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MODI REDEFINES NDA

NEW INDIA, DEVELOPED INDIA, ASPIRATIONAL INDIA



Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives to attend the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting at Samvidhan Sadan, in New Delhi, on Friday

NDA members dig trenches to fortify Govt

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Top leaders of the NDA - BJP, TDP, JD(U), IJP amongst others engaged themselves during the day to consolidate the process of Government formation as well as held deliberations of the shape of Council of Ministers to be led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. After the National Democratic Alliance parliamentary meeting, the top BJP leaders Amit Shah and Rajnath Singh met party president JP Nadda at his residence and discussed on the demands of the NDA partners. TDP's N Chandrababu Naidu, JD(United) Nitish Kumar, Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena and Chirag Paswan of Lok Janshakti Party-Ram Vilas have emerged as key parties after the BJP failed to cross the halfway mark needed to form a Government in its own right. Sources said Naidu, Nitish and Shinde met Nadda separately to discuss their demands and possible Cabinet formation. Naidu was the first to meet Nadda. After that Kumar and Shinde met Nadda. Before meeting with key NDA partners, Nadda held a deliberations with Shah and Rajnath Singh, soon after the NDA parliamentary meeting is ended. The TDP wants five posts in the Cabinet, including parliamentary speaker. Kumar's JD(U) is also keen on

getting two major portfolios - railways and rural development, sources said. Sources said talks are going on and the outcome is not known to others as discussions were held between top brass of the two parties. As of now, nothing has been finalised. Sources said Naidu and Kumar, both coalition-era veterans, conducted discussions with their party leaders ahead of the NDA meeting today. The BJP, however, is not keen on accommodating allies in four key Ministries that come under the Cabinet Committee on Security - defence, finance, home affairs, and external affairs. The BJP will also not want to let go of portfolios that are critical to its infrastructure push, such as road transport and highways, or its welfare agenda, sources said. The four allies whose support is critical for the BJP to reach the majority are N Chandrababu Naidu's TDP, which has won 16 seats, Nitish Kumar's JD(U) (12), Eknath Shinde's Shiv Sena (7) and Chirag Paswan's Lok Janshakti Party-Ram Vilas (5). Naidu and Kumar - on Friday endorsed Prime Minister Narendra Modi as the leader of the National Democratic Alliance with a message to balance regional aspirations and national interests.

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Friday appointed NDA Parliamentary Party leader Narendra Modi as Prime Minister-designate paving the way for his swearing-in as the Prime Minister for a historic third consecutive term after Jawaharlal Nehru. This is the first time an incumbent Government is entering a third term in India since 1962. Murmu handed over the letter of appointment to Modi, who called on her at the Rashtrapati Bhavan here on Friday evening. Earlier,

leaders of the BJP-led NDA had called on Murmu and handed over letters of support for Modi, who was elected as the leader of the NDA Parliamentary Party. "The President having satisfied herself on the basis of the various letters of support received that the BJP-led NDA alliance, which is also the largest pre-election alliance, is in a position to command majority support of the newly constituted 18th Lok Sabha and to form a stable Government, appointed Narendra Modi as the Prime Minister of India

exercising powers vested in her under Article 75(1) of the Constitution of India," the Rashtrapati Bhavan said in a communiqué. Addressing the media in the forecourt of the Rashtrapati Bhavan, Modi said he has been appointed as Prime Minister-designate by the President. "The President has asked me to work as the PM-designate and she has informed me about the oath ceremony," Modi said and added that he has informed the President that they will be comfortable if the event is held at 7.15 pm

of June 9. He said the Rashtrapati Bhavan will work out the details of the oath taking ceremony on Sunday by when he would hand over the list of the Council of Ministers to the President. "This 18th Lok Sabha is an important milestone towards fulfilling those dreams when the country will celebrate the 100 years of independence in 2047," Modi said. This 18th Lok Sabha is a House of new energy, youthful energy, and people have given the NDA Government one more chance, Modi said.

Earlier, at a meeting of the NDA parliamentary party in the central hall of the old Parliament House, Modi was unanimously elected by the MPs and coalition partners as the leader of the alliance. BJP leader Rajnath Singh proposed Modi's name as the leader of the NDA Parliamentary Party and the proposal was seconded by his party colleagues Amit Shah and Nitin Gadkari as well as top NDA leaders. NDA leaders HD K u m a r a s w a m y , Chandrababu Naidu, Nitish Kumar, Chirag Paswan,

Jayant Choudhary (RLD), Ajit Pawar (NCP), Anupriya Patel (Apna Dal-S), Pawan Kalyan (Jana Sena) supported the proposal. Before moving to Rashtrapati Bhavan Modi sought blessings of veterans LK Advani and MM Joshi who were pillars of the NDA alliance when it was first formed. Modi went to meet former president Ram Nath Kovind at his residence. Modi, while addressing the NDA's parliamentary meeting, spelled out his vision for the "next 10 years" of the NDA Government.

New Government in a New-look Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Parliament premises, now comprising New Building christened as Sansad Bhawan and the Old Parliament rechristened as Samvidhan Sadan, will sport a new look when the 18th Lok Sabha convenes for its maiden session shortly. After the beginning of New Parliament in September 2023, work was underway to integrate the entire complex, comprising four different buildings when the country witnessed the process of just concluded three months spanning Lok Sabha polls.

Several measures have been taken to welcome the members and ensure their seamless registration as the Lok Sabha Secretariat got ready to welcome MPs of the new Lok Sabha. Secretary General, Lok Sabha, Utpal Kumar Singh, conducted an inspection of the preparations and is monitoring the arrangements on a day to day basis.

With a view to reducing the paperwork and making the registration formalities of members seamless, the registration process of the newly elected members shall be done through an online integrated software application. Members would not be required to sign multiple physical forms with various branches. While welcoming the members, the Secretariat will provide each member with a set of publications relating to the Constitution of India, rules, directions and some other useful publications in hard copies. Besides, a few other publications will be provided to members in a soft version. As part of the redevelopment of



external areas, the statues of national icons, including those of Mahatma Gandhi, Chhatrapati Shivaji and Mahatma Jyotiba Phule, have been moved to a lawn near gate number 5 of the old Parliament building, which has been named as Samvidhan Sadan. This has paved the way for the creation of a vast lawn in front of the Gaja Dwar, which is used by the President and the Prime Minister to enter into the new Parliament building. The lawn can now also be used for official ceremonies such as the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, usually during the Budget Session. The Parliament complex comprises four buildings - Parliament Building, Samvidhan Sadan, Parliament Library and the Parliament Annex - with each structure having its own distinct surroundings and security set-ups. Earlier, the movement of vehicles within the complex was difficult, particularly during Parliament

sessions, leading to blockades within the complex. The Parliament Library building and the Annex are separated by a road that has a reception office and a row of barracks, housing security offices along a compound wall. The statue of Babasaheb Ambedkar is located inside the Parliament complex and thousands of visitors through the premises to pay tributes to him on his birth and death anniversaries. The Red Cross Road outside the Parliament premises will also become a part of the complex as there are plans to develop offices for Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members on the land which currently houses the International Red Cross Society. The row of barracks has been vacated and plans are also being made to demolish the compound wall separating the Parliament buildings from the Annex. These offices have been shifted to the North Utility Block of the new Parliament building.



