest on his WhatsApp channel, Rahul said, "Today, along with INDIA janbandhan MPs, protested against NDA's 'Kursi Bachao Budget' in Parliament House premises." Further, to continue with protest, Congress Chief Ministers and other non-BJP led CM of States like Jharkhand, West Bengal, Delhi, Punjab will be boycotting the NITI Aayog meeting scheduled for July 27. Led by Congress, Opposition staged a walkout from the Rajya Sabha.

## Jail or jahannum for terrorists, says Nityanand in Parliament



Security personnel stand guard during an encounter with terrorists in Trimukha area of Sopore in North Kashmir, on Wednesday PTI

MOHIT KANDHARI ■  
JAMMU/NEW DELHI

The Centre on Wednesday sent a stern message that terrorists active in Jammu and Kashmir region will either land in jail or be sent to 'jahannum' (hell). Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and the entire Defence core team held series of review meeting for constant Jammu terror attacks in recent times, Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai asserted in Parliament that the Modi Government has zero tolerance for terrorism. A terrorist was neutralised while one more Indian Army jawan sacrificed his life in the ongoing encounter with terrorists in the North Kashmir district of Kupwara

on Wednesday. The braveheart has been identified as Naik (GNR) Dilwar Khan. This is the third incident of terrorist violence in the last three days in Jammu and Kashmir. The house of a Shaurya Chakra awardee was targeted by terrorists in the Khawas tehsil of Rajouri on Monday while an Army jawan sacrificed his life in the line of duty thwarting a major infiltration bid along the line of control in the Krishna Ghati sector of Poonch on Tuesday. "The Modi Government has zero tolerance for terrorism. We will end terrorism. They (terrorists) will be either in jail or jahannum... I want to assure the House. Terrorist activities witnessed recently will soon end. They

(terrorists) will not succeed in their design," Rai said in Parliament.

In the latest Rajouri incident, in the ensuing firefight, one terrorist was eliminated and a soldier received injuries who later succumbed to his injuries. A spokesman of the Chinara Corps said based on specific information the operation was launched by the Indian Army and Jammu and Kashmir police in the general area of Kowat, Kupwara on July 23. On July 24, suspicious movement was observed and challenged by vigilant troops, in response to which terrorists opened indiscriminate fire. The Government informed the Lok Sabha that in the past few days, 28 terrorists have been killed in Jammu and Kashmir and unfortunately some security personnel have also lost their lives. According to the Minister, security forces have killed about 900 terrorists in the region after the abrogation of Article 370 in 2019.

Between 2004-2014 when the UPA was ruling at the Centre, there were 7,217 incidents of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. The number came down to 2,259 from 2014, when the BJP was voted to power, and July 21 this year, Rai said. In 2019, the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir was bifurcated into the union territories of Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh.



## Jail, ₹10 lakh fine for paper leak in Bihar's new Bill

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
PATNA

The Bihar Assembly on Wednesday passed a Bill aimed at curbing the scourge of question paper leaks and other malpractices in recruitment tests conducted by the State. The Bihar Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Bill, 2024, was moved by state Parliamentary Affairs Minister Vijay Kumar Chaudhary and passed through voice vote amidst a walkout staged by the Opposition. The new legislation targets curbing malpractices in competitive examinations, including the leak of question papers, in the State which, incidentally, has also been at the centre of the NEET 2024 paper leak controversy. The Bill stipulates severe punishment for those involved in such malpractices, including a prison term of three to five years and a fine of ₹10 lakh.

## SC proposes panel for talks with farmers at Shambhu border

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Observing that there is a trust deficit between farmers and the Central Government, the Supreme Court on Wednesday proposed the constitution of an independent committee comprising eminent persons to reach out to the protesters at Shambhu border and address their demands, including a legal guarantee of MSP.

The top court directed the Punjab and Haryana Governments to suggest the names of suitable individuals for the committee and submit a proposal for removal of barricades on the National Highway while ordering a status quo on the border for a week.

A three-judge bench headed by Justice Surya Kant said there is a need for a "neutral umpire" who can inspire confidence between farmers and the Government.

"You have to take some steps to reach out to farmers. Why would they otherwise want to come to Delhi? You are sending Ministers from here and despite their best intentions there is



trust deficit," the bench also comprising Justices Dipankar Datta and Ujjal Bhuyan said.

"Let appropriate instructions be taken within a week. Till then let parties maintain status quo at the site to prevent flaring up of the situation at the Shambhu border," the bench said while postponing the matter after a week.

The top court was hearing the Haryana Government's plea challenging the High Court order asking it to remove within a week the barricades at the Shambhu border near Ambala where protesting farmers have been camping since February 13.

During the hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta submitted that earlier the roads were blocked against the three agricultural laws and now they have new demands.

The top court said the Centre has to examine the demands of the farmers as a welfare state. "Some demands may be genuine, others may not be acceptable," the bench said.



Rescue operations are underway at the site of a plane crash at Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, Nepal, on Wednesday PTI

## Eighteen killed in Nepal plane crash

PTI ■ KATHMANDU

A Nepalese private plane crashed and caught fire shortly after taking off from the Tribhuvan International Airport here on Wednesday, killing 18 people aboard, including a child, and seriously injuring the pilot — the only survivor. The Bombardier CRJ-200 aircraft of Saurya Airlines, carrying 19 people, including two crew members and technical staff of the airline, was bound for Pokhara International Airport for regular maintenance service when the accident occurred at 11.11 am (local time). "Shortly after takeoff from runway 02, the aircraft veered off to the right and crashed on the east side of the runway," said a statement issued by the

Civil Aviation Authority of Nepal.

It said rescue operations were initiated immediately and fire was brought under control. "One injured person (Captain Manish Ratna Shakya) was rescued and taken to the hospital, and 18 People were found dead," it added.

The aviation authority identified one of the passengers as a child named Adhiraj Sharma, who was the son of Manu Raj Sharma, a technician of Saurya Airlines. Sharma's wife Priza Khatriwad and their four-year-old son Adhiraj died in the crash.

A statement issued by the airline said that Priza and her son were initially identified as employees of the company, but it was later revealed that they were passengers.

## GNSS toll collection to make NH driving hassle-free

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■  
NEW DELHI

To provide seamless and barrier-free tolling experience on National Highways and Expressways, the Road and Transport Ministry has decided to initially implement global navigation satellite system (GNSS)-based toll collection system on pilot basis as an added facility along with FASTag. Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said pilot study with regard to GNSS-based user fee collection system has been done on Bengaluru-Mysore section of NH-275 in Karnataka and Panipat-Hisar section of NH-709 in Haryana. Gadkari said a stakeholder consultation through international workshop was



Representative Image

organised on June 25, 2024 and global expression of interest (EOI) was invited for wider industrial consultation on June 7, 2024 with last date of submission as July 22, 2024.

Replying to a separate question, he

said the master plan for National Highways to improve the logistics with provision of expressway/high speed highways has been prepared by the Road Ministry under PM GatiShakti Framework using transportation model with

analysis of data of e-way bills (GST), toll and traffic survey.

Responding to another question, the Minister said among all the National Highway projects that started about 10 years ago, 697 projects have gone beyond their original completion schedule.

Primary reasons for delay in NH projects are issues relating to land acquisition, statutory clearances, utility shifting, encroachment removal, law & order, financial crunch of contractor, poor performance of contractor and force majeure events like Covid-19 pandemic, heavy rainfall, floods, cyclone, landslides/avalanches etc, he added.

According to Gadkari, since 2014, NHAI has availed loan and other borrowings totalling ₹3.77 lakh crore for completion of projects / scheme entrusted with them.



## India's archers aim to strike Gold in Paris

PTI ■ PARIS

A different year and another Olympics, but for Indian archers, the target will be the same — fetching their first ever medal at the Games.

More or less regular at the Olympics since debuting back in 1988, the archers will kick off the nation's Paris campaign here on Thursday with the qualification rounds at the Les Invalides gardens here.

For the first time after London 2012, India will have a full six-member squad after both the men's and women's teams qualified on the basis of rankings. This means they will compete in all the five events.

Veterans Tarundeep Rai and Deepika Kumari, appearing in their fourth Olympics, will lead their young teammates, hoping to secure at least a top-10 finish in the qualification round to ensure a favourable draw.

Each archer will shoot 72 arrows and the scores in the qualification round of 128 athletes from 53 countries will decide the seeds for the main knockout competition beginning with the women's team finals on Sunday.

The qualifying round will be crucial for the Indians, who have often slipped in the seedings and ended up losing to heavyweights Korea, tipped to top the qualifications.

## Yearning for social media fame costs Spiderman dearly

SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

In an era where fleeting moments of fame on social media have become the obsession, many youngsters are resorting to dangerous stunts and rule-breaking to impress their followers on platforms like Instagram and Twitter. One such incident involved a 20-year-old "Spiderman" in Delhi, who was caught sitting on the bonnet of a car while making videos, showcasing the perilous lengths some will go for digital notoriety. According to officials on Wednesday, a fine of ₹ 26,000 was imposed for dangerous driving and other violations in the matter.

According to the police, they received a complaint on social media platform X about a Scorpio car seen on Dwarka road with a person dressed as



A 20-year-old man, sitting on a Scorpio car's bonnet and dressed as Spiderman landed in the police net on Wednesday

Spiderman on its bonnet. Police traced the car and located the occupants near Ramphal Chowk in Dwarka. The person in

the Spiderman costume was identified as Aditya, a resident of Najafgarh. The driver of the vehicle was identified as a 19-year

-old Gaurav Singh, a resident of Mahavir Enclave, a senior police officer said. However, this is not the first time

this young boy has used such means for gaining popularity on social media. Previously, he was arrested for performing stunts on a motorcycle, with no number plate or mirrors, in South West Delhi's Dwarka. After the reel went viral, the traffic police took cognisance and arrested him along with one other female who was dressed as Spiderwoman. The police issued a challan under Motor Vehicle Act. While one expected the culprits to be ashamed of flouting the law, the young Spiderman called his arrest a proud moment. Calling himself "Najafgarh Spiderman", he has taken to the streets of Delhi while donning his superhero attire many times. He runs an Instagram account called Indian Spidey Official, where he posts videos of his stunts. The boy's bio reads, "Your Friendly Neighbourhood Indian

Spidey" and the account has over 12,500 followers, with the viral videos getting more than one lakh likes. A quick scroll through his Instagram page shows the "Indian Spidey" playing badminton, riding a tractor and dancing on trending songs. Meanwhile, the owner and driver of the vehicle have been prosecuted for dangerous driving, driving without a pollution certificate, and not wearing a seat belt, with a possible maximum fine of ₹6,000 and/or imprisonment or both, the officer said. "The Delhi Traffic Police reiterates its commitment to ensuring road safety for all citizens. Such reckless behaviour on the roads will not be tolerated, and strict action will be taken against offenders to uphold the law and protect the lives of road users," an official said.