INDIA Bloc leaders in New Delhi File photo: Ranjan Dimri / The Pioneer

INDIA bloc Oppn won't be LoPsided

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA ■ NEW DELHI

As the Congress-led Opposition still hobbles for options to lead a Government at the Centre, the party is likely to take call on the nomination of 'Leader of Opposition' in the new Lok Sabha, the official status of LoP restored after a decade, at a meeting of the party's apex CWC meeting on Saturday. Sources said logically the LoP status will fall into the kitty of Congress which is the largest amongst the Opposition but it may consider a 'vocal leader from either of parties from the INDIA Bloc. "Lets see who becomes the LoP. It's the Congress or from INDIA as a united representation has to be made to face the BJP led NDA again," quipped a senior party leader. Batting for Rahul Gandhi to take on the mantle of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, several party leaders and newly elected MPs, including senior party leader Shashi Tharoor said the former Congress president deserves more than anyone. "I think we have a strong number now to stand up to the government and it (Leader of Opposition) should be a leader who is undoubtedly the most popular in the party," Tharoor said. Sources in the Congress said however Rahul may refuse to don the mantle of LoP in Lok Sabha as he will "have to keep a tab on many other things for the INDIA Bloc". "A decision in this regard is to be taken in the

Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Saturday. This will be first meeting after the great gains in just concluded LS polls and all of us looking forward to meet and greet and the leaders including high command who worked hard," said the Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary who led the Congress in the outgoing Lok Sabha however lost the elections from his home turf in West Bengal this time. Sources said there may also be a discussion on which of the two seats Rahul should retain for political reasons. He had won from two constituencies, Wayanad in Kerala and Rae Bareilly in Uttar Pradesh. Top Congress leaders, including Sonia Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, besides other leaders would participate in the deliberations. The party will also host a dinner for all its newly elected MPs on Saturday evening. The biggest Opposition party with 10 per cent of seats has Leader of Opposition post in the Lok Sabha. Congress, after being reduced to just 44 seats in 2014, and then 52 seats in the 2019 general elections fell short twice to get the post officially it led as Leader of the (largest) Party which was represented first by Mallikarjun Kharge and in the outgoing LS Adhir Ranjan Chowdhary who has lost this elections. Congress almost doubled its tally in the 2024 Lok Sabha election with 99 plus one (100) MPs to bear the torch of grand old party in LS.

Taiwan protests China 'outrage' over India bonhomie



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Taiwan on Friday said China's "outrage" over a "cordial" exchange between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te is utterly unjustified as threats and intimidation never foster friendship. The comments by the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry came a day after China protested an exchange of messages between Modi and Ching-te, saying it opposes all official interactions between Taiwan and countries having diplomatic relations with Beijing. "China's outrage at a cordial exchange between the leaders of 2 democracies is utterly unjustified. Threats & intimidation never foster friendships," the Taiwanese Foreign Ministry said on a social media post. "Taiwan remains dedicated to building partnerships with India underpinned by mutual benefit & shared values," it said. On Wednesday, Lai greeted Modi on the National Democratic Alliance's victory in the Lok Sabha polls and said Taiwan was looking forward to enhancing the "fast-growing" ties between the two sides.

Sujata Karthikeyan goes on 6-month leave

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha IAS officer Sujata Karthikeyan, serving as Special Secretary in the Finance Department, has proceeded on six months' 'childcare' leave.

This comes almost a month after Sujata was removed from the post of Secretary, Mission Shakti, and appointed as Special Secretary, Finance Department, following an instruction from the Election Commission of India (ECI) in this regard. The ECI had ordered for her transfer to a non-public dealing



department, hours after a delegation of BJP central leaders submitted a complaint accusing the 2000-batch IAS officer of 'actively' operating as an agent of the ruling BJD in the state.

Sujata is the wife of BJD leader VK Pandian, who took a plunge into state politics after taking voluntary retirement from All India Civil Services in October 2023. Pandian is now in New Delhi and the BJD said that he has gone on tours to the national capital at the instance of outgoing Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik.

BJP to announce CM's name today

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The BJP Legislature Party will hold a meeting to announce the name of the State's new Chief Minister on Saturday.

This was stated by newly-elected BJP MLA Rabinarayan Nayak to the media here on Friday.

"As announced by our State

president Manmohan Samal earlier, the BJP Parliamentary Board will take a decision on the Chief Minister and the BJP Legislature Party will approve the name at its meeting on Saturday," Nayak said.

Meanwhile, the newly-elected MPs from the State left for New Delhi on Friday for a meeting with the party's central leaders. The BJP Parli-

amentary Board will meet after the central leaders hold discussions with party MPs from the State. The Chief Minister's name would not be made public until the State legislature party approves it, sources said.

Notably, the Chief Minister will be sworn in at a function to be held at the Janata Maidan in Bhubaneswar on June 10.

Sensex bounces back to record high

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty climbed over 2 per cent to settle at record high levels on Friday after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised upwards the GDP growth projection to 7.2 per cent for 2024-25 from 7 per cent earlier. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,720.8 points, or 2.29 per cent, to hit a new record peak of 76,795.31 in day trade. The benchmark ended at a record high of 76,693.36, up 1,618.85 points, or 2.16 per cent. The NSE Nifty climbed 498.8 points, or 2.18 per cent, to



23,320.20 during the day and is just 18.5 points from the record intraday high. The index settled with a jump of 468.75 points, or 2.05 per cent, at all-time closing high of 23,290.15. IT and interest rate-sensitive bank, realty, and auto stocks ended with sharp gains. Detailed report on Page 10

Thunderstorm, heat wave predicted in State

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Even as the weather office predicted that monsoon would arrive in the State in three to four days, hot and humid conditions are making life miserable for people. The Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Friday said there would be a gradual rise in maximum temperature (day

temperature) by 2 to 3 degrees Celsius during the next three days and no large change is expected thereafter at many places in the districts of the State. The IMD also issued a forecast for thunderstorm activities while a Yellow alert was also issued for heat wave conditions. On Saturday, thunderstorm with lightning accompanied

with gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph is likely to occur in the districts of Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Subarnapur, Boudh, Nuapada, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Kandhamal, Nabarangpur, Rayagada, Koraput, Malkangiri, Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Baleswar and Bhadrak, said the IMD issuing a Yellow warn-

ing. On Sunday, heat wave condition is likely to prevail in the districts of Bargarh, Balangir and Nuapada. Hot and humid weather condition is likely to prevail in the districts of Baleswar, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapada, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khordha, Nayagarh, Ganjam and Gajapati, said the weather office issuing a Yellow warning.

Youth's body found in canal in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Fire Service personnel on Friday recovered a body of a youth, who drowned in the Puri Canal near Hanspal on the Bhubaneswar outskirts while taking a bath on Thursday. The victim was identified Soumya Ranjan Das (24), a resident of Jagatsinghpur district. According to sources,

the Fire Service personnel had failed to locate him even after a frantic search on Thursday evening. The search operation had to be stopped for the night and was resumed on Friday morning. Police seized the body and sent it for postmortem. An investigation was also underway to ascertain the circumstances leading to the victim's death.

Modi hails BJP performance in Odisha

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The newly elected MPs of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Friday re-elected Narendra Modi as their leader. This also paved the way for Modi to become the Prime Minister for the third term.



In course of his address, Modi said the BJP has scripted history by winning 20 Lok Sabha seats out of 21 and bagging 78 seats in the 147-seat Odisha Assembly to form the next government in the State. "When I think about Lord Jagannath, I believe that he is

the God of the poor. The revolutionary results that have come in Odisha, I am sure, the dream of Viksit Bharat, with the blessing of Lord Jagannath, Odisha will be one of the growth engines of the 'Vikas Yatra' of the country in the next 25 years," said Modi.

Puri firecracker blast Toll rises to 16 after more victim dies

PNS ■ PURI
The death toll in the firecracker explosion during the Chandan Yatra in Puri rose to 16 after one more person succumbed to burn injuries in a hospital on Friday.

including police personnel and others, who were present on duty on the day of the incident, along with the authorities of Puri Shreemandir deposed before the SRC. Later in the day, the family of the deceased, intellectuals, social and human rights activists and media personnel made their statements. Notably, 20 devotees sustained burn injuries after crackers exploded during 'Chapa Khela' of the Holy Trinity in Narendra Puskarini as part of Chandan Yatra on May 29.

At present, 12 patients are undergoing treatment at various hospitals. On Friday, several officials

MLA-elect Jagdev gets 3-day interim bail

To move High Court for extension
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR



The district court here on Friday granted interim bail to Khordha MLA-elect Prashant Jagdev in connection with the EVM toppling case. He was granted bail for three days, June 9, 10, 11, and asked to surrender before the court on June 12. "We had sought bail for a

month over oath-taking ceremony on June 10, medical grounds and death of his nephew. But the court granted bail for just three days," Jagdev's lawyer told the media. He added that they would move the Orissa High Court for extension of his bail and later for regular bail. Jagdev was arrested on May 26 for allegedly toppling an EVM and manhandling two polling personnel in booth no. 114 of Kaunripatana under Bolagarh block under the

Bengunia Assembly constituency while polling was on during the third-round elections on May 25. In addition to Sections 131, 132, 135, 136 of Representation of People's Act, he has also been charged under Sections 294 (use of abusive, humiliating or defamatory words), 506 (criminal intimidation) and 354 (assault or criminal force to woman with intent to outrage her modesty) of the IPC. He is currently lodged in the Khordha jail.

Unauthorised bldg owner issued notice in J'pore

After complaints
NISHAN PATNAIK ■ JEYPORE



The Jeypore Municipality on Thursday issued a letter against an unauthorised construction at the main road of Jeypore town, which is presently rented to Kolkata Bazar. The development came after locals complained that the plot No. 984/4103 and No. 983/2333 owners had illegally built extensions and encroached on common areas, hindering movements within the premises. According to municipality officials, the building owner has been granted permission for 45/90 feet but the owner has violated it by constructing 53/100 feet and also as per the rule for commercial building the total area of parking should be of 30% of built area towards FAR ie 5,434 sq.ft and a minimum 15% of space should be demarcated for two-wheelers parking which is not provided on the ground. The owner has also violated

complaints from various quarters he had personally visited the site and conducted an inspection after which it came to notice that the B+4 commercial building constructed under Jagadhatripur Mouza has violated the norms as per prescribed under the Odisha Town Planning and Improvement Trust for (planning and build-

ing standards) Rules of 2021 and the Odisha Town Planning Improvement Trust Act 1956. Patnaik said regarding this an explanation has been raised from the owner regarding the demarcation report of the plot within 7 days. The EO has also asked the owners of all the commercial buildings to properly follow the norms.

'Odisha should demand Spl Category status'

Says SP
PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The leaders of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar have demanded Special Category status for their States. Though Odisha had demanded Special Category status much earlier, still it could not be achieved, said the State unit of the Samajwadi Party (SP) here on Thursday. Biju Patnaik during his tenure had demanded indepen-

dent financial status for Odisha. The Central Government is taking huge revenue from coal, iron ore, manganese and other mineral resources from the State for its development. But it is giving negligible funds to Odisha, said State SP president Rabi Behera. Odisha should take advantage of the situation of Andhra Pradesh and Bihar demanding Special Category status. All parties of the State should unite for the purpose, said Behera.

Similipal Tiger Reserve closed till Sept 30

Ecotourism complex will remain open
PNS ■ BARIPADA



The authorities on Friday announced closure of the Similipal Tiger Reserve (STR) for visitors from June 12, 2024. In a notice issued by the Field Director, STR Prakash Chandra Gogineni the tiger reserve will be out of bounds for tourists/ visitors tentatively till September 30. The decision was taken in accordance with the regular management practice of the tiger reserve. "The exact date of reopening will be notified and published in daily newspapers," the

notice read. Usually, the STR remains closed for the visitors for a period of four months during the monsoon season. However, the ecotourism complex, Jamuani, Gurudia, Kumari, Barehipani and Ramtirtha, shall remain open for the visitors. "The exact date of reopening will be notified and published in daily newspapers," the official notice read.

Hosannas to gentle colossus Naveen Patnaik

Naveen Patnaik took over as the president of BJD in 1997 and had a record-breaking five-year stint as CM. He was universally recognised as a cut above the rest in terms of immaculate courtesy, understated public persona and according the right priorities in public policy. Be it grassroots democracy, where 50% of women are part of Panchayats, or Parliament where 42% of the MPs from BJD are women this is in sharp contrast to women's MP representation in the Lok Sabha which is around 14% and the debate to give 33% representation to women in Lok Sabha is caught in the whirlpool of OBC politics. The Maternity Benefit Scheme (Mamta) is another initiative, where Jean Dreze and Reetika Khera's survey (2021) brings out its successful implementation in contrast to most States where the delivery mechanism is caught in the quagmire of bureaucratic red tape and lack of empathy. The Mission Shakti is another marquee initiative since 2001 which has empowered 70 lakh women, by hand holding women in accessing credit from formal sources, facilitating



SATYA NARAYAN MISRA

marketing, and improving their livelihood perceptibly. "Mo School" Abhiyan is another sterling development initiative without a parallel anywhere, for ensuring inclusive and quality education in public schools. Naveen launched the "Mo School" Abhiyan, a unique initiative to bring the alumni and the alma mater and the community around the Government schools together. The "Mo School" Abhiyan rests on five pillars: Connect, Collaborate, Contribute, Create and Celebrate. The financial contribution of the alumni is matched by

the Government twice over. By using a mobile application, it has been possible to connect with the alumni and help them to know more about the development work which is needed in the school. The collaboration between alumni, school and district administration as well as the community has led to infrastructure creation and sports infrastructure. Many schools are benefited from technology-enabled interventions to enhance the educational ecosystem, and multidisciplinary educational content like documentaries, films, and talks by alumni. One of the areas in which India stands behind 140 countries is its low representation of women in the Parliament. Only 14.39% of women representatives are part of the current Lok Sabha as against a global average of 24.6%. Odisha is way ahead of other States in providing 50% percent reservation for women in local bodies as against a constitutional requirement of 33%. Among the 12 BJD MPs in Lok Sabha, 5 are women (41.6%). In the State Assembly out of 16 women representatives, 14 belong to the Biju Janata Dal (BJD). 12% of BJD MLAs are women. The State



Government revised the 33% reservation to 50% for women in the local Government body i.e. Panchayati Raj Institutions way back in 2011. Quite clearly such healthy representation of women at different levels of Parliamentary democracy has given a major voice to women in bolstering social sector initiatives like healthcare, drinking water, and education. To alleviate maternal and infant undernutrition, the Government of Odisha launched a scheme for pregnant and lactating mothers called Mamata, which is a conditional cash transfer maternity

benefit scheme. This helps in providing partial wage compensation for pregnant and nursing mothers so that they are able to rest adequately during pregnancy and delivery. In a survey by the renowned economist Jean Dreze and Ritika Khera (2019), they note: "In earlier surveys, we had also noted how Odisha, a low-income State often clubbed with the so-called BIMARU States (undivided Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh) not so long ago, was making steady progress in matters of food security, child nutrition, and public health. This time, once again, we saw important signs of hope in Odisha." The Mission Shakti programme, launched by the Chief Minister of Odisha on March 8, 2001, is the flagship programme under which these groups started functioning with the aim of poverty alleviation and women empowerment. Till now it has empowered around 70 lakh women across the State. The total financial implication is Rs 20,989 crore, of which the Center's share is 75% and the State's contribution is 25%. It focuses on Women Self Help Groups

(WSHGs). These women SHGs are engaged in a wide range of activities such as producing and packaging pickles, spices, badi, papad, manufacturing LED bulbs, appliances, utensils, etc. The Government of Odisha linked these SHGs with other development and welfare programs for fruitful implementation. Odisha has mostly adopted the Sen development model where women and women-centric programmes are the epicenters of public policy. Be it the Mo School initiative, Mamata, Mission Shakti, Millet Mission or handsome representation to women in local Government and Parliament, these development initiatives have become templates for emulation by the other States in India. Naveen Babu's successful Millet Mission has become a template for emulation by the center. The way he has handled disasters has won him plaudits from all over. Odisha has become the epicentre for hockey. The way the World Cup hockey was organized earned him respect from all over the world. His attention to aesthetics and scrupulous embrace of simplicity can be a lesson for the more flamboyant

politicians, who traverse the national space with undisguised hubris. Compared to many opposite-party CMs bickering with the Centre, Naveen Babu has been a role model in fostering Centre-State synergy. It's a pity that such a CM was ridiculed by the PM in public for his failing health for political gain. This smacks of a very low level of politicking which the recent election saw at an unprecedented level. Naveen Babu left the political company of the BJP when he realized that he should not be tainted by the color of communalism. Odisha prides itself as a shining totem of secularism where its principal deity is paid hosannas by a Muslim poet Salabega. It's indeed a pity that such a non communal State would now be run by a manifesto communal party. Modi's invocation of Lord Jagannath could not have been more oxymoronic for a party that swears by Hindu fundamentalism. Hiren Mukherjee, a political adversary of Nehru, called him a Gentle Colossus. A similar gesture to the gentle colossus of Odisha would be both timely and gentlemanly. (Dr Misra is a Professor Emeritus)

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Ganjam Waterloo Denying tickets to genuine aspirants cost BJD dear

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMAPUR

The BJD met its Waterloo in Ganjam in the recently held simultaneous elections though the district used to be its citadel. The BJD was rejected in 11 of the 13 Assembly constituencies (except Hinjili and Sanakhemundi) and in two Parliament segments (Brahmapur and Aska) where the BJP swept, making a record of sorts.