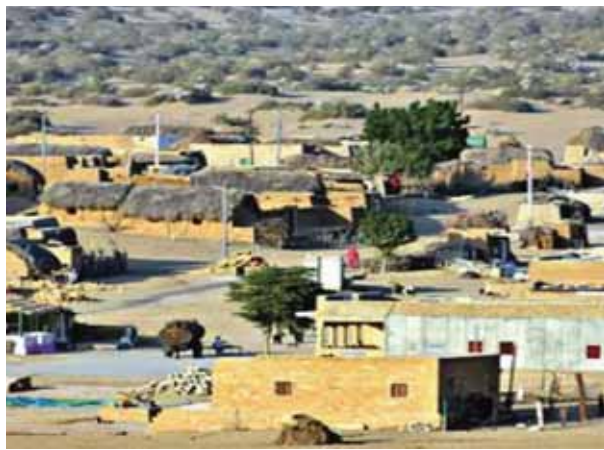




# Border villages get ₹1,050 cr to curb migration

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

As the Government continues its thrust on comprehensive development of villages located remote areas along the border with China, the Union Budget has allocated Rs 1,050 crore for the Vibrant Villages Programme (VVP) that will benefit select villages in 19 districts in Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim, Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh and Ladakh. The Government approved the VVP as a centrally-sponsored scheme on February 15, 2023, with an outlay of Rs 4,800 crore for 2022-23 to 2025-26 for development of these villages in 46 blocks abutting the northern border. The Budget, presented by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Tuesday, has earmarked Rs 1,050 crore for the VVP for 2024-25. The objective of the programme is comprehensive development of these villages to improve the quality of life



of people and thereby reversing out-migration, officials said. The VVP, which is being implemented by the Union Home Ministry, envisages focused areas of interventions for creation of opportunities for livelihood generation through promotion of agriculture, horticulture, tourism and cultural heritage, skill development and entrepreneurship,

development of co-operative societies for managing livelihood opportunities including agriculture, horticulture, cultivation of medicinal plants and herbs, road connectivity, housing and village infrastructure, energy including renewable energy, television and telecom connectivity and financial inclusion. One of the sectors identified for development is promotion

of tourism and culture by augmenting various tourism-related infrastructure, promoting community managed home stays, organising local fairs and festivals, promoting ecotourism, agro-tourism, wellness, wildlife, spiritual and adventure tourism and local cuisines. The VVP was conceived as an outcome-oriented programme with outcome indicators at three levels-village, household and individual beneficiary. Under the VVP, so far 136 border villages are being provided connectivity through 113 all-weather road projects at a cost of Rs 2,420 crore. Mobile 4G connectivity is being worked on rapidly in these areas and by December, all villages under the VVP will be covered by the 4G network, officials said. Showing its focussed attention, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, after assuming charge in the Modi

3.0 Government, had reviewed the implementation of the VVP at a high-level meeting here on July 13. He had stressed the need to provide employment opportunities to the residents of border villages and increase connectivity to prevent migration from such remote areas. Shah had directed authorities to continue the efforts being made by Senior Ministers and officials to better understand the issues of border villages under the special initiative taken by the Central Government. He said the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and Army deployed around the border villages should encourage purchase of local agricultural and handicraft products through cooperatives. The Home Minister said the healthcare facilities of the Army and CAPFs should be regularly made available to benefit the residents of nearby villages.

# BJP asks Rahul to apologise after SC's verdict on NEET

PNS ■ NEW DELHI



The BJP on Wednesday accused Rahul Gandhi of fuelling lack of trust in India's examination system following the NEET-UG paper leak at a few places, and asked if he will apologise after the Supreme Court's verdict on the issue. The court on Tuesday dismissed the pleas seeking cancellation and re-test of the examination, holding that there was no evidence on record to conclude that it was "vitiated" on account of "systemic breach" of its sanctity. The court said the leak occurred in a couple of cities. BJP leader and former union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad hit out at the opposition, especially Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, following the verdict, accusing him of defaming India's examination globally with his strong words. His choice of words was

violative of Parliament's dignity and the dignity of the office of the Leader of Opposition, a position Gandhi holds, Prasad said. He also dismissed Rahul Gandhi's criticism of the budget as a "kursi bachao budget", saying it was not the BJP's fault if people have repeatedly rejected him and his party in the elections. Defending the government's action on the NEET row, the BJP leader said the probe in the matter was handed over to the CBI and the candidature of 155 examinees was

cancelled. He highlighted the enormity of the examination, noting that over 23.5 lakh students took it at 4,750 centres across 571 cities. Rahul Gandhi was using words like "fraud" to attack the entire examination and now the court has made it clear that there was no systemic breach in the sanctity of the test, he said. "Will Rahul Gandhi apologise..." he asked, claiming that paper leaks were rife during the governments led by the Congress.

# First Advanced Frigate launched

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

The first of two Advanced Frigates under construction by Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) for the Indian Navy, was launched on Tuesday, defence ministry said here on Wednesday. In keeping with maritime tradition, the ship was launched by Rita Sreedharan to the invocation from Atharva Veda, in the presence of Goa Governor P S Sreedharan Pillai. The ship has been named Tripud, after the mighty arrow, representing the indomitable spirit of Indian Navy and its ability to strike far and deep. The contract for building two Tripud class Advance Frigates was signed between Ministry of Defence and Goa Shipyard Limited in January, 2019. The ship is designed for combat operations against enemy surface ships, submarines and aircrafts. The Tripud class ships are 124.8 m long and 15.2 m wide, with a draught of 4.5 m. Their displacement is approximately



3,600 tons and speed a maximum of 28 knots. The ships are equipped with stealth features, advanced weapon and sensors and platform management systems. Being constructed at GSL, the Tripud class of ships are follow on ships of the Teg and Talwar class ships acquired from Russia. These frigates are being constructed for the first time indigenously by an Indian

shipyard. In line with the 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' initiative, a large percentage of the equipment fit, including weapons and sensors is of indigenous origin, thereby ensuring that large scale defence production is executed by Indian manufacturing units, generating employment and capability enhancement within the country.

# UK Foreign Secretary visits India for talks on FTA

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

British Foreign Secretary David Lammy on Wednesday began a two-day visit to India to galvanise support for an ambitious Free Trade Agreement and reset the overall bilateral partnership in crucial areas such as clean energy, new technologies and security. As he embarked on the high-profile trip, Lammy described the negotiations for the trade deal as the floor and not the ceiling of the ambitions to unlock shared potential and deliver growth. The British Foreign Secretary's visit to New Delhi is the first high-level engagement between India and the UK after Prime Minister Keir Starmer's Labour Government came to power on July 5. India is the emerging superpower of the 21st century, the largest country in the world with 1.4 billion people and one of the fastest growing economies in the world," Lammy said. "Our Free Trade Agreement negotiations is the floor not the ceiling of our ambitions to unlock our shared potential and deliver growth, from Bengaluru to Birmingham," he said. A British Government readout said, Lammy will push for a "reset" of the UK-India partnership, including through reinforcing London's commitment to securing a



free trade agreement that will benefit both economies. It said the Foreign Secretary will also galvanise support for accelerated action on the climate crisis with India as an "indispensable partner", driving forward the clean energy transition and creating opportunities for British and Indian businesses. He will discuss partnering on Indian-led global initiatives to build clean power access, climate resilience in the global south and small island states, it said. "We have shared interests on the green transition, new technologies, economic security and global security," Lammy was quoted as saying in the readout. "I am travelling to India in my first month as Foreign Secretary because resetting our relationship with the Global South is a key part of how this Government will reconnect Britain for our security and prosperity at

home," he said. In a social media post, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said Lammy's visit will strengthen the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries. Lammy and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will hold wide-ranging talks this evening that is expected to focus on the FTA and New Delhi's concerns over activities of pro-Khalistan elements in Britain, people familiar with the matter said. The British Foreign Secretary is also scheduled to meet Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal during which both sides are likely to reaffirm their commitment to the proposed free trade pact, they said. It is learnt both sides have already agreed on almost 90 per cent of the trade pact but the remaining 10 per cent comprised several sticky

issues such as import duties on automobiles and scotch whisky and visas for business people. The British readout said Lammy will highlight the importance of a new partnership with India that focuses on economic, domestic and global security. Economic, domestic and global security will be at the heart of the Foreign Secretary's first visit to India as he travels to New Delhi to unlock the full potential of the UK-India partnership. He will tell his Indian counterpart that he wants to drive forward greater growth for both countries, it said. The Foreign Secretary will underscore the importance of the "living bridge" between the UK and India. It represents the 1.7 million people with Indian heritage that have made their home in the UK and make an exceptional contribution to British life, the readout released by the UK high commission in New Delhi said. "In a visit to India's third largest technology company, the Foreign Secretary will meet business leaders to highlight how the UK and India are working together on shared ambitions such as cutting-edge science to encourage innovation, boost trade, and improve the livelihoods of working people in both countries," it said.



People walk past as sea waves crash against the promenade during high tide, at Marine drive, in Mumbai, on Wednesday PTI

# Over 12K plaints filed through PMO grievance portal pending, LS told

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Over 12,000 complaints related to the central government departments filed through a public grievance portal of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) are pending, the Lok Sabha was informed on Wednesday. In a written reply, Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh said <https://www.pmindia.gov.in> is a centralised portal for registering public grievances related to central ministries or departments and also for state and Union territories. He said the status of the grievances filed using the portal can be tracked with a unique registration ID generated at the time of filing of the complaint. The grievances received are redressed by the ministries, departments, states and Union territories concerned in a decentralised manner, the Minister said, adding that a majority of these are redressed in less than 30 days. According to data he shared, as many as 58,612 complaints were received between

January and June. In addition to that, 34,659 complaints were brought forward from the previous year. Of these, 80,513 were redressed and 12,758 are pending, the data showed. In 2023, 1,84,227 such complaints were received (in addition to 19,705 brought forward from the previous year). Of these, 1,69,273 were redressed and 34,659 were pending. The Minister also shared data on pending complaints related to the state governments and Union territories. As many as 46,696 complaints (excluding 25,724 brought forward from the previous year) about states and UTs were received during January and June. Of these, 46,219 were redressed and 26,201 were pending. During 2023, 91,973 complaints were raised against state governments and UTs. Of these, 2,58,633 complaints were redressed (redressal was also done from 1,92,384 complaints brought forward from the previous year) and 25,724 were pending, according to the data.

# Maratha-Dhangar quota: Cong urges Govt to start negotiations

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

A Congress MP from Maharashtra on Wednesday made a demand in Lok Sabha that the government should start negotiations with Manoj Jarange-Patil to find a solution to the Maratha-Dhangar reservation issue at the earliest. Raising the issue of reservation for Maratha and Dhangar communities in Lok Sabha, Congress' Praniti Shinde also made a strong demand for conducting a caste census to ensure reservation to women. Shinde, the Lok Sabha member from Solapur, said Jarange-Patil is sitting on a fast and the Dhangar community also wants to be included in the Scheduled Tribes (ST) category. "The government is adding to the existing tensions in Maharashtra. The BJP is in the government in Maharashtra and at the Centre." Why can't there be a negotiation to find a solution to it? Why is there a delay? It is my demand that the government enter into talks on the Maratha-Dhangar reservation issue and find a solution to the problem," Shinde said. Shinde also demanded that a caste census be conducted at



the earliest so that women and Maratha and Dhangar communities get reservation due to them. BJP MP from Palghar, Hemant Savara, demanded setting up of a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya in Thane district of Maharashtra. Savara said he was educated in a Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya (JNV) in Palghar, which was a part of Thane district. He said Thane district ceased to have a JNV after Palghar district was carved out of it in 2014. Congress member from Idukki, Dean Kuriakose, wanted the government to reintroduce the vermin list under the Wildlife Protection Act to allow culling of "cruel animals" entering farm land and destroying the crop. Congress Deputy Leader Gaurav Gogoi raised the issue of over 12 lakh elementary teachers who lost their jobs after the Supreme Court

scrapped the 18-month diploma course in elementary education. He said the Centre should issue a gazette notification recognising the 18-month diploma course. Gogoi said such a move would do justice to the diploma holders who lost their jobs after the Supreme Court ruling. SP member Mohibullah demanded that the Centre set up an AIIMS-like hospital in his Rampur Lok Sabha constituency in western Uttar Pradesh. BJP member Anil Firojiya wanted the government to make Right to Education mandatory till graduation. Ladakh MP Mohammad Haneefa wanted the government to turn Ladakh into a Union Territory with legislature and also bring it under the sixth schedule of the Constitution to safeguard the interests of the local population.