According to some political observers, the hypocritical

denial of tickets to grassroots level senior leader Rama Chandra Panda and many other genuine aspirants led to their resignation from the ruling BJD just before the 2024 elections, who also took away their followers and well-wishers in large numbers. The desertion of former Deputy Mayor Jamula Shankar Narayan, former MLA Shiva Shankar Sahani and former State secretary T Gopi cost the BJD dear.

Panda's return to the BJP fold worked like a miracle in

the Chhatrapur Assembly segment. It may be recalled here that Panda had left BJP after being denied a ticket for the Brahmapur LS seat. In his place, the BJP fielded Bhruhu Buxipatra in 2019. Panda left BJD just before the elections when the BJD fielded the same man Bhruhu in 2024. Besides Chhatrapur, Panda's departure from the ruling BJD too made a serious impact on the neighbouring constituencies such as Khallikote, Gopalpur and Brahmapur.

2 held by RPF for pelting stones at train

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Railway Protection Force (RPF) apprehended two persons suspected of involvement in a stone pelting incident targeting the Kamakhya-Bengaluru Express near Nirakarpur on Thursday.

Upon receiving reports of stone pelting endangering the safety of passengers and railway staff, RPF Khurda Road initiated a probe.

Through diligent efforts, including coordination with

the train's Ticket Examiner (TTE) and pinpointing the exact location of the occurrence, it was confirmed that the incident took place between Golabai and Nirakarpur Railway Stations in the Balugaon-Khurda Road Railway Section of the Howrah-Chennai mainline operated by the East Coast Railway.

A team from the RPF proceeded to the identified area and detained two persons, identified as Ramesh Majhi (38) from Golabai village and

Sadasib Pradhan (33) from Nakula Patna village under the Jankia police station in Khordha district.

The detained duo were found in an inebriated condition near the railway track, and upon questioning, they confessed to consuming alcohol and engaging in the reckless act of throwing stones at a passing train.

In response to the grave breach of railway safety, the RPF has registered a case against the accused.

CIFA observes World Environment Day

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The ICAR-Central Institute of Freshwater Aquaculture (ICAR-CIFA) observed the World Environment Day on June 5 with a plantation programme in its campus. This year's World Environment Day theme "Land Restoration, Desertification, and Drought Resilience" emphasised the critical need to heal our land, combat desertification and strengthen the resilience against drought.

ICAR-CIFA in-Charge Director Dr SS Giri highlighted the importance of this year's theme and the significance of the plantation programme. He expressed his vision for a greener CIFA campus and committed to planting various trees to enhance the campus's greenery. He himself planted a bael plant.

The Heads of Divisions at



ICAR-CIFA, including Dr PC Das, Dr JK Sundaray and Dr M Samanta, along with other staff members and research scholars, participated in the plantation drive.

About 150 bael plants were planted across the campus. The participation of the entire ICAR-CIFA community in the programme underscored their collective commitment to environmental stewardship and sustainable practices.

Environment Day Awareness drive, talk held in J'pore VDU

PNS ■ JEYPORE

The World Environment Day was celebrated by the NCC (National Cadet Corps) unit of Vikram Dev University, Jeypore, under the leadership of Commanding Officer Lt. Col Pirti Ranjan Dash.

NCC Officer, Captain (Dr) Lakshman Patra gave a brief introduction of the guests and spoke about the significance of the day.

The aim was to educate and involve the university community in environmental conservation efforts. The celebration commenced with an inauguration ceremony attended by the Registrar, faculty members, NCC cadets, and students.

The Registrar delivered the keynote address, emphasizing the importance of sustainable



practices and individual responsibility towards the environment.

A seminar on "Sustainable Living and Environmental Conservation" was organised. The keynote speaker was Dr Ujjwal Kumar Sadangi, Asst Professor of Chemistry.

The cadets of Prakash Vidyalyaya and St. Xavier

Here married women do not observe Sabitri Brata!

RAJESH BEHERA ■ KENDRAPADA

Sabitri Brata, exclusively meant for the Hindu married women, is one of the important rituals observed in Odisha. The Hindu woman, whose husband is alive, generally observes the Brata as a vow without taking food for the long life and betterment of her husband. But here in Kendrapada district, one can find some Hindu women skipping the rituals.

These women belonging to the farmer community of Uppar Saranga village under Kendrapada township do not observe the Brata. "As our ancestors did not observe Sabitri Brata and our mothers-in-law also skipped, we the female members generally do not

observe the Brata. We don't go to temples to offer prayers on the day either," said Rinarani Pradhan, wife of Sunakar Pradhan of Uppar Saranga village.

"My sisters-in-law generally do not observe Sabitri brata nor do they keep fasting as a part of the penance. So, I skip," opined Bijuli Pradhan (46), wife of Sridhar Pradhan of the same village.

"In the modern society one can find several instances where women do not pay re-



spect, care and love to their husbands. Besides, they torture their husbands which is regularly reported in media. So, it is meaningless to observe Sabitri Brata," said Kalpana Pradhan.

If a woman wants her husband's long life, then she has to respect, care and dedicate herself completely towards her husband for round the year, not merely by observing the Sabitri for a day, argued the women of the village.

In Baleswar, Bhadrak Loud, mysterious sound triggers panic

PNS ■ BALESWAR

Once again, on Friday, a series of loud and mysterious sounds triggered panic among residents of Nilagiri and its surrounding areas in Baleswar district as well as in Bhadrak district too.

People ran out of their houses as a loud sound was heard between 9:50 am and 10 am. The sound resonated for a few minutes.

Residents looked up at the sky and around but could not find out the source from where the sound was originating. "It

felt like an earthquake and much louder than a bomb," a resident told mediapersons.

On Thursday too, a similar sound had been heard three times between 2:55 and 3 pm. Residents also felt a vibration, and the doors and windows of their houses shook creating fear in them.

They suspected that it could be because of some tests being conducted by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) at Wheeler Island, but the district administration or the DRDO was yet to issue any statement.

World Environment Day held at CSIR-IMMT

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The CSIR-Institute of Minerals and Materials Technology, Bhubaneswar celebrated the World Environment Day as part of the JIGYASA programme on June 5. The focus of the day was on land restoration, desertification, and drought resilience.

RCCF, Angul, and Executive Director of the Forest and Environment Section at Odisha Mining Corporation Sudhansu S Khora joined as the chief guest. Accompanying him was Regional Director of CMPDI, Bhubaneswar, Sanjay Kumar Bhar who attended as the guest of honour.

The event commenced with the planting of mango fruit-bearing trees at the Bose Einstein International Residence, CSIR-IMMT, led by Director, CSIR-IMMT,



Bhubaneswar, Dr Ramanuj Narayan. Also present were Head of the Environment and Sustainability Department Dr N K Dhal, along with scientists, research scholars, and children from CSIR-IMMT.

During the opening ceremony, Dr Narayan extended a warm welcome to all the guests and students from various schools. He emphasized

the importance of environmental initiatives and highlighted the ongoing activities related to the environment on the CSIR-IMMT campus.

Bhar discussed mining (primarily coal mining) and associated environmental challenges. He highlighted the activities of eco-restoration post mining. Khora briefed about forests of Odisha and depart-

mental programmes towards protection, restoration and management practices.

Dr Dhal spoke about the Environment and Sustainability department and its research work. Former scientists Dr RN Kar and Dr P Chattopadhyay were felicitated for their contribution towards environmental research at CSIR-IMMT.

Environment Day: Host of events held in Ganjam

KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMAPUR

The Youth for Social Development (YSD), with support of the Unicef, celebrated the World Environment Day across ten Gram Panchayats in Rangeilunda Block, Ganjam here on Wednesday. The event witnessed enthusiastic participation from anganwadi workers, ASHA, children and adolescents, PRI members, CRP, MBK, Self-Help Group members, youth leaders, community people, and teachers.

Representatives from YSD



and Unicef addressed the gathering, highlighting the importance of environmental conservation and sustainable practices. Local PRI members and dignitaries shared their insights and commitment to the cause.

A major highlight was the extensive tree plantation drive. Participants, including AWW, ASHA, adolescents, CRP, MBK, SHG members, youth leaders, community people and teachers planted saplings in community areas, schools, and public spaces across Loudigaon, Padmapur, Markandi, Sasanpadar, Chikarda, Golanthara, Gounju, Golabandha,

Satakutuni and Badakusothali GPs, aiming to enhance local biodiversity and promote a greener environment.