# India, Russia review defence ties in key meeting

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India and Russia reviewed the entire gamut of their defence ties in Working Sub Group on Planning of Military Cooperation of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-M&MTC) here on Tuesday and Wednesday. It was the third meeting, defence Ministry said. Giving details, officials said the discussions focused on strengthening the ongoing defence engagements between the two sides, pondering over new initiatives under the ambit of the existing bilateral defence cooperation mechanism. The Working Sub Group Meeting is a forum established to carry forward defence cooperation between the countries through regular talks at the operational level between Headquarters, Integrated Defence Staff (HQIDS) and the Main Directorate of International Military Cooperation of the Ministry of Defence, Russian Federation.

# SC rejects plea to include tribunals in e-courts project

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday refused to entertain a plea seeking to include tribunals in the e-courts project aimed at upgrading the digital infrastructure of courts across the country. The public interest litigation said quasi-judicial panels like the Armed Forces Tribunal and the National Green Tribunal should be made part of the National Judicial Data Grid (NJDG). The NJDG falls under the e-courts project that pertains to the formulation of a national policy on the computerisation of the country's judiciary. It is monitored and funded by the Department of Justice of the Law Ministry. The NJDG portal is a national



repository of data relating to cases instituted, pending, and disposed of by the courts across the country. "You may approach the Department of Justice regarding this. The NJDG is part of the e-courts project. It

looks at district courts, the high courts and the Supreme Court and this does not look at tribunals at all," the CJI said. The bench made clear that it cannot "impinge" the contours of the project. The bench said, "Rs 7,000

crore was allocated for the courts and not for the tribunals. The moment we say the tribunals will be brought under it then the funds will be spent on tribunals as well." "Today there is no administrative sanction for the tribunals under the e-courts project. So, the tribunals cannot come under it now." The plea to bring tribunals under the NJDG cannot be accepted since it is a project under the e-courts project. The petitioner can avail other remedies it has under law and can approach the Government as well," it ordered. The bench, however, permitted the PIL petitioner to approach the Central Government seeking the computerisation of tribunals.





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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Balancing growth with populism

Though the budget 2024 is growth-centric, it has populist overtones and addresses concerns of NDA allies

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the first Union Budget for Modi 3.0 government on July 23, 2024, aiming to bolster India's economic growth while addressing social equity and the interests of the NDA allies. This budget is an exercise in balancing economic growth with political dividends. This budget outlines allocations for infrastructure, green energy initiatives, and the digital economy, reflecting a comprehensive approach to development. The Union Budget 2024-25 focuses on macro-economic growth and fiscal stability but offers limited welfare for the poor, relying on effective policy implementation for success. While the fiscal deficit has improved to 4.9% of GDP, significant disparities persist, with increased capital expenditure intended to boost private investment but widening rural-urban and income divides. The budget maintains a similar outlay as the interim budget, prioritising agriculture, rural development, housing, and MSMEs to create jobs. New measures include direct payments for first-time employees and incentives for employers to increase hiring. The budget does not adequately address rising inflation, which stands at 5.08%. To support manufacturing, the government has introduced initiatives like the Credit Guarantee Scheme for MSMEs and increased Mudra Loan limits, along with developing industrial parks enhancing agricultural practices through Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) and increasing support for natural farming. Despite these efforts, the success of the budget depends on effective implementation and addressing broader economic challenges.



The Union Budget 2024 outlines a comprehensive plan to deal with the rising unemployment by increasing the skill set of the youth. It plans to provide skills to 20 lakh youth over five years. As part of this initiative, 1,000 Industrial Training Institutes will be upgraded into hub and spoke arrangements with a focus on outcome orientation. The course content and design will be aligned with the skill needs of the industry. The budget's positives include the significant investment in infrastructure, expected to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. However, the budget also presents challenges. The ambitious spending plans may widen the fiscal deficit, posing challenges to macroeconomic stability and inflation control. Effective implementation of the proposed schemes and projects remains a critical concern, given historical delays and inefficiencies. The 2024 budget reflects a populist approach, aimed at addressing the concerns of its allies — Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu and has generously allocated funds for their states. The BJP has learned from its performance in the recent Lok Sabha elections, where it faced criticism for not adequately addressing issues like rural distress, job creation, and social equity. By focusing on infrastructure development, rural welfare, and social sector spending, the budget seeks to win back the support of these crucial demographics.

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### PICTALK



Pigeons fly past the new sculpture 'Natyashastra' installed at Mandi House, New Delhi

RANJAN DIMRI

## Indian education system: Building a vibrant nation

By integrating knowledge and skill development with modern practices, we can nurture youth who are proficient and emotionally and physically resilient

Bharat's educational policies are geared towards fostering a balanced approach that integrates learning with modern skills, reduces unnecessary burdens, and nurtures the unique potential of every child. These efforts are crucial for building a future-ready youth capable of seizing new opportunities in a rapidly evolving world. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a vocal advocate for educational reforms and skill development. One of the landmark steps taken by the government is the introduction of the New National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, established after almost four decades. The introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has started giving positive dividends. Being a transformative policy, it formalises skill training by integrating it into the education system from Class VI onwards. This policy underpins the importance of combining schooling with skill training, and teaching-learning materials for classes III rd onwards are also being made available now. The government's plan to incorporate emerging and



acted with students, teachers, and parents, emphasizing the need to create an educational ecosystem where each child's unique individuality is encouraged and fully expressed. The government has been making concerted efforts to achieve this goal, recognizing that cultural and societal expectations often add undue pressure on students. Modi advocates for healthy competition, reminding us that "Teachers are not in a job role but they shoulder the responsibility of grooming the lives of students." With the rapid pace of technological advancements, its adoption in the process of learning is very crucial and technology should be harnessed as a tool for learning, reminding us that "one cannot run away from technology," as the Prime Minister remarked. Reforms are necessary as they can lead Bharat to a higher stage of advancement. The holistic approach involves aligning educational practices with principles that promote mindfulness and resilience. Education should encompass a broad spectrum of human

development, not just intellectual growth. Proper methodologies should be used to assess and nurture various aspects of a child's development. The new education system is all set to enhance individual potential and it also contributes to the nation's economic growth. It is widely admitted that a well-educated population is better equipped to drive economic progress and social mobility, reducing disparities and fostering a more equitable society. Moreover, education contributes to better health, increased civic engagement, and enhanced personal satisfaction. Bharat's examination system needs further reforms. Hence, going forward, the nation is bound to have a more fair, transparent, stress-free, flexible and robust examination system. The holes are being plugged on an urgent basis at all levels. Bharat is on the right path to building a stronger, more vibrant nation where talent, knowledge, and skills thrive. (The author is the BJP Councillor from Narayana, New Delhi; views are personal)



UMANG BAJAJ

acted with students, teachers, and parents, emphasizing the need to create an educational ecosystem where each child's unique individuality is encouraged and fully expressed. The government has been making concerted efforts to achieve this goal, recognizing that cultural and societal expectations often add undue pressure on students. Modi advocates for healthy competition, reminding us that "Teachers are not in a job role but they shoulder the responsibility of grooming the lives of students." With the rapid pace of technological advancements, its adoption in the process of learning is very crucial and technology should be harnessed as a tool for learning, reminding us that "one cannot run away from technology," as the Prime Minister remarked. Reforms are necessary as they can lead Bharat to a higher stage of advancement. The holistic approach involves aligning educational practices with principles that promote mindfulness and resilience. Education should encompass a broad spectrum of human

# The unfulfilled promise of Ram Rajya

The BJP's electoral setback in Ayodhya and UP, despite the grand Ram Temple inauguration, necessitates introspection on the foundations of cultural nationalism



SIDHARTH MISHRA

Covenanting for deity, indifferent to the movements Sidharth Mishra In Hindu tradition, Lord Shiva is the symbol of faith, always speaks the truth, and is Trikaladarshi (knows the past, present and future). In Goswami Tulsidas' Ramcharitramanas, there is a reference to Shiva telling his wife Sati, "Hohi Soi Jo Ram Rachi Rakha," meaning what happens has been designed by Ram himself. Shiva explains to his wife that Ram is Param Brahma (ultimate creator), and writes the fate of a person based on his or her deeds. To the followers of Ram, this couplet forms the essence of Ram's divinity and majesty. The starting lines of the couplet are followed by Tulsidas saying, "Ko Kari Tark Badhave Sakha" that is why disputes his decision with inane discussions and then completes the couplet saying "As Kahi Lage Japan Harinama; Gai Sati Jahan Prabhu Sukhdhama," the essence of this being that in seeking refuge in Ram one attains solace as did Sati, Shiva's wife.

Though Tulsidas demands faith in Ram nowhere he mentions that a human being's own 'karma' (deeds) would not have a bearing on Ram's 'rachna' (creation). To those for whom Ram is the symbol of the revival of cultural nationalism, it's time to retrospect on their 'karma' which led to Ram's 'rachna' of the setback that they received in the just concluded Lok Sabha polls. Defeat in Ayodhya is indeed the symbol of the setback, which is spread across Ram's territory of Awadh and beyond it. Ramjanambhoomi movement played an important role in the revival and strengthening of the concept of cultural nationalism. The consecration of the statue of Lord Ram at the much-awaited temple should have proved to be the culmination of people's faith in Ram and its natural expression in the electoral gains for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). It did not happen. Celebrated English poet TS Eliot writes in his epochal poem, Hollow Men, "This is the way the world



ends/Not with a bang but with a whimper." Earlier in the same poem, Eliot writes, "Between the conception/ And the creation/ Between the emotion/ And the response/ Falls the Shadow." The question is why the Ramjanambhoomi movement culminated electorally the way it did, not with a bang but with a whimper. The inauguration of the Ram temple in January this year was the event of the century. The fluttering flags bearing Ram symbols across the states, and the cultural build-up through popular Bollywood renditions had even the sceptics once believed in the movement bearing the soul of our culture and nature. It was complete with immaculate camera coverage, with itinerary being unveiled with clockwise precision, weather at its shining best in generally a gloomy climate and a massive build-up of expectation of dawning of Ram Rajya (the rule of Ram, the ideal form of governance). The event, however, surprisingly did not bring good electoral tidings for the BJP. The party strategists were left befuddled at the morally demoralising electoral setback. For the pontiffs of cultural nationalism, the reason for 'shadows between the con-



TO THOSE FOR WHOM RAM IS THE SYMBOL OF THE REVIVAL OF CULTURAL NATIONALISM, IT'S TIME TO RETROSPECT ON THEIR 'KARMA' WHICH LED TO RAM'S 'RACHNA' OF THE SETBACK THAT THEY RECEIVED IN THE JUST CONCLUDED LOK SABHA POLLS

ception and creation, between the emotion and the response' will not be known until they decide to come out of the echo chamber of the 'VIP route' and have a 'darshan' of Ram Lalla by joining the milieu of the masses. Rama Rajya has been defined as the ideal state of society as intended by Lord Ram, comprising perfect harmony, justice, dharma and prosperity, where people live in peace and happiness. Gandhi took the interpretation forward, saying that true Ram Rajya would be to ensure equal rights to both prince and pauper. Ask the Ram Bhakts standing in the line of the paupers, for the darshan of Ram Lalla, if an ideal state had dawned. The management of the whole 'darshan' process at the Ramjanambhoomi temple today is a prototype of how it's a case study of not being the Ram Rajya model. The uncarpeted red sandstone floor of the pathway from the temple entry to the sanctum sanctorum in the heat of the summer leaves the Bhakts with blisters, cursing the temple management for their scorn. Providing carpets to cover the hot stone floor, functional air coolers on the pathway to beat the sultry weather or water coolers to quench the

thirst from standing in a queue is something that should not be beyond the command of 'caring' temple management. But then that care is lacking. The whole environment at the temple grapples with the attitude of Suraksha (security) rather than sewa (service). The teeming throng of untrained private security guards stands out as a sore thumb. The curt replies by these guards to the simple queries of the devout worshipper are all adding to the dwindling goodwill about the temple movement, though not for the temple deity. Ram lives in all humans, as notable lyricist Sahir Ludhianvi penned (*mere rom rom mein basne wale ram*) for Bollywood super hit Neel Kamal. This song over the years has become the anthem for all the Ram worshippers. If the attitude of disdain at the Ram temple is not replaced with that of service, Ram Bhakts would continue to vow for their deity albeit without much goodwill for those associated with the temple movement. (Sidharth Mishra is the author and President of, Centre for Reforms, Development & Justice; views expressed are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### BUDGET REACTIONS

Madam — It is not unusual for mixed opinions to arise on budgets presented by Central or State Governments. While ruling parties typically praise the budget, opposition parties are quick to criticize it. Congress leader Pawan Khera claims that the job-related schemes are merely copied from the Nyay Patra. If this is true, Congress might feel validated for having their scheme adopted. However, this could simply be Khera's personal view. What the opposition says often has little impact on the central government. Opposition parties have labeled the budget as specific to Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. It is natural for the opposition to be disappointed with the budget, especially since it does not upset the Chief Ministers of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh. They had hoped that by denying special status to these states, discontent would grow, possibly leading to a withdrawal of support from Nitish Kumar and Chandrababu Naidu. The budget allocates Rs. 15,000 crore for the development of Andhra Pradesh's capital and grants for its backward regions. Bihar receives Rs. 26,000 crore for various road projects and Rs. 21,000 crore for power. An industrial center is planned for Gaya, and there is a welcome initiative to revive Nalanda University. On the fiscal front, the current budget lacks encouragement for savings. The government seems to believe people have no choice but to deposit their money in nationalized banks, thus avoiding tax deductions for savings. It would have been fair if the Finance Minister had emphasized savings as well. KV Seetharamaiah|Bengaluru

#### AN HORRIFIC INCIDENT

Madam — A horrifying incident in Rewa (Madhya Pradesh). I am deeply concerned about the recent incident in Rewa district, Madhya Pradesh, where Mamta Pandey and Asha Pandey were partially buried while protesting against

## Kamala is the right choice



This would seem to have come about a little late, a mere four months before the decisive election. For Democrats there are two options. One, go for Kamala by nomination, thereby making her a very probable scape goat in lieu of Biden, given Trump's stamped and vivid image of a clenched fist, post the shooting, or stage a grand show where their candi-

dates at the upcoming convention mount the podium and vigorously debate as to how they intend to run the nation rather than run for office. The party convention must set exemplary tenor and substance by navigating through issues on hand than throwing mud on a Teflon coated Trump, on whom nothing will stick. Under extreme pressure and for want of time on its hands, the party could find great sense in gathering both its wits and resolve to have Kamala as their candidate. Kamala is one person who is most suited to take on Trump. Remember Trump carries a heavy baggage of his own and the recent episode can but blur some of his glaring negatives, not all. R.Narayanan| Mumbai

road construction on private land. This inhumane action raises serious questions about women's safety under the current government. On one hand, we hear slogans like "Nari Shakti" and "Beti Bachao, Beti Padhao," but on the other hand, women are being harassed and buried alive. Is this what we call women's safety, freedom, and security? How long will such incidents continue to occur? The nation cannot tolerate such atrocities. Authorities must address this matter urgently and find a solution to prevent such incidents from happening again. I urge the government to prioritize women's safety and take immediate action to address this issue. Masood Ahmad |Barabanki

#### A BOOST TO THE GDP

Madam — This refers to the front page article, "India's GDP to surge 6.5 - 7% in 2024-25: Economic Survey", (July 23) this is my response. The economic survey of the year 2024 revealed the positive growth figures of India's GDP

surge of 6.5 to 7 % in the year 2024-25. The evangelist numbers are welcoming for speeding up the growth trajectory of India, to make it a 5 trillion dollar economy as soon as possible. Although the inflation figures are stressing, as it burdened the pockets of the locals. But the growth figures are surely welcoming for each one of us. This will also help India to target 'Vikshit Bharat' vision, and help ensure balanced regional development for all together. Sectoral growth with equality from agriculture to export will power boost India to practically visualize these figures in real life. There are provisions in the budget which will definitely lead to the spurt in economic activity, especially the push for employment and skill development is likely to create more jobs and give boost to manufacturing sector. However, it will all depend upon the execution of these schemes. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



GOURAV VALLABH

# UNION BUDGET 2024: POINT COUNTER POINT



PRIYANKA CHATURVEDI

## Transformative changes for the middle class



The middle class in India has long been the backbone of the nation, driving consumption, innovation, and overall economic growth. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, India has witnessed transformative changes that have significantly impacted this demographic. In the last decade, we have moved from a Low Growth, High Inflation Nation to a High Growth, Low Inflation Nation. Currently, we are the only large economy in the world to have High Growth and Low Inflation. The GDP growth rate consistently outpaced other major economies, with 8.2% growth in FY 2023-24 compared to 7.0% in FY 2022-23. These economic improvements have directly benefited the middle class. Primarily, what the middle class expects from a Budget is more disposable income in hand, Quality jobs for the next generation, and an improved quality of life.

**More Disposable Income in Hand** Generally, the government tries to increase the middle class's disposable income by controlling inflation or by giving tax relief to the personal income tax category. This budget and government fiscal policies provide relief by both instruments. Inflation management has been crucial, with the Modi government adopting an inflation-targeting regime in 2016.

This approach stabilized and lowered inflation, which has averaged 5% since 2014, never breaching the 8% mark. In June 2024, retail inflation was 5.08%, with core inflation at its lowest in over 12 years, providing further relief to the middle class and enhancing their purchasing power.

In addition, the budget brings significant tax relief for the middle class. FM has rationalized slab rates under the new tax regime and allowed an additional standard deduction of Rs 25,000, effectively making the total standard deductions Rs 75,000 effective from AY 25-26. The new tax regime continues to be the default tax regime of taxation.

These changes increase disposable income in the hands of the middle class to the extent of Rs 17,500 per

annum. In other words, after these changes, there will be no tax till income from the Salary of Rs 7.75 Lakh under the new tax regime.

**Empowering the Backbone of India**

The Union Budget 2024-25, presented by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, introduces a series of measures aimed at empowering the middle class and ensuring inclusive growth. This budget focuses on employment, skilling, MSMEs, and infrastructure, which are all pivotal for middle-class prosperity. The budget allocates Rs2 Lakh Crore for education, employment, and skilling, directly benefiting the middle class by facilitating job opportunities for 4.1 crore youth over five years. Schemes like the Employment Linked Incentive provide direct benefits to first-time employees, boosting job creation in the manufacturing sector.

Additionally, a new centrally sponsored skilling scheme will train 20 lakh youth, aligning their skills with industry needs and ensuring the middle class remains competitive in the job market. Under the PM Awas Yojana Urban 2.0, the housing needs of 1 crore urban poor and middle-class families will be addressed with an investment of Rs 10 lakh crore. This will include the central assistance of Rs2.2 lakh crore in the next 5 years.

A provision of interest subsidy to facilitate loans at affordable rates is also envisaged. For small business owners within the middle class, the budget introduces a comprehensive package for MSMEs, including a credit guarantee scheme for machinery and equipment purchases and support during stress periods.

**A Brighter Future**

The measures outlined in the budget are set to have profound implications for the middle class. Increased employment opportunities, enhanced skilling programs, and support for MSMEs ensure stable incomes and improved living standards.

Affordable housing initiatives make homeownership more accessible to the middle class, and the focus on infrastructure development creates a con-

ducive environment for businesses, fostering economic growth and stability. Let us understand this with the help of an example - The story of a middle-class family. Sachin is a middle-class professional living in Delhi. With the recent changes introduced in the budget, his yearly take-home salary has seen an increase of Rs17,500 due to the new tax benefits.

This increment has allowed Sachin to invest more in his children's education and save for the future. The constant control of inflation also eased his household expenses, making it more affordable for his family to maintain their standard of living. Sachin's son, Amit, recently graduated and was worried about finding a job.

However, with the government's focus on creating employment opportunities, Amit secured a position in a manufacturing firm that benefits from the Employment Linked Incentive scheme. This job provides Amit with a stable income and gives him the confidence to contribute to the family's finances. The government's commitment to skilling programs has also allowed Amit to enrol in a training course that enhances his skills, making him more competitive in the job market.

In addition, Sachin's wife, Priya, who runs a small business, has benefited from the support extended to MSMEs. The credit guarantee scheme has enabled her to purchase new machinery, increasing her business's productivity and profitability. The Union Budget 2024-25 is a testament to the government's commitment to fostering inclusive growth and empowering the middle class.

By addressing key areas such as employment, skilling, MSMEs, housing, and infrastructure, the budget paves the way for sustained economic growth and prosperity. As the middle class continues to thrive, it will undoubtedly propel India towards becoming a global economic powerhouse, realizing the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat' in 2047.

(The writer is Professor of Finance, XLRI Xavier School of Management and BJP Leader; views are personal)

## The budget skips pressing issues



The Union Budget of the newly elected alliance government presented its first budget. Smt Nirmala Sitharaman as the Finance Minister of India presented her 7th budget, and a new record was made too. Considering a lot of promises were made to the people of India and lots of challenges they face - unemployment, price rise, stagnant income one would have hoped that BJP would, after its underperformance in the general election have learnt some lessons and course correct. However it was disappointing to see the same mistake of ignoring the Jann ki Baat, Madam Minister also like the Prime Minister delivered her Mann ki Baat speech.

This was to be the Union Budget but now can easily be titled PradhanMantri Sarkar Bachao Yojana announcement where huge financial packages have been earmarked for states that are run by their alliance partners and whose crucial support they need for their government to run uninterrupted- JDU in Bihar and TDP in Andhra Pradesh. While a package worth 59000 crores was announced for Bihar, it was 15000 crores for Andhra Pradesh.

However, their demand for special status has so far not been addressed. Making specific politically motivated state budget allocations over other states' interests sets a wrong precedent for future governments to follow. These funds aren't addressing the requirements but rather addressing their political commitments. Alliance-run Maharashtra, a state that pays the highest taxes to the centre got no specific allocation from the PMSBY (PradhanMantri Sarkar Bachao Yojana) besides many opposition-run states.

It is a shame that the centre has blatantly disregarded the principle of equality but chosen to discriminate between states. Maharashtra seeks new airports, a GIFT city like dedicated business/smart city, highways and roads but all of this was ignored. The real BJP hate for Maharashtra stands exposed yet again. The opposition-led state has now made their displeasure over this discrimination obvious by choosing to boycott an upcoming

NITI Ayog meeting to be chaired by the Prime Minister. In the budget, the Finance Minister introduced an apprenticeship program for youth between 20-30 years of age and committed 1 crore internship programmes for youth in the top 500 companies of India. That would mean every company will have to absorb 20000 interns at Rs 5000/pm stipend earmarked from their CSR. This also means that graduates/postgraduates who are part of the record 9.2% unemployment rate and looking for meaningful employment will have to be content with this program, what it doesn't address is creating jobs or entrepreneurial opportunities for the highly skilled youth.

This is the corporate Agniveer programme not meant to address the elephant in the room which is unemployment but rather mock the plight of the youth. Similarly, FinMin spoke of women-led development but fell short of offering anything that would help address the gender pay gap, bring them more jobs, incentivise savings through tax breaks or ease their burden of inflation in running family budgets. SAMBAL is an umbrella scheme that includes Beti Bachao Beti Padhao, One Stop Centre, Nari Adalat, Mahila Police Volunteer, Women's Helpline etc. In 2020-21, when these schemes were separate, the BE for just four of those included under SAMBAL was ₹640 crores, which is more than what has been allocated in the BE for 24-25 (₹629 crores).

The Finance Minister and the entire government have been patting themselves on the back for maintaining fiscal prudence and keeping fiscal deficit under check but it is a classic case of operation successful but patient dead with Aam Janta not having enough savings, enough money to invest and consumption growth amongst its weakest ever.