The volunteers formed teams to conduct clean-up drives in parks, market places, roadsides, AWCs and schools. They worked diligently to remove litter, setting an example of community-driven cleanliness and environmental responsibility. Poster making, essay writing, and slogan writing competitions were organized for students and adolescents, focusing on themes like "Beat Plastic Pollution," "Restore Our Earth," and "Biodiversity

Conservation." Informative workshops on climate change, waste management, and water conservation were conducted to mark the event. Environmental experts and local activists engaged with community members, school teachers, and PRI members, fostering a deeper understanding of these critical issues. Special educational programmes were implemented in schools, featuring storytelling sessions, puppet shows, and educational games designed to teach children about environmental conservation in an engaging and memorable way. Attentiveness sessions on organic farming, rainwater harvesting, and composting were provided to adolescents and SHG members, promoting sustainable practices and efficient water use.

Importance of harnessing AI for wildlife safety

The present heat wave prevailed in the country with the mercury shooting up to 48 degrees Celsius in some cities rightly displayed us the fury of nature and the need to protect the environment. It is high time to pay attention to the protection of nature and wildlife conservation which result in maintaining biodiversity and ecological balance. Ultimately, wildlife conservation is not just about saving individual species but safeguarding the intricate web of life that sustains our planet.

In the age of rapid technological advancement, the sphere of zoology is leveraging cutting-edge tools and innovations to address the challenges of wildlife conservation. Among these tools, artificial intelligence (AI) is emerging as a powerful tool in the protection of endangered species, preservation of biodiversity and mitigation of human-wildlife conflicts. Artificial Intelligence (AI) is making rapid strides in the field of zoology, revolutionizing the way researchers study



VANITA BISWAL

and understand ecology, animal behaviour and conservation. By utilising the capabilities of AI, zoologists and conservationists are revolutionising the way we monitor, manage, and safeguard wildlife population.

Traditional methods of species identification and classification often demand adequate expertise and time-consuming manual work. AI-powered image recognition systems, trained on large datasets of wildlife images, can accurately identify the species from photographs or video footage with significant speed and precision.

These systems enable researchers to rapidly compile biodiversity, assess species richness, and identify rare or endangered species in the wild. By automating the process of species identification, AI streamlines conservation efforts and alleviates more extensive biodiversity assessments.

AI-driven technologies, such as remote sensing devices and drones equipped with high-resolution cameras, enable researchers to collect vast quantities of data on wildlife populations and their habitats. Machine learning algorithms can analyse this data to identify and track individual animals, monitor their population trends, and detect changes in ecosystem dynamics in real-time. By providing valuable insights into animal behaviour, distribution, and habitat use, AI-powered monitoring systems empower conservationists to make conversant decisions and implement targeted conservation strategies.

AI algorithms can analyse complex datasets to model and predict the potential impacts of environmental changes, habi-

at loss, climate change, and human activities on wildlife populations. By integrating data on factors such as land use, climate patterns, and human population dynamics, these predictive models help identify areas of high conservation priority and assess the vulnerability of species to specific threats. Conservationists can use this information to develop proactive conservation plans, prioritise resource allocation, and implement targeted interventions to mitigate risks and safeguard biodiversity.

AI technologies play a pivotal role against poaching and illegal wildlife trade by enhancing law enforcement efforts and improving detection capabilities. AI-powered algorithms analyse large volumes of data, including acoustic recordings, satellite imagery and social media posts, to identify suspicious activities, detect poaching hot spots, and track illegal wildlife trafficking networks. By providing early warning systems and actionable intelligence to law enforcement agencies, AI helps to stop

poaching operations, protect vulnerable wildlife populations from exploitation and apprehend poachers.

AI-driven platforms and mobile applications empower local communities and scientists to actively participate in wildlife conservation efforts. These platforms facilitate data collection, reporting, and monitoring of wildlife area, enabling community to contribute helpful observations and insights to ongoing research projects. By engaging with local stakeholders and leveraging their collective knowledge, AI fosters collaboration, builds awareness, and promotes stewardship of natural resources, ultimately intensifying conservation initiatives at the grassroots level.

AI facilitates habitat restoration efforts by analysing geospatial data to identify degraded areas and prioritise conservation planning. Machine learning algorithms can assess the effectiveness of habitat restoration projects, and optimize resource allocation for conservation. By incorporating AI-driven insights into habitat

management strategies, conservationists can enhance the resilience of ecosystems and support the recovery of threatened species.

AI-powered platforms and mobile applications engage local communities and people, scientists in wildlife conservation efforts. These platforms enable community members to contribute data, report wildlife sightings, and participate in monitoring programmes, thereby fostering greater public participation and awareness. By leveraging the collective knowledge and efforts of local stakeholders, AI promotes community-driven conservation initiatives and strengthens conservation outcomes at the grassroots level.

The digital age provides unparalleled opportunities for raising awareness about wildlife conservation issues and engaging the public in conservation efforts. Digital platforms, social media helps in conservation organisations to reach a global audience and communicate conservation messages effectively. By leveraging social media content, interactive

experiences, and virtual reality technology, conservationists can inspire empathy, foster connection with nature, and mobilise support for conservation action.

Digital platforms and crowd funding websites provide conservation organisations with new avenues for fundraising and resource mobilisation. Through online crowd funding campaigns, conservationists can raise awareness about specific conservation projects, attract donations from a diverse range of supporters, and secure funding for conservation initiatives. By tapping into the power of digital networks and social sharing, conservation organisations can amplify their reach and impact, enabling more people to contribute to wildlife conservation efforts.

AI algorithms are increasingly being used to examine genomic data and identify genetic variations associated with traits of interest in wildlife populations. By studying the genetic diversity and structure of species, researchers can better understand evolution-

ary processes, population dynamics, and adaptation to changing environments. This information provides conservation strategies aimed at preserving genetic diversity and mitigating the effects of inbreeding and genetic bottlenecks.

In conclusion, the integration of AI into zoology and wildlife conservation represents a transformative leap forward in our ability to protect and preserve Earth's biodiversity. By supporting the power of AI for remote sensing, species identification, predictive modeling, anti-poaching efforts, and community engagement, zoologists and conservationists can unlock new opportunities to address conservation challenges more effectively and sustainably. As we continue to embrace technological innovations in the digital age, AI will undoubtedly remain a vital tool in our quest to safeguard the natural world for future generations.

(The writer is a Guest Faculty, Department of Zoology, Vikram Dev University, Jeypore, Odisha)

Modi elected leader of NDA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners including Telugu Desam Party (TDP) chief N Chandrababu Naidu, Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal (United) supremo Nitish Kumar, Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde — on Friday endorsed BJP leader Narendra Modi as the leader of the NDA with a message to balance regional aspirations and national interests.

Speaking at the NDA Parliamentary Party meeting here, BJP allies JD(S) leader H D Kumaraswamy, Shiv Sena chief Eknath Shinde, NCP chief Ajit Pawar, HAM(S) chief Jitan Ram Manjhi among others supported the proposal moved by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh to elect Modi as the leader of the NDA.

Hailing and supporting Narendra Modi's name as NDA leader, TDP chief Chandrababu Naidu said, "...Narendra Modi has a vision and a zeal, his execution is very perfect. He is executing all his policies with a true spirit... Today, India is having the right leader - that is Narendra Modi. This is a very good opportunity for India, if you miss now, we will miss forever..." "Balancing regional aspirations and national interests must run parallelly while ensuring holistic development for all strata of society," Naidu said. Naidu said Modi's rallies in Andhra Pradesh helped the TDP win 16 seats in the Lok Sabha elections.