The fact that private final consumption growth was just 4% in 2023-24 against the overall GDP growth rate of more than 8% shows this clearly. The Government has once again managed to turn a deaf ear to the plight of farm-

ers. If shutting down internet services and using tear gas shells to stop the farmers from protesting was not enough, the Union Budget has no mention of a legal guarantee on minimum support price (MSP) for farmers or any support for farm loans through waivers or lower interest rates. With billionaires continuing to have thousands of crore weddings and stamped-like situations occurring over jobs by unemployed youth, the Union Budget has missed out on addressing wealth inequality at large. While packages for youth employment have been introduced, the Budget does not address reducing the gap between the poorest and the richest sections of the population. Despite the economic survey pointing out the disparity in income with the top 10% accounting for one-third of the income, measures to uplift farmers, and labourers or increase wealth taxes are absent. The Finance Minister's announcement of the reduction of tax on long-term capital gains (LTCG) is a bane in disguise. While seemingly, the tax on LTCG has reduced from 20% to 12.5%, the indexation benefits have been eliminated. This means that profits on sales of property, gold and other unlisted assets will not be adjusted to inflation and a higher amount would be taxable, thus effectively increasing the tax burden on investors, and making investments in property, gold and shares unprofitable. The PradhanMantri Sarkar Bachao Yojana caters to the BJP's essential allies.

The needs of the public, the opposition, and most states have been ignored. While ignoring the concerns of 90% of the nation is not new for this Government, it is disappointing to see it continue after the BJP's performance in the General Elections. One can, however, be hopeful that the increased representation and enthusiasm of the opposition members in Parliament can lead to fruitful deliberations and additions to the Union Budget this session. (The writer is Rajya Sabha MP, Shiv Sena - Uddhav Balasaheb Thackeray, views are personal)

# ESG: The key to sustainable business in a post-pandemic world

Environmental, social, and governance considerations are crucial for sustainability in an era marked by environmental degradation

The interest in Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) considerations isn't merely a trend—it's a critical pivot towards sustainability in an era marked by environmental degradation and widening social gaps. At its core, ESG represents a comprehensive framework guiding businesses towards practices that not only ensure profitability but also address pressing global challenges.

As we advance in the post-pandemic landscape, collaboration and cooperation are more crucial than ever. For India, these priorities align with ambitious climate targets, a rapidly growing digital economy, and global trade aspirations. Amid climate change and environ-



PIYUSH NIRANJANA

mental degradation, there is growing recognition that businesses play a vital role in promoting sustainable development. Last year, Business 20(B20) was one of the most prominent Engagement Groups in India's presidency of G20. It has become an increasingly important forum for private sector leaders to deliberate on subjects such as the adoption of ESG standards. One of the

B20 Action Councils has focused on encouraging the rapid and broad implementation of ESG principles among businesses of all sizes and economic contexts.

Their primary suggestions include creating universally applicable ESG standards and ensuring transparent, comprehensive, inclusive, and equitable disclosures across all regions. ESG goals are typically a set of operational standards that require companies to adhere to better governance, ethical practices, environmentally friendly measures, and social responsibility. It emphasizes non-financial factors as a metric for guiding investment decisions in a world where only financial returns are no longer the sole goal for investors or

employees. ESG enables businesses to have a long-term vision instead of a myopic vision. The horizon of ESG has evolved significantly over the years. It is more than simply checking a box on the compliance checklist. Accelerating a shift to cleaner energy carriers and other efficient technologies can improve global standards of life while also contributing to long-term decarbonization goals. For instance, ESG can align with traditional medicine to forge an environmental path by promoting the use of natural, organic, and sustainable resources in Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homoeopathy (AYUSH) practices, thus reducing the environmental footprint. To



promote greater adherence to ESG standards, businesses must be transparent about their practices and their impact on the environment and society. This can include initiatives such as reporting on greenhouse gas emissions, disclosing supply chain practices and engaging with stakeholders to address concerns about labour standards and human rights. The path to a universally embraced ESG

framework is fraught with challenges.

Diverse and sometimes conflicting definitions and standards set by various entities have led to inefficiencies in reporting and general sluggishness in adopting responsible practices on a global scale. The solution lies in harmonizing ESG frameworks for disclosure, reporting, and rating. Such a unified approach would streamline efforts, making it easier for companies of all sizes to participate in the global movement towards sustainability. Companies that address ESG risks tend to experience fewer disruptions, gain more trust, and achieve consistent financial results, adhering to a triple-bottom-line strategy that combines financial

returns with environmental and social norms.

Progressive ESG reporting standards, multi-stakeholder partnerships, and dialogue between businesses and civil society can address these challenges. Indian corporations are increasingly incorporating ESG considerations into their business decisions, with several asset management firms launching ESG funds. These ESG-indexed companies have outperformed non-ESG-indexed companies, as per data from the National Stock Exchange (NSE). [1] Investors in India are using novel tools to fund social and environmental initiatives. The Ghaziabad Municipal Corporation, which is also listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange, issued India's first

green bond (BSE). The Corporation raised ₹150 crores in capital to help fund the water treatment plant and tertiary sewage. According to a survey conducted by Singapore-based bank DBS and Bloomberg Media Studios, 92% of Indian SMEs said ESG measures are a high priority for their business, compared to 83% of SMEs across Asia. The corporate world is aligning with climate science, with thousands of businesses adopting initiatives like the Science-Based Targets. (The writer is member Invest India, the National Investment Promotion and Facilitation Agency under DPIIT, Ministry of Commerce and Industry; views are personal)







# Stock markets fall for 4th day on selling in banking shares, STT hike

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
Benchmark BSE Sensex declined for the fourth day in a row on Wednesday due to selling in financial and banking shares and the government's move to hike securities transaction tax and short term capital gains tax.



The 30-share BSE Sensex declined 280.16 points or 0.35 per cent to settle at 80,148.88 with 19 of its components closing lower and 11 with gains. During the day, it tumbled 678.53 points or 0.84 per cent to 79,750.51. The NSE Nifty dropped 65.55 points or 0.27 per cent to 24,413.50. From the Sensex pack, Bajaj Finserv declined by 2 per cent after its first-quarter earnings failed to cheer investors. Bajaj Finance, Hindustan Unilever, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Adani Ports, Axis Bank and State Bank of India were the other big laggards. However, Tech Mahindra, ITC, NTPC, Tata Motors and Sun Pharma were among the gainers.

# Abolition of Angel tax will boost startup ecosystem, says CBDT chairman

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The abolition of Angel tax for all classes of investors will act to "prompt" innovators and venture capitalists to better invest in startups and any instances of money laundering here will be taken care of by the existing legal mechanism, CBDT Chairman Ravi Agrawal said on Wednesday. He said the removal of this tax will act to boost the startup ecosystem in India. He would urge the community to "please come forward, please invest as the country is waiting for your investment, initiatives and innovations", Agrawal told PTI in a post-Budget interview. Asked how would a possible case of money laundering through investor funds be tackled after the removal of the Angel tax, he said if such a violation is found or it is detected that the fund has come through "undisclosed" sources, there are provisions in the respective statute and that will be taken care of. The head of the direct taxes administration of the country responded in the affirmative when asked if the taxman would make a reference to its sister agencies like the Enforcement Directorate (ED) if a violation of the anti-money laundering law is noticed. "This (money laundering) issue is one. The intention, always, was never to dissuade the startups. It was never to put any stop on the investments... We in coordination with the DPIIT (Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade) had actually provided relaxations insofar as the investments are concerned..." Agrawal said. This (removal of Angel tax) step of the government would actually prompt the startups and also the angel investors to invest in these initiatives and that will help the country, he said.

# Rupee falls 1 paisa to revisit all-time low of 83.70 against US dollar

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
The rupee depreciated 1 paisa to revisit its all-time closing low of 83.70 (provisional) against the US dollar on Wednesday, weighed down by a strong dollar against major crosses overseas amid investors' weak appetite for riskier assets. Forex traders said the increase in capital gains tax and removal of indexation benefits announced in the FY25 Budget on Tuesday was the main reason for dollar buying as foreign investors sold stocks. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.69 and touched an intra-day high of 83.68 and a low of 83.72 against the dollar during the session. It finally settled at an all-time low level of 83.70 (provisional) against the American currency, registering a fall of 1 paisa from its previous close. On Tuesday, the rupee declined 3 paisa to 83.69 against the US dollar after the government raised tax rates on capital gains in the FY25 Budget. Forex traders said US dollar buying continued to be the theme after the increase in long-term capital gains tax (LTCG) and short-term capital gains tax (STCG) and then the removal of indexation benefits. The government on Tuesday proposed reducing the long-term capital gains tax on immovable properties to 12.5 per cent from 20 per cent but removed the indexation benefits to adjust for inflation, a move experts termed as "negative" for sellers. As per the memorandum to the Union Budget, with rationalisation of rate to 12.5 per cent, indexation available under section 48 of the Income Tax Act is proposed to be removed for calculation of any long-term capital gains, which is presently available for property, gold and other unlisted assets. Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading higher by 0.05 per cent at 104.50. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading higher by 0.79 per cent at USD 81.65 per barrel. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex fell 280.16 points or 0.35 per cent to settle at 80,148.88 points, and Nifty dropped 65.55 points or 0.27 per cent to 24,413.50 points. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Tuesday as they offloaded shares worth Rs 2,975.31 crore, according to exchange data.



# Budget proposals lay ground for long-term reforms: NITI Aayog VC

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
NITI Aayog vice chairman Suman Bery on Wednesday said the review of the direct tax and the custom's duty rates as announced by the Finance Minister in her Budget speech will prepare the ground for long term reforms. Bery further said that the Budget for 2024-25 was a structural budget, which will help in improving labour productivity by building a relationship between the workforce and the private sector. "The Budget (2024-25) proposals provide a roadmap for review of direct taxes, customs duty rates meant to be done in the six months... Will prepare the ground for longer term reforms," he told PTI in an interview. The government on Tuesday announced that it will undertake a comprehensive review of the Income Tax Act to make it easy to read. Presenting the Union Budget for 2024-25, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said the government will come out with SoP (Standard Operating Procedure) for TDS defaults and simplify and rationalise the compounding of such offences. "I am now announcing a comprehensive review of the Income-tax Act, 1961. The purpose is to make the Act concise, lucid, easy to read and understand. This will reduce disputes and litigation, thereby providing tax certainty to the tax payers. It will also bring down the demand embroiled in litigation. It is proposed to be completed in six months," Sitharaman has said. She has also said that in Budget 2022-23, the government reduced the number of customs duty rates.



"I propose to undertake a comprehensive review of the rate structure over the next six months to rationalise and simplify it for ease of trade, removal of duty inversion and reduction of disputes," Sitharaman has added. Bery noted that fiscal consolidation is being maintained and improved in this year's budget which is important. According to him, the Budget proposals provide long term vision and it is the first step towards Vikshit Bharat. Responding to a question on economic growth, Bery said it is easiest for India to increase its growth rate by increasing labour productivity and increasing the number of people who work. "India has been doing well, but it can do better, should do better, and needs to do better," he said. According to Bery, a big push is given in this year's Budget for the MSMEs who survived COVID pandemic shocks, Bery said. Asked whether the Budget proposals will promote

private consumption and private investments, he said private consumption has been primarily affected in the rural areas. "So I think a lot depends on this year's monsoon," Bery opined. He pointed out that the whole point about adjusting the tax slab and raising the deduction on income tax is to provide a bit more money for consumption. "If the government's efforts in fiscal consolidation and inflation control succeed then the interest rate will come down, and if interest rates come down, then that will help in increasing consumption of consumer durables, many of which are financed on EMI," Bery explained. Pointing out that private investment depends pretty much on the business environment, he said that the finance minister has come out with proposals in the Budget document to improve the ease of doing business, which is of course affected by the state government's action as well as federal government action.

# Cut in customs duty, credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs to help boost exports: Experts

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The Budget announcements such as cut in customs duties on range of goods, credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs and setting up of e-commerce hubs will help boost domestic manufacturing and exports, experts said. They said reducing customs duty on goods like spandex, leather and marine goods will help industry to be self-reliant. Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPCC) Chairman Sudhir Sekhri said the garment industry hails expanding the list of trims and embellishment under IGC (import of goods at concessional rates), which will help increase shipments of ready-made garments. "The enhancement of limit under credit guarantee scheme for MSMEs in the manufacturing sector, grant of one month wage to new entrants in all formal sectors up to Rs 15,000, EPFO contributions for new manufacturing employees for four years, and upgrading the industrial training institutes will help the garment industry scale up and be future ready," Sekhri said. Council for Leather Exports (CLE) Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan said rationalisation of export duties and inclusion of more inputs, including wet blue chrome tanned leather, wet white leather, crust leather and finished leather under a duty-free scheme will help create more jobs and increase shipments. "On the export duty front, the export duty on wet blue and crust leather has been brought down from 40 per cent to 20 per cent. This will facilitate export of value-added processed leathers from the country, as there is a huge demand for these leathers in the global market," Jalan said. He hoped that the government will remove this export duty for crust leathers so as to achieve the objective of enhancing the export of value added leathers by USD 1 billion in the next 2-3 years. Hi-Tech Gears Ltd Chairman Deep Kapuria said the Budget has not made any major changes in the existing import duty rates barring very few sectors. "This is a message to the large global companies who always prefer a low and predictable import tariff regime for their seamless operation of cross-border production network," Kapuria said, adding that elimination and cut in the import duty on 25 critical minerals, along with capital goods for manufacturing of solar cells and panels will give a big boost to not only renewable energy sector but many high-tech strategic sectors such as defense, electronics, space. Chemical & Petrochemical Manufacturers' Association President Kamal Nanavaty said the Critical Mineral Mission will facilitate domestic production, recycling of critical minerals, and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets. "While thrust would be on developing domestic production capacity of critical minerals, but parallelly the Budget proposes to fully exempt customs duties on 25 critical minerals and reduce basic customs duty on two of them," Nanavaty said. Startup firm WOCE (World of Circular Economy) Director Anup Garg said the abolition of the angel tax for all classes of investors is a welcome move that will certainly spur investments in startups, especially those with a vision for environmental sustainability. "Most investors now wisely invest in forward-thinking companies, particularly those that consider the environment and human well-being," Garg said. Saroj Kumar Mahapatra, Executive Director, PRADAN, said the Budget marks a significant step forward in agricultural development. "By prioritising agricultural research focused on climate-resilient crop varieties, it aims to bolster future food security and mitigate inflation risks," Mahapatra said.



# Investors base of REITs likely to rise with changes in LTCG rules: Experts

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
The government's decision to reduce the holding period for determining long-term capital gains for REITs to 12 months would help in broadening the investor base of this financial instrument, according to industry experts. According to the Union Budget document, the government has reduced the holding period for determining long-term capital gains for business trusts -- Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and Infrastructure Investment Trusts (InvITs) -- from 36 months to 12 months. "This unit of listed business trust will now be at par with listed equity shares at 12 months instead of earlier 36 months," the document noted. A REIT is made up of a portfolio of commercial real estate assets, the majority of which are already leased out. Commenting on the move, Ramesh Nair, CEO of Mindspace REIT, said this would enhance liquidity, boost transaction volume, and increase investments, making REITs a more attractive asset class compared to other long-term investments. "It will appeal to investors seeking quicker returns and attracts short-term investors who may have previously been deterred. This is expected to attract a broader investor base eventually leading to more diversified



and robust investment portfolios, ultimately driving growth in the commercial real estate market," Nair said. Aravind Maiya, CEO of Embassy REIT, welcomed the move that the LTCG (long term capital gain) regime for REITs matches that of listed equities. "Embassy REIT's unitholder register has over 1 lakh holders, a 25x increase since our IPO. The reduction of the LTCG period from three years to one illustrates the commitment of our regulators to growing this critical asset class," Maiya said. Indian REITs Association, which has been formed by four listed REITs, hailed the decision to reduce the holding period for determining long-term capital gains for business trusts. "This change addresses a long-standing industry request and enhances liquidity in Indian REITs,

# Indo-Bangla trade resumes after two days of shutdown

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**  
Trade between India and Bangladesh, which was stalled for the last two days due to the violence in the neighbouring country, resumed on Wednesday. Trade to all major land ports in West Bengal, including Petrapole, Gojadanga, Fulbari, and Mahadipur, resumed after Bangladeshi Customs resumed work and the restoration of the internet link, an export body official said. "Trade has resumed from the Petrapole border since this morning after the Benapole side reopened to receive cargo," Kamlesh Saini, manager of the Land Port Authority of India (Petrapole), told PTI. Petrapole, located in Bongaon in the North 24 Parganas district, serves as South Asia's largest land port and plays a crucial role in facilitating trade between India and Bangladesh. "Benapole border has resumed functioning. Altogether 220 trucks entered Bangladesh from Petrapole while 27 trucks reached Bangladesh today," said Sajedur Rahman, general secretary of the Benapole C&F Staff Association. "Trade has resumed after the

# Budget employment-centric, pro-agriculture, says SJM

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Swadeshi Jagaran Manch on Wednesday termed the Union Budget as employment-centric, pro-agriculture and pro-business, especially MSMEs, and urged the government to adopt more measures to promote entrepreneurship. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman presented the Union Budget for fiscal 2024-25 in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday, outlining nine priorities of the government which included productivity, jobs, social justice, urban development, energy security, infrastructure, innovation and reforms. "The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch appreciates the budget proposals as they are employment-centric, pro-agriculture, pro-business, especially MSME (micro, small and medium enterprises)," the organisation's co-convenor Ashwani Mahajan said in a statement. However, Swadeshi Jagaran Manch (SJM) expects from the government that "more measures be adopted for the promotion of entrepreneurship in the country", he added. SJM is an affiliate of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) ideological fountainhead. Noting that the budget offers an "innovative comprehensive internship opportunity" in 500 top



companies to develop skill sets for educated youth and make them employable, SJM said if the scheme is implemented properly, this can prove to be a "watershed moment for our younger generation". "This can help 1 crore youth to skill themselves for future job opportunities in the next five years," it added. Apart from this, SJM said, a good number of schemes have been announced in the budget to incentivise the creation of jobs in the private sector, including support to businesses for EPFO contribution and also providing first salary to first-time employed from the government's kitty. "The Swadeshi Jagaran Manch congratulates the central government, especially the finance minister, for innovative schemes announced in the budget for promoting job creation and also self-employment," Mahajan said. SJM also appreciated the increase in the capital expenditure and "encouragement" given in the budget to increase private investment. Increasing the cap for Mudra loans from Rs 10 lakh to 20 lakh is also a step in the right direction, it said. "Introduction of a credit guarantee scheme for MSME, credit support to MSME during the stress period, e-commerce export hubs for MSME, development of investment-ready plug and play industrial parks, rental housing for industrial workers etc. Are some of the good measures adopted for development of MSMEs," the SJM said. Scheme for street vendors is yet another step towards inclusive growth, it added. The SJM said that the budget's push to infrastructure both by way of public capital expenditure and also private investment can go a long way towards much-desired infrastructure development. Encouragement in renewable, especially solar energy, is also an "appreciable programme", it added. The RSS affiliate said budgetary proposals made to encourage natural farming and provide support to the farmers in crop diversification can help improve the farmer's welfare. "Reforms and strengthening debt recovery tribunals, steps towards speeding up insolvency resolution are also welcome steps," it added.

# Neeraj's advice boosting high jumper Kushare's confidence in Paris

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Just focus on training and don't get scared by the fame of the opponents' is the mantra Paris Games-bound high jumper Sarvesh Kushare learnt from none other than Olympic and world champion javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra. Kushare said Chopra's advice has boosted his confidence as at one point in time this year, he was not even sure of making the Paris Games cut. He made it to the Olympics through world ranking quota. The Paris Games automatic qualification mark was 2.33m. From doing practice on fodder-made makeshift mat to becoming the first Indian high jumper to qualify for the Olympics, Kushare has come a long way.

"I have not met Neeraj bhai for a long time, but when we met last time, he told me to focus on training and not be afraid of the fame of the opponents. He always keeps giving important tips," Kushare told PTI Bhasha in an interview from Poland where he is training along with other Paris-bound Indian athletes.

"He (Chopra) is my idol and he gave us confidence by winning the first ever Olympic medal in athletics. We also want to be like him and bring pride to the country," said the high jumper, who hails from

Deogaon village, a few kilometres from Nashik in Maharashtra. With a personal best of 2.27m and season's best of 2.25m, making it to the final round in the Paris Games can be a realistic target. The 29-year-old, who is making his Olympic debut, though, claimed that he has been jumping over 2.30m mark frequently during practice. "It is only my height that is small but I am also very strong from within. There is no fear of seeing my opponent's personality. It is important to be in top form at the right time and have faith in your preparation," Kushare, who stands at 5 feet 9 inches, said.

"Right now the focus is on the qualification round which will be held on August 7 at 10 am. The first goal is to make it to the finals. I will plan for the rest later."

Kushare, who is currently training at Spala, Poland, along with other Olympic-bound Indian athletes, started the sport on a makeshift mat made of waste from corn which was used as fodder for cows.

"There was no high jump mat in our village, so the corn fodder collected for the cow was used as a mat with a foam cover on it. It was used as a landing area and we used to do practice on it," he recollected.



"I started playing under the guidance of my school's PT teacher R W Jadhav sir. Then I went to the Army Sports Institute and also got support from Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) which sent me to

America for training." He became a father nine months ago but he will be able to see his newborn daughter only after the Olympics. "I have a nine-month-old daughter but I have not met

her since November. Initially, I stayed with her for just five days and now I will meet her only after the Olympics," he said. It will, however, be a tough task for Kushare to be in the

medal bracket in Paris. At least nine athletes have jumped 2.33m or above in the last one year. Qatar's Mutaz Barshim and Gianmarco Tamperi of Italy shared the gold medal in

Tokyo with an identical jump of 2.37m. Tamperi is the leading the chart this season with 2.37m while Barshim has been struggling a bit with a season best of 2.31m. At one point in time, Kushare,

who won gold with a jump of 2.25m in the National Inter-State Championship in Panchkula in June, was uncertain whether he would qualify for the Paris Olympics or not. "Before June, my ranking had gone down to 36 because I could not play in May when competitions were going on all over the world. I was afraid whether I would be able to play in the Olympics or not. I was under a lot of pressure but then I qualified by performing consistently well in Malaysia, Kazakhstan and Panchkula," he said.

"I had a lot of problems due to an ankle injury but now my confidence has increased by practising well consistently. Talking about his daily training routine at Spala, he said, "Practice includes gym, speed work, strength training. The recovery sessions here are very good. We just rest in our free time because it is very important to give rest to the body." He said when asked about his routine.

"I talk to a sports psychologist regularly for mental preparation. He tells me how to deal with pressure and how to keep myself mentally fresh. I do yoga and meditation every morning."

The Indian athletics team has been training at Spala from July 8 and will leave for Paris on July 29.

# Women's boxing fights its way to parity with men's game

## Just 12 years after its Olympic debut

AP ■ COLORADO (USA)

Charley Davison's husband and their three young children were already in bed back home on the east coast of England before she pulled on her headgear and stepped into the World Boxing ring in southern Colorado earlier this year. The 30-year-old Davison was able to pursue her Olympic dreams half a world away from her family only because of the spectacular growth of women's boxing. In just over a decade, the sport has proliferated from its Olympic debut with only 36 fighters in three weight classes in London to become an equal part of the tournament in Paris, where half of the 248-fighter field will be women competing in a record six weight classes. The addition of a 54-kilogram bantamweight division at the Paris Olympics changed the game for fighters like Davison.