Kumar expressed confidence that Modi will develop India in a big way and also pay attention to Bihar. "We are confident that Modi will develop India and we will wholeheartedly support him every passing day," Kumar said. "All the pending works of Bihar will be done. It is a very good thing that all of us have come together and we will all work together with you... We will all work under your leadership," he said. The Bihar chief minister slammed the opposition and expressed confidence that they will be defeated in the next Lok Sabha elections. "I have noticed that a few people have won (Lok Sabha elections) here and there by saying useless things. They haven't done any work, never served the country. Next time when you win, they all will be defeated," Kumar said. During the occasion, in a humble gesture, Prime Minister

Narendra Modi made way for Kumar to pass in front of him when he got up to express his support for Modi's name as the leader of the alliance. Reciprocating the gesture, Kumar after expressing his support to PM Modi's name tried to touch his feet, however, the former resisted him and shook hands with the Bihar Chief Minister. The Shiv Sena chief Shinde used a line from a popular advertisement and said, "Yeh Fevicol ka jod hai, tootega nahin (this is a Fevicol bond, it's not going to break)". Shinde said in Hindi, "Today is a historic and golden day. (Senior BJP leader) Rajnath Singh has proposed making Prime Minister Narendra Modi the head of the NDA parliamentary party and, as a party that follows (Shiv Sena founder) Bal Thackeray's ideals, we support this fully." "In the past 10 years, PM Modi

has contributed to the development of this country and ensured that India's stature has risen globally. The economy has also been strengthened. No matter how many rumours or false narratives the opposition spreads, they have been rejected by the people and PM Modi has been accepted... What I will say about the Shiv Sena is that the party and the BJP share a common ideology and the alliance, which was formed by Bal Thackeray, is a Fevicol bond and will not break," he added. Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) [Ram Vilas] Chief Chirag Paswan and Prime Minister Narendra Modi shared a candid moment at the NDA parliamentary party meeting. After expressing his support for PM Modi, Paswan approached him, shook his hand, and hugged him, to which the Prime Minister responded with a pat on Paswan's head.

Will work on further boosting research, innovation in third term: Modi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said the qualitative changes in India's education sector are reflected in the QS World University Ranking and his Government will work on further boosting research and innovation in the third term. "Over the last decade, we have focused on qualitative changes in the education sector. This is reflected in the QS World University Rankings. Compliments to the students, faculty and institutions for their hard work and dedication. In this term, we want to do even more to boost research and innovation," the Prime Minister said in a social media message. The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) Bombay and Delhi are among the top 150 universities in the world, while the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) retained the top rank globally for the 13th time, according to

the QS World University Ranking-2025 announced on Wednesday.

While IIT Bombay climbed from 149 last year to 118, up by 31 ranks, IIT Delhi improved its rank by 47 points to bag the 150th position globally. According to the coveted ranking published by the London-based higher education analyst, Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), the University of Delhi stood out for the employability of its graduates and has been ranked 44th globally in the category of "employment outcomes". Boasting 46 universities in this edition of the rankings, the Indian Higher Education system is the seventh most represented globally and the third in Asia, trailing only Japan (49 universities) and China (Mainland) (71 universities). From 46 institutions compared to 11 in 2015, India has increased its representation by 318 per cent in the last decade, registering the highest growth among G20 nations, QS officials said.

Modi's third term unprecedented in last six decades: Dhankhar



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar on Friday here acknowledged the historical significance of the Government's third term, unprecedented in last six decades. Emphasising the rarity of such an accomplishment, he stated "It is for the first time since 1962 that a Prime Minister has got a third term". Addressing the participants of the Rajya Sabha Internship Programme at Vice President's enclave, Dhankhar urged the interns to harness the power of social media to express their views and remain vigilant against pernicious tendencies in democracy. Emphasising the role of constructive debate, dialogue and discussion in the Parliament for positive growth, Dhankhar urged the interns to mobilize public opinion if they see any deviation from these principles.

He further exhorted that Bharat is not a sleeping giant, instead we are a country on move that is rising every day and every moment. Emphasizing the significance of consulting the Indian Constitution for clarity, the Vice President advised the interns to text of Indian Constitution whenever in doubt about. Describing the internship programme as a "Parliamentary Startup" that would provide a new direction and urge to engage with the country's democratic processes, Dhankhar highlighted how citizens can indirectly participate and raise public issues through petitions, without being a member of Parliament. Dr Sudesh Dhankhar, Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha Harivansh, Secretary General, Rajya Sabha P.C. Mody, Secretary to Vice President, Sunil Kumar Gupta, Secretary Rajya Sabha, Rajit Punhani and other senior officials were present.

Four Indian medical students drown in Russian river, says MEA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Four Indian students, who were studying at a university in Russia's Veliky Novgorod region, drowned in the Volkhov river, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said on Friday. A fifth Indian student was saved from drowning and is currently receiving medical attention, it said, adding two students are missing and search for them continues. Local emergency services have so far recovered two bodies from the Volkhov river. "Four Indian students who were studying at the Yaroslav-

the-Wise Novgorod State University located in Veliky Novgorod, Russia, drowned in an unfortunate incident in the Volkhov river," the MEA said. The four students were identified as Harshal Anantrao Desale, Jishan Ashpak Pinjari, Jia Firoj Pinjari and Malik Gulamgous Mohammad Yakub from Maharashtra. The name of the student rescued is Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane. The MEA said the Indian consulate in St Petersburg remained in contact with the university and local authorities and is providing all possible assistance. "Local emergency services have so far recovered two dead bod-

ies from the Volkhov river. We offer our condolences to the families," the MEA said in a statement. It said the search for the remaining two missing students continues. "The five students involved in the incident belong to the Jalgaon district of Maharashtra. Our Consulate in St Petersburg is coordinating with local authorities for the repatriation of the mortal remains," the MEA said. It said the Indian consulate continues to be in contact with the families and the district administration in Jalgaon, Maharashtra. The Indian consulate in St Petersburg said it is working



together with the local authorities of Veliky Novgorod to send the mortal remains to the relatives as soon as possible. "The bereaved families have

been contacted and assured of all the possible help," it said on X. It said proper medical care including psychological treat-

ment is being provided to the girl student who was saved. "These students were pursuing medical education in Veliky Novgorod State University. Sincere condolences to the bereaved families," it said. According to a report by PTI from Jalgaon, Jishan Ashpak Pinjari, one of the four Indian students who drowned in the Volkhov river in Russia, was on a video call with parents when he and the three others drowned in the river, a family member said on Friday. The four, Harshal Anantrao Desale, Jishan Ashpak Pinjari, Jia Firoj Pinjari and Malik Gulamgous Mohammad Yakub, students of the Yaroslav-

the-Wise Novgorod State University, were taking a walk along the Volkhov river, when they entered the waters, an official said. Another student, Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane, survived. Now she is under the care of local medical staff, the official said. Jalgaon district collector Ayush Prasad said arrangements are being made to bring the bodies to India. Jishan and Jia were siblings and hailed from Amalner in Jalgaon district of Maharashtra. Harshal Desale belonged to Bhadgaon, also in Jalgaon district. "When they entered the Volkhov river, Jishan made a video call to his family. His

father and other family members were pleading with Jishan and others to come out of the river waters when a strong wave swept them away," a family member told local media. In a message to the Indian envoy to Russia, the administration of Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University has expressed condolences over the tragedy. "The students were taking a walk near the city's beach along the Volkhov river, in the evening, during their study-free time. The tragedy was accidental and unexpected. Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane survived. Now she is under the care of medical staff," a university official said.

Priyanka slams Modi Government for irregularities in NEET entrance exam

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Friday slammed the Modi Government over alleged irregularities in the NEET medical entrance exam and called for resolution of students' "legitimate complaints" through an investigation. Several aspirants of the medical entrance exam NEET have alleged inflation of marks which led to a record 67 candidates bagging the top rank, including six from the same exam centre. The National Testing Agency (NTA), however, denied any irregularities and said the changes made in the NCERT textbooks and grace marks for losing time at the examination centres are some of the reasons behind the students scoring higher marks. In a post in Hindi on X, Priyanka said, "First the NEET exam paper was leaked



and now the students allege that there has been a scam in its results as well. Serious questions are being raised on 6 students of the same centre getting 720 out of 720 marks and many kinds of irregularities are coming to the fore." There are reports of many children committing suicide across the country after the results were announced, Gandhi said and added that

this is very sad and shocking. "Why is the government ignoring the voice of lakhs of students? Students want answers to legitimate questions related to the rigging in the NEET exam results," the Congress general secretary said. Is it not the government's responsibility to resolve these "legitimate complaints" by conducting an investigation, she asked.