"After the Tokyo Olympics, if there wasn't going to be a 54 (division), I would have hung my gloves up," said Davison, a former youth champion who left boxing for seven years before returning to get in shape after having kids.

"Because 51 (kilos) was getting too hard, and 57, I'm not quite big enough for that one, I feel," she added. "So 54 was a blessing. As soon as I heard that weight, I knew it was for me. Every kilo makes a difference. I know I'm not the only one who's grateful. I think it's ideal for a lot of women to have this many weight classes. It makes such a difference for the sport."

Davison fought for Britain in Tokyo, but lost early. Three years later, she has the opportunity to try again only because of the IOC's commitment to the sport's growth. Boxing essentially has reached gender parity along with the rest of the Olympic



program, and dozens more women are getting a shot. "Since I've started, especially on the international level, the level (of women's boxing) has raised incredibly," said Canada's Tammara Thibeault, the middleweight world champion and an Olympic quarterfinalist in Tokyo headed to her second Games. "That makes us all better, because we elevate each other. That's how a sport grows, and we're really growing right now." Women's boxing entranced athletes like Australia's Tiana Echegaray, who had never boxed just five years ago. She was 25 and working at a boring office job in the music business in Sydney when she threw herself into training - and now she's an Olympian.

"I think maybe the creative side of me saw boxing as an art," said Echegaray, who studied music. "It's really pretty, you know? When you see really skilled boxers compete, it's the prettiest thing I've ever seen. It's so cool to watch. "It's not just the sport itself, but the community around the sport," she added. "It's the people. Boxing teaches you so much about life. I'm so grateful that I found it now. I think I would have loved to have found it younger, but I don't think I would have had the emotional maturity to get

punched in the face and be all right with it." Britain's Chantelle Reid was a teenage pugilism prodigy who returned this year after a lengthy break. She was bowled over by the sport's growth in her absence. "The level in women's boxing has increased massively in the six years" since her return, Reid said. "There's so much talent out there now. It just makes me push a little bit harder to be on top. It's exciting. ... Sport science has come into the sport a lot, and everyone is just much more strong. They've all got that grit, whereas before it was more point-fighting boxing. No one really had that grit, but I'm seeing that a lot now."

Reid is among the many fighters in the Paris field who got hooked when they watched the inaugural women's boxing competition in London as girls. "Gold medalist Nicola Adams and Katie Taylor, they've set a high standard now," Reid said. "They've set an amazing example for women's boxing. We're just trying to reach that level now, and hopefully the next generation is that much better." Indeed, women's boxing has changed dramatically in the 12 years since its Olympic debut in London - and not just on the amateur level.

# It's a now-or-never situation for me: Tarundeep

PTI ■ PARIS

It's a "now-or-never situation for me," says veteran Indian archer Tarundeep Rai as he seeks to win a maiden Olympic medal in his fourth appearance at the Games while also serving as the team's unofficial mentor in Paris. The 40-year-old Rai has won medals in every championships at the global and continental level but not the Olympics. He has two silver at the World Championships (2005, 2019), nine World Cup medals, including three gold, a silver and a bronze in Asian Games, two silver and a bronze in Asian Championships. "It's emotional every day. It's the fourth time. It's a now-or-



never situation for me, and that's what I tell my teammates too. Maybe someone playing his first or second Olympics should think like it's now or never. You have to put in an effort as if it's going to be your last," Rai told PTI in an interview. The veteran archer from Sikkim was part of the Indian teams at the 2004

Athens, 2012 London and 2021 Tokyo Olympics. He exited in the first round in the individual event in Athens, and in the second round in both 2012 and 2021 editions. In Tokyo, the men's team, which had Tarundeep Rai in it its ranks, reached the quarterfinals. "Olympics is a dream for

everyone, and I'm no different. You need an extreme level of preparation for this, and you have to put in a lot of hard work to qualify and win a medal. The colour of your sweat sometimes turns red," Rai said ahead of the Paris Games. "This Olympics, I'm playing with a three-year gap. Positive sign. Many changes. Tokyo, whatever I lacked, the objective is to rectify. Will do my best," said Rai who hails from Namchi in Sikkim. More or less regular at the Olympics since debuting back in 1988, the Indian archers will be aiming to fetch their maiden medal as they began the country's campaign here on Thursday with the

qualification rounds. "There are always expectations. We had the potential to win, but for small margins, we have returned empty-handed," Rai rued. "We have kept that in control (this time). Coaches, management, players' mentality, we have kept that in check. Everyone is in their best form." For the first time since London 2012, India will have a full six-member squad after both the men's and women's teams qualified on the basis of rankings. This means they will compete in all the five events. Rai failed to make it to the Hangzhou Asian Games last year and said it was a wake-up call for him.

# Noah looks to be star of Olympics, and bring all of track along for ride

AP ■ PARIS

Winner. Entertainer. History maker. By the time the Paris Olympics are over, Noah Lyles hopes to be all of that and maybe more. The confident 26-year-old sprinter thinks he can win medals, break records and bring the entire sport of track and field onto America's screens for more than 10 days every four years. These are audacious goals. Winning the 100 and 200 meters and maybe a relay or two would put him in a category with Usain Bolt, Carl Lewis and Michael Johnson, to name a few. Making track popular again - that's a whole different, and more complex, mission, and one Lyles has not shown any fear of tackling. "I want to see everybody be able to see the stories we create, the moments that are shared, and the big events that we have," Lyles said. "And, we need personalities to be able to show that. Because just going out there and winning doesn't mean everybody's watching." BEHIND-THE-SCENES DOCUMENTARIES TO DRAW NEW FANS: Lyles has a two-pronged strategy. The first part is dominating the sprints.



That second part is becoming a must-see personality who transcends both track and sports, the way Bolt did. Lyles has spent the last year or more laying the groundwork for that second part. He has opened up his life for two behind-the-scenes documentaries. The first, "Untitled: The Noah Lyles Project," came out last year. The second, a Netflix production called "SPRINT" that debuted this summer, features Lyles as a main character among some Olympians including ShaCarri Richardson and the stable of Jamaica's fastest women sprinters. When he's not on TV, Lyles has curated a look outside - or make that coming into - the track.

He is making his "walk-in" to meet an event, arriving in everything from a green sweater with church-window-shaped cut-outs to black leather pants to the tailored navy suit with the signature Adidas stripes down the side of the slacks he wore to the US Olympic trials. There, he was greeted by Snoop Dogg, who carried a briefcase they opened for a big reveal of Lyles' track kit for the 100-meter final. "It's to keep hype," Lyles explained. "If you're generating excitement and hype, it's like, 'What's in the briefcase?' You want to know what's in the briefcase." LYLES TOOK A NOTABLE DIG AT THE NBA: Getting others to follow his lead in a sport filled with solo artists is only part of the mountain Lyles is trying to climb. Another part might have been best illustrated last year when, while articulating his vision for track after completing the 100-200 double at world championships, he made an off-hand comparison between track and the NBA. "The thing that hurts me the most is I have to watch the NBA finals and they have World Champion on their head," Lyles said. "World champion of what? The United States?"

## Indian men finish 6th, women 7th in World Junior Squash Championships

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India finished sixth and seventh in the men's and women's sections respectively in the World Junior Squash Championships held in Houston, USA. The Indian men lost to England 1-2 in the match for fifth position while their women counterparts beat New Zealand 2-1 in the clash for the seventh on Tuesday. Both the matches went into deciders. **RESULTS: Men:** India lost to England 1-2 (Shaurya Bawa bt Yusuf Sheikh 3-11, 11-6, 11-8, 11-7; Yuvraj Wadhvani lost to Bailey Malik 11-5, 9-11, 8-11, 14-16; Ayaan Vazilalli lost to Dylan Roberts 11-6, 9-11, 9-11, 7-11). **Women:** India beat New Zealand 2-1 (Shameena Riaz lost to Ella Lash 7-11, 12-10, 13-11, 4-11, 4-11; Nirupama Dubey bt Anabel Gemmill 9-11, 11-6, 11-4, 8-11, 11-9; Unnati Tripathi bt Ella Hill 11-4, 11-3, 11-6).

# Salt Lake City celebrates announcement that it will host 2034 Winter Olympics

AP ■ SALT LAKE CITY

Salt Lake City was formally Salarated the 2034 Winter Olympics following a Wednesday vote by the International Olympic Committee in Paris, which gives Utah its second Games after hosting in 2002. A watch party was planned at 3 a.m. Local time - 11 a.m. In Paris - to celebrate the announcement. Large crowds were expected at the event that coincides with a state holiday marking the date Mormon pioneers discovered the Salt Lake Valley in northern Utah. Olympic fanatics were already starting to gather downtown and pitch tents before sunset Tuesday.

Salt Lake City was the lone contender the Olympic committee was considering for 2034. Climate change and high operational costs have reduced the number of cities willing and able to welcome the Winter Games. Utah has capitalized on low interest elsewhere, pitching itself to Olympic officials as an enthusiastic repeat host if the committee goes forward with a proposed permanent rotation of Winter Olympic cities. Olympic Games Executive Director Christophe Dubi had said Salt Lake City would be a prime candidate for such a plan. Local leaders had their sights set on hosting multiple times even before Salt Lake City

welcomed its first Games, bid team spokesperson Tom Kelly said. Remnants of the 2002 Games are nestled throughout the city and have kept the Olympic fever alive for more than two decades. Organizers of the 2034 Games touted that enduring enthusiasm throughout the selection process and showed visiting Olympic officials how they have preserved the venues used in 2002. In their final presentation to the Olympic committee Wednesday morning, the bid team was expected to outline its plan for one of the most compact layouts in Olympic history, with all venues within a one-hour drive of the athletes village on the



University of Utah campus. The plan requires no new permanent construction, with all 13 venues already in place and each having played a role when the city first hosted. For Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, securing the bid was central to his goal of cementing the state as North America's winter sports capital. He and other local leaders were in Paris for the bid presentation, while many winter Olympians stayed in town to train and join in the festivities. American freestyle skier Christopher Lillis, a gold medalist at the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing, said the 2034 games would be a dream come true for young people with Olympic aspirations. Salt

Lake City has a lot since 2010, when Lillis said his family started visiting, and it's become more expensive. Lillis has been training at nearby Utah Olympic Park and said the sports facilities in the area are "top notch." Matthew Lindon, a 45-year resident of the ski resort community of Park City, Utah, where many events would be held, said the city has expanded considerably since he arrived. "With the 2002 Olympics, the motto was, 'The world is welcome here.' And really what happened was we brought Utah to the world, and now we're a world-class destination skiing resort," he said.

# Zubin Bharucha helping us, Lankans should take advantage of Indian retirements: Jayasuriya

PTI ■ PALLEKELE

Sri Lanka's interim head coach Sanath Jayasuriya on Wednesday revealed that IPL side Rajasthan Royals' high performance director Zubin Bharucha has helped his batters prepare for the upcoming T20 series against India where he expects them to take advantage of the recent retirements by stars like Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli.

Rohit, Kohli and all-rounder Ravindra Jadeja retired from the T20 Internationals after India's World Cup triumph last month. The T20 series against Sri Lanka will get underway here on July 27.

Jayasuriya revealed despite some of the Sri Lankan players' involvement in the Lanka Premier League, they have held a six-day camp with Bharucha. "We just started the sessions just after the LPL. Most of the players are playing the LPL, so they were busy with cricket and what we wanted (for them) was to play cricket as much as possible," he said.

"We got Zubin from Rajasthan Royals and we had about six days of work and also with the other cricketers who finished with the LPL. I hope the players have learnt what you (management) wanted to do in terms of practice and their technique."



"The preparation was good, and we have two more days in Kandy before the T20 starts," he added. Jayasuriya said the sessions with Bharucha were intense and the players have been able to learn a lot from him. "It is important to learn as international cricketers new techniques, new approaches and shot making to be effective," he said. India also have a new captain in Suryakumar Yadav for T20Is and Jayasuriya, while acknowledging the struggles of his side, urged them to make the most of the opportunity. "Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli are best players in the world.

Looking at their talent and the kind of cricket they have played we all know where they belong, along with Jadeja," Jayasuriya was quoted as saying by Associated Press during a press meet. "Their absence will be loss to the Indian team and we have to take maximum advantage out of that," he said. Heads rolled in the top management of Sri Lanka team after the debacle in the T20 World Cup in the Americas. After Sri Lanka made a preliminary round exit, upon return the team captain Wanindu Hasaranga, head coach Chris Silverwood and high performance consultant Mahela Jayawardena all

resigned. When asked about Sri Lanka's current state, Jayasuriya hoped the players are able to develop themselves. "It is up to the players, we have been doing all the work in terms of practice, we have got best coaches. I think Sri Lanka Cricket has provided most of the things and now it is up to the players," he said. "For the present cricketers to come to that level, we have been doing all the necessary work and I hope in next two years there will be a lot of development in these boys," the batting great added. "We need to give a little bit of time. I know, for the cricket-loving public it is frustrating

sometimes but be patient, give us time, we are working ion it. It is really hard work on it with the players and they will do well." The 1996 World Cup winner said Sri Lanka have enough talent in ranks to come out of troubled times while acknowledging the frustration of the fans. "We have enough of talent. What we want (from them) is to go out in the middle and deliver -- it is not easy, we know that," he said. "We have delivered when we were playing and now the time has come, people are waiting for this present team to perform and with what we are doing at the moment they will deliver very soon," he added.



## Indian women team's mantra has been to take one game at a time: Deepti

PTI ■ DAMBULLA (SRI LANKA)

Senior player Deepti Sharma said India's mantra in the Women's T20 Asia Cup has been to take one game at a time as conditions haven't really changed from the last time the team played here. India marched into the semifinals with a thumping 82-run win over Nepal on Tuesday after fireworks with the bat from Shafali Verma (81 off 48 balls) and Deepti's impressive 3/13 with the ball. India amassed 178 for 3 after batting first and then restricted Nepal to a paltry 98 for 9 in their 20 overs. "From the first game we are

pretty confident about each (match) and every situation and the condition as well. We are looking forward to semi-final as well," Deepti told the media after the match. She said not much has changed in terms of the nature of the pitches and conditions in Sri Lanka from the team's previous tour to the island nation in June 2022. "Nothing (has) changed, just keep it very simple and just focus for another match. I played (here) last time also and yeah, nothing changed," she said. "We (are) only backing ourselves and you know, conditions are really (the) same."

The right-arm off-spinner is topping the bowling charts with eight wickets in three matches and she credited her success to her readiness to bowl in all situations. "I (am) always ready to bowl in any kind of situation. I like to take the challenges from the front. (It's) nothing, just (that) I'm enjoying each and every match, plan accordingly and what we discussed in the meeting, I just apply myself," she said. "If we win the toss, it's (a) positive (approach) from the upfront. As a batting unit also, we are doing really well from the game one and we finished also well," she added.



## Ollie Pope reckons England can make 600 Test runs in a day's play

PTI ■ LONDON

Ollie Pope reckons England can breach the 600-run mark inside a day's play in Test cricket while ruling out any let up to their ultra aggressive 'Bazball' approach with the bat. England hold the record for the most runs scored in a day when they piled up 588 for 6 on the second day of the Manchester Test against India in 1936, and Pope believes the current side under Ben Stokes can eclipse that. "Sometimes we might score 280 to 300 in a day but that's OK and probably because we're reading situations. There might also be a day where we go and get 500 to 600 at some point in the future as well. And that's a cool thing to have," Pope was quoted as saying by BBC Sport.

In December 2022, England smashed 506 runs on the opening day of the first Test against Pakistan in Rawalpindi. England are currently 2-0 up in

the three-match Test series against the West Indies after they followed up a victory by an innings at Lord's with a comprehensive 241-run win at Trent Bridge, Nottingham last week. The third and final Test starts on Friday at Edgbaston. The win in Nottingham was the first time England scored 400-plus in both innings of a Test match with totals of 416 and 425. Pope (121 in first innings) was one of three England centurions in the second Test alongside Joe Root and Harry Brook. Pope said there might be times England batters will have to "manage the game a little bit more" but that their attacking Bazball style under coach Brendon McCullum and captain Stokes has now become second nature. "I got asked on day one at Trent Bridge 'do you get told to play like that?'. No, we don't. It's just our natural games and the way we go about it," Pope said.

## Mind Games: The psychological challenge of being Olympian

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Human excellence is often closely linked to human fortitude and Olympics is the prime example of it. The Paris Games, starting on Friday, will be a gathering of 10,500 athletes, 117 of them from India, competing for a mere 329 medals. Needless to say, talent alone won't decide who finishes on the podium. It will also boil down to the mind and how one can discipline it to cope with the grandeur and pressure of the big moments. Visualisation, blocking out the noise and being focussed are among the techniques that are often talked about but are they as easy to implement in a highly competitive environment? "There is a lot of pressure (already) in sports and when you compete at the Olympics, you have to be someone who has gone through a lot of highs and lows as well," explains Dr Divya Jain, a sports psychologist with Fortis Healthcare. "In sports, you're confronted with winning and losing on a day-to-day basis, so it's not about winning every time; it's about how you recover, how quickly you bounce back from a mistake," she said while explaining the difference between Olympians and other athletes. "There is public scrutiny, staying away from family, the noise of the Games... All of these are aspects that athletes have to cope with at a psychological level," she added. For the next few weeks athletes will try to be at the peak of their form. To do that, they have trained physically and



mentally but the medal winners will be those who are a tad more tenacious and focussed than the rest. "Not only do they have their own high expectations, but they also carry the hopes of their entire country and scrutiny of a global audience," says Keerthana Swaminathan, a sports psychologist and president of the Indian Sport Psychologists Association. "Being away from families, friends and home is a part of sportspersons' lives but in Olympics, with all eyes on them, it could lead to further stress and anxiety. "Olympians often have to deal with extensive travel and long periods away from family and friends, which can be really isolating. This combination can take a serious toll on their mental health, making it crucial for them to have strong support systems and access to mental health resources," she adds. And to ensure that Indian athletes have calmer minds, a first of its kind specialised medical team is accompanying the contingent, featuring wellness specialists, and a sleep scientist among the regular medical staff.

"Representing and competing for one's country can instil a deep sense of responsibility and pride but that also adds an additional layer of pressure as athletes at the Olympics often feel that they are competing for national glory," says Dr Nanaki J. Chadha, a Sport and Performance Psychologist. Dealing with distractions is something that every athlete needs to learn since focussing on the 'here and now' goes a long way. "It's also about being able to harness that pressure because it's natural for anyone to be in a high-stress situation, to have certain responses to that pressure. Your heart rate may increase, muscle tension may change, your rhythm may change," explains Dr Divya Jain. "So you need to train yourself to work through that pressure and also to harness that pressure to help do better, actually become stronger, (to) have more explosive movement, recognising that that's the body we are preparing, rather than clearing that kind of competition situation," she explains. That mental health is a crucial aspect of an athlete's overall

competitive preparedness has been stressed quite often by India's first individual Olympic gold-medallist Abhinav Bindra. Bindra has often talked about his own struggles before the Beijing top finish. "WHAT SEPARATES AN OLYMPIC MEDALIST FROM OTHERS?: "Medallists have an extraordinary ability to maintain unshakeable focus and concentration, even in the most intense situations," Keerthana says, "They can block out distractions - whether it's the noise of the crowd, the pressure of the moment, or the actions of their competitors - and stay entirely present in their performance," she adds. It is something that Bindra and some of other top Indian sportspersons have also often pointed out. Being flexible to last-minute changes and self-assurance are also an important aspect. "They trust in their training, abilities and preparation, which helps them take risks when necessary and push their limits without fear of failure. This self-assurance also acts as a buffer against the pressure and expectations they face, enabling them to perform at their peak," Keerthana says. The winners also tend to remain focussed for the entirety of the competition, says Dr Nanaki. "Medallists often possess superior mental resilience, allowing them to perform under pressure and that also helps them recover quickly from setbacks. Now, throughout the competition, the ability to maintain focus and concentration is extremely crucial," she says.

## For TT great Sharath Kamal, running into Roger Federer tops favourite Olympic memories

PTI ■ PARIS

From lunching alongside tennis icon Roger Federer to taking a set off Chinese legend Ma Long, India's flag-bearer for Paris Olympics, Aachant Sharath Kamal, on Wednesday recalled the most memorable moments from his five appearances at the Games so far. The 42-year-old table tennis legend helped the Indian men's team qualify for the first time in history and is believed to be set for his final appearance at the Games. The multiple-time Commonwealth Games gold-medallist believes that qualifying as a team could become the catalyst of growth for table tennis in India. For someone who has a huge bank of memories from the Olympics having made his first appearance in 2004, Sharath recalled running into Federer at a dining hall in his debut Games. "One day I was just out for lunch and as I was entering from this side, there was another person coming from the other side with a tennis bag and hair let loose. I feel like I have seen him somewhere. I couldn't recognise who he was with his hair let loose," he said in a release from Ultimate Table Tennis. "We pass each other -- we actually cross paths -- (and) he goes to give his bag at the baggage keeping area. I walk in, take my plate looking at what to eat and it suddenly strikes me. Man, it's Roger Federer!" Sharath said he was rather shy at that time but nonetheless



searched for the Swiss ace. "He was sitting at one of the tables all by himself. I went as close as possible. I didn't want to get in his place but still got close and I was eating (on the same table)," he continued. "Suddenly, a guy comes in with a reverse hat and shorts and they are clapping hands. I look at him and it's Andy Roddick," Sharath recalled. With the Tokyo Olympics postponed by one year during the COVID-19 pandemic, Sharath recalled facing difficulties in training and yet he was able to make a dent in Long's march to the gold medal. "Out of the five times I have played with him, I have won just one set against him and that was in Tokyo. And I am very proud of what happened there, especially coming in after COVID," he added. "India had a very tough situation especially after the second wave. People in the rest of the world started their training back and, mid-way in the lockdown in India, we were still confined to home workouts. I was playing on my terrace. It was very tough.

## New Zealand Olympic soccer team complains after Canadian team drone flown over its training session

AP ■ WELLINGTON

New Zealand says it has complained to the International Olympic Committee's integrity unit after a drone flown over a New Zealand women's soccer team training session was found to be operated by a member of the Canadian team's support staff. Defending Olympic champion Canada and New Zealand meet in their opening match at the Olympic tournament on Thursday. The drone incident occurred earlier this week, the New Zealand Olympic Committee said Wednesday.

"Team support members immediately reported the incident to police leading to the drone operator, who has been identified as a support staff member of the wider Canadian Women's football team, to be detained," the NZOC said in a statement. "The NZOC has formally lodged the incident with the IOC integrity unit and has asked Canada for a full review." The Canadian Olympic Committee has apologized to the NZOC and New Zealand Football. "The Canadian Olympic Committee stands for fair play and we are shocked and disappointed," the statement said. "We offer our heartfelt



apologies to New Zealand Football, to all the players affected, and to the New Zealand Olympic Committee." The NZOC said it and New Zealand

Football "are committed to upholding the integrity and fairness of the Olympic Games - at this time the NZOC's main priority is to support the New Zealand women's football athletes and wider team as they start their campaign." It's not the first time a Canadian soccer team has been involved in a drone controversy involving an international rival's training session. In 2021 at Toronto, Honduras stopped a training session ahead of its men's World Cup qualifier against Canada after spotting a drone above the field, according to reports in Honduran media.

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