151 paintings portraying Shivaji's life displayed at NGMA

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Timed with the 350th coronation anniversary of Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, a captivating collection of 115 larger than life oil paintings, portraying a journey through the life and legacy of one of India's most iconic historical figures and the great Maratha ruler has been opened for public at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in the national capital till June 21. The Maratha warrior king was crowned on June 6, 1674, at the fort from where he had laid the foundation of "Hindavi-Swaraj" or self-rule of Hindu people. The inauguration day was timed with the 350th anniversary of Shivaji's coronation. The Union Culture Ministry plans to take this exhibition, 'Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj: Celebration of the 350th Anniversary of the Great Coronation' on a nationwide



tour to raise awareness about the iconic leader, said Union Culture Secretary Govind Mohan after inaugurating the exhibition on Friday. Painted by Marathi father-son artist duo, Shrikant Chougule and Gautam Chougule, each painting vividly portrays key moments from Shivaji's life—from his early days receiving the saffron flag from his father Shahaji to his strategic military triumphs and the establishment of the Maratha kingdom. Through their skillful artistry, the Chougules bring to life the courage,

determination, and resilience of Shivaji, inviting viewers to reflect on the great Maratha leader's profound legacy. Shivaji is also known for his maritime skills, having launched Maratha Navy at Durgadi Fort Kalyan Year OCT 1657. Mohan, said that Deepak Gore who collected the paintings has "agreed to gift" the "treasure" to the Union Culture Ministry, and there is a plan to give it a permanent space at Indira Gandhi National Centre for Art (IGNCA) in Delhi.

Third gender voter turnout in 2024 LS poll higher than 2019

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Reflecting their growing awareness and interest in exercising their democratic rights, third gender voters are increasingly making their presence felt as has been revealed by the data released by the Election Commission (EC) which said, the voter turnout in 2024 from this marginalised community stood at 25 per cent, a notable increase from the 14.58 per cent recorded in the previous Lok Sabha polls. The EC's phase-wise data shows that while the first phase saw a turnout of 31.32 per cent, subsequent phases also witnessed considerable participation, ranging from 18.67 per cent to 34.23 per cent. This indicates a consistent engagement of the third-gender community throughout the electoral process, reflecting their growing awareness and interest in exercising their democratic rights. "The increased voter turnout underscores the importance of

addressing the needs and concerns of our community within the electoral framework. The trend also highlights the need for continued efforts to enhance accessibility, eliminate discrimination, and promote inclusivity in the electoral process," said Rajan Singh, who identifies as a transwoman and was the national candidate's first transgender candidate. With the slogan, Sauchalay se, Sansad tak', Singh contested from the South Delhi constituency and received 325 votes, according to the EC data. Though Singh's electoral journey may not have resulted in victory, he said, his candidacy signifies a voice in the democratic process, advocating for meaningful change and representing the aspirations of their constituency. Narela-resident Pooja, also a transgender, who was in the fray from North-West Delhi and got 509 votes said "the participation was an experience for me."

Statues shifted from Parliament premises to ensure Opposition cannot hold protests: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday alleged that statues of Mahatma Gandhi, B R Ambedkar and Chhatrapati Shivaji among others have been relocated within Parliament premises to ensure that Opposition parties cannot hold democratic protests, and said such "stunts" cannot save Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "unstable government" from falling. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh termed the Lok Sabha secretariat's explanation for relocating the statues as "wholly bogus," and said there has been no discussion with any political party on the matter. In a statement, the Lok Sabha Secretariat said Thursday that

due to their location at different places in the Parliament premises, visitors were not able to see these statues conveniently. "For this reason, all these statues are being respectfully installed in a grand 'Prerna Sthal' in Parliament House premises. This 'Prerna Sthal' is being developed in such a way that the visitors coming to visit the Parliament complex view the statues of these great persons conveniently and get inspired by their life experiences," the statement said. The Lok Sabha Secretariat had asserted that the Parliament House complex comes under the jurisdiction of the Lok Sabha Speaker and earlier also, statues were shifted inside the complex with the permission of the Speaker. lamming the shift of statues,

Ramesh said, "Yesterday at 2:30 PM, I had highlighted how the Modi regime was shifting the statues of Chhatrapati Maharaj, Mahatma Gandhi, and Dr. Ambedkar away from prominent places they now occupy in front of Parliament House." "Rattled by photographs of these shifts that were also put out, late last night, well after 8PM, the Lok Sabha Secretariat was forced to issue a wholly bogus and clearly manufactured explanation for the shift. There has been NO discussion with any political party on these shifts," he said in a post on X. The real reason for the shifts can now be revealed, Ramesh said, adding that these statues were places where for the past 10 years Opposition parties - including the TDP and JDU - would stage peace-



ful and democratic protests against the Modi Government. "Clearly the incoming one-third PM wants no place next to where Parliament meets where protests, even in a Constitutional manner, against him and his government can take place. Such stunts can no longer save him and his unsta-

ble Government from falling," Ramesh said. In its statement, the Lok Sabha secretariat said the arrangements are also being made to provide visitors with detailed information about the life and contribution of these great persons and freedom fighters through modern technology at

this 'prerna sthal' so that the people visiting can get inspired by their life and thoughts. The Parliament premises will sport a new look when the 18th Lok Sabha convenes for its maiden session in June as work is underway to integrate the entire complex, comprising four different buildings. As part of the redevelopment of external areas, the statues of national icons, including those of Gandhi, Shivaji and Jyotiba Phule, were to be moved to a lawn near Gate No 5 of the old Parliament building, which has been named as Samvidhan Sadan. This would pave the way for the creation of a vast lawn in front of the Gaja Dwar, which is used by the President and the prime minister to enter into the new Parliament building. The lawn can also be used for

official ceremonies such as the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament, usually during the Budget Session. CPI general secretary D Raja has called the move to remove the statues from their original place a contempt of the ideals of freedom, liberty and equality. "The arbitrary and unilateral decision to shift the statues of Mahatma Gandhi, Dr. Ambedkar and Chhatrapati Shivaji in the Parliament House premise is condemnable. All statues in the Parliament House are erected in the honour of individuals who significantly contributed to our national life," Raja said in a post on X. Trinamool Congress MP Jawhar Sircar has said the government must explain why

this was done. "Who dared to remove statues of Mahatma Gandhi (our traditional protest site) and Babasaheb Ambedkar - from their hallowed sites in our Parliament compound? Has the statue of Shivaji also been removed? Are statues of (Nathuram) Godse & (Narendra) Modi coming up? The Government must explain," he said in a post on X on Thursday. Working president of NCP-SCP Supriya Sule said this is very "infuriating". She also said "All these statues were erected by Indian citizens out of love for national heroes in the Parliament building area. The government has insulted all the countrymen by removing these statues. What is special is that today is the 350th anniversary of the coronation day of Shivaji."

Power play: Andhra Pradesh BJP unit eyes Cabinet berth

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Buoyed by the outcome of the recent Assembly and Lok Sabha polls, the Andhra Pradesh BJP unit is seeking at least one cabinet berth at the Centre, amid reports that there will be "ample" representation from the state.

BJP sources said the state unit has already sent a message to the top brass through Shiv Prakash, national joint general secretary of the saffron party, requesting a cabinet berth for at least one Lok Sabha member of the party from the state if possible.

"This is an opportune time to expand the party in Andhra Pradesh and send a message to the masses that BJP is serious about the state. A request has been sent to the senior leadership of the party," the BJP sources told PTI.

The first choice would be State BJP President D Purandeswari who won from Rajamahendravaram Lok Sabha constituency by a margin of nearly 2.40 lakh votes, defeating her nearest rival G Srinivas of YSR Congress, they said. The saffron party has performed impressively in the state by improving its vote share to 11.28 per cent in the recent polls,



winning three Lok Sabha and eight assembly seats, from a minuscule less-than-one per cent in 2019.

As part of a seat-sharing deal among NDA partners, the TDP contested 144 assembly and 17 Lok Sabha constituencies while BJP put up candidates in six Lok Sabha and 10 assembly seats in Andhra Pradesh.

Janasena contested two Lok Sabha and 21 assembly seats. The TDP won 135 seats in the assembly polls. Its allies BJP and Janasena got 8 seats and 21 seats respectively. In the LS polls, the TDP won 16 seats, BJP three and Janasena two seats. The BJP had two Lok Sabha members between 2014 and 2019 — Kambhampati Hari Babu

(Visakhapatnam) and Gokaraju Ganga Raju (Narsapuram) — and none during 2019-24.

The party also hopes that some leaders from the YSR Congress party, which was routed in the assembly polls, may opt to join the saffron party as they could not align with TDP. During the recently concluded assembly and Lok Sabha polls, the party fielded several leaders who switched over to it, causing heartburn among old timers.

According to political observers, by giving party tickets to new entrants, the BJP was trying to send a message or signal to disgruntled leaders of other parties that it would generously offer seats to contest polls to turncoats.

68% of candidates in JK polled fewer than NOTA votes

PTI ■ SRINAGAR

Sixty-eight per cent of the total 100 candidates in the fray on Jammu and Kashmir's five Lok Sabha seats polled fewer than None Of The Above (NOTA) votes, according to Election Commission data.

Cumulatively, 34,788 voters pressed the NOTA button in the five seats, showing their rejection of the candidates fielded by parties. The maximum 12,938 NOTA votes were polled in the Udhampur constituency of Jammu region, a seat retained by BJP candidate Jitendra Singh.

There were 11 other candidates in the fray from Udhampur, and NOTA polled more votes than nine of them. In the neighbouring Jammu seat, 4,645 voters pressed the NOTA button, which is more than votes individually garnered by 18 candidates.

There were 22 candidates in the fray from the seat which has been retained by the BJP's Jugal Kishore. In the Srinagar seat, the number of NOTA votes was 5,998. There were 24 candidates in the fray from the constituency and most of them — 18 — got fewer votes than NOTA.

In the Anantnag-Rajouri constituency, 6,223 voters



favoured NOTA. There were 20 candidates were in the fray from the seat, and nine of them secured fewer than

NOTA votes. In the Baramulla seat, 4,984 voters used the NOTA option. There were 22 candidates in

the fray and 14 of them polled fewer votes.

Thus, out of the total 100, 68 candidates have secured fewer votes than NOTA, an analysis of the EC data shows.

Meanwhile, in the Ladakh Union territory, which was part of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir until the Centre divided J-K into two Union territories and abrogated Article 370 in August 2019, NOTA was favoured only by 912 voters. Ladakh is the sole Parliamentary constituency in the UT. There were only three candidates in the fray and all of them got more votes than NOTA.

NPP to support to Khandu Government in Arunachal

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

The National People's Party (NPP) will extend support to the Pema Khandu government in Arunachal Pradesh, a senior party leader said here on Friday.

NPP Arunachal Pradesh unit president Thangwang Wangham said the party has accepted the people's mandate in the recently held state Assembly elections. The NPP, led by Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, which is an ally of the North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA), will extend support to the Khandu government, Wangham said. "We accept the mandate given

by the people," he said while assuring his party's commitment to keep the aspirations of the people alive in the State. Wangham, who won the Longding-Pumao assembly seat, said the party has a clear vision for the state, region and the country. "We have regional aspirations with a national outlook and will always work for the welfare of the people and development of the state," he said.

The NPP which contested in 20 seats in the April 19 state assembly elections won five seats. Wangham outlined the party's focus on development, youth employment, healthcare, education, and combating the drug menace.

He emphasised the goal of creating a drug-free society by raising awareness among addicts about the consequences of narcotics.

"We will work for a drug-free society and will reach the addicts to make them aware of the ill effects of narcotics. Addicts should be given a second chance to lead a normal life," he said.

The ruling BJP had won 46 seats in the 60-member assembly, while the NPP bagged 5, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) won three, the People's Party of Arunachal (PPA) won in two seats, Congress one seat and independent candidates won in three seats.

CPI(M) shocked by BJP opening account in Kerala

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

While Sitaram Yechury, the CPI(M) general secretary and Pinarayi Vijayan, the chief Minister, are upset over the victory of Suresh Gopi, the BJP candidate from Thrissur Lok Sabha constituency, the duo is silent about the mammoth wins registered by Muslim League from the constituencies of Malappuram and Ponnani.

Suresh Gopi won by 75,000 votes relegating the Congress candidate K Muraleedharan to the third position. Reacting to Suresh Gopi's victory, the first by a BJP candidate from Kerala in the State's electoral history, Yechury said it was an unfortunate development.

Vijayan said in a statement that the BJP opening account in Kerala should be viewed seriously which means the coming months will see a rise in political murders in the State.

E T Mohammed Basheer, the Muslim League candidate who contested from Malappuram polled 6.44 lakh votes defeating his CPI(M) rival by more than 3,00,000 votes. Abdusamad Samadani, the Muslim League candidate at Ponnani won by a margin of 2,35, 760 votes. Interestingly, no candidates other than Muslims have won from these two constituencies.

Both the constituencies (known in local parlance as Kerala's Pakistan) have emerged as the monopoly of Muslim League despite the fact that there is no development of any kind in the region. "Wherever the Muslim community constitutes more than 10 per cent of the population, there is Muslim consolidation but the secular and liberal brigade are silent about this phenomenon," said a veteran political commentator.

Samadani hogged national limelight for the conversion of famous author Kamala Das from Sanatana Dharma to Islam. The Muslim League leader had promised to marry her if she got converted to Islam. The easily gullible Kamala Das believed him and got converted to Islam, changing her name to Kamala Surayya and started wearing burqa. After a month long honeymoon, Samadani cried off from the deal leaving Kamala Surayya high and dry. This was the first ever high



profile Love Jihad in the State. Kamala, shocked and shattered, left Kerala to stay with her youngest son at Pune and did not come back to the State while she was alive.

Though she had told her close friend Leela Menon, a nationally acclaimed journalist, that she was cheated by the lover and expressed her desire to get reconverted to Sanatana Dharma, that remained unfulfilled. There are thousands of Samadanis who have played the role of Romeos to trap Hindu girls by promising them heaven after marriage only to dump them as sex slaves in ISIS territories.

Mohammed Basheer, whose son was caught cheating a nationalised Bank in Kozhikode by not paying back loan worth hundreds of crores availed during the UPA regime (2004-2014) is another Islamic extremist. No persons other than Islamic Jihadis could win from these two constituencies and the 14 assembly constituencies that constitute them.

"The former parliamentarians, late Ibrahim Sulaiman Sait and late Ghulam Mohammed Banatwala visited these constituencies only for filing the nomination papers and this had earned them the title "migratory birds". The Muslim League is a constituent of the Congress-led UDF in the State while it is with INDI Alliance in the national politics. There are possibilities of the League switching over to the CPI(M) camp at the right time," said P Sujathan, author and political critic.

P Rajeev, CPI(M) leader and Kerala's industry minister had declared that Muslim League should have been allocated six Lok Sabha seats. "Had they been with us, the party would have won more seats," he had said. The religious demography of Kerala is so placed that only candidates who are at the mercy of Muslim community could dream of winning elections in the State.

Amaravati capital city project comes to fore in Andhra Pradesh

PTI ■ AMARAVATI

Following the stellar triumph of the TDP in Andhra Pradesh Assembly elections, the Amaravati capital city project, which was shelved by the outgoing YSRCP government, is now expected to be revived.

As the first chief minister of the bifurcated state between 2014 and 2019, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu had floated Amaravati as the capital city.

The greenfield capital city was envisioned to be an environmentally sustainable one, located between Vijayawada and Guntur cities, covering up to 29 villages. Naidu had acquired up to 30,000 acres of land from farmers for Amaravati capital city construction through land pooling.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi had taken part in its foundation-laying ceremony on October 22, 2015, and former Telangana CM K Chandrasekhar Rao had also attended it. However, this brainchild of Naidu suffered a setback in 2019 when the TDP lost power and Y S Jagan Mohan Reddy-led YSRCP won a landslide victory. Naidu's successor poured cold water on the Amaravati capital city plans and propounded a new theory of three capitals, which could now become a dead concept now that he has suffered a humiliating defeat in the 2024 polls, whereas Naidu is expected to take over as the CM soon.

The massive victory of the



NDA alliance of TDP, BJP and Janasena has injected new life into Amaravati, which is poised to see brisk activity.

While releasing the election manifesto on April 30 at his Andhra Pradesh residence in Undavalli, Naidu vowed that Amaravati will be developed as the capital city of the state. Talking to reporters, TDP General Secretary Nara Lokesh, who won from the Mangalagiri assembly segment, said on June 4 that the incoming government was committed to developing Amaravati as the single capital of the state.

TDP Spokesperson Jyothsna Tirunagari said that building Amaravati would be the first priority of the new government. "Amaravati reconstruction is our first priority, there is no doubt about that. We have done a lot of development during our regime (2014-2019). After Jagan Mohan Reddy took over, in fact he destroyed everything and demolished most of the things," Tirunagari told PTI.

MNS candidate withdraws from fray for Maharashtra council elections

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) candidate Abhijeet Panse has withdrawn from the fray for the upcoming state legislative council election from the Konkan Graduates' constituency, a party leader said on Friday.

The party had last month announced filmmaker Panse's candidature for the legislative council elections slated to be held on June 26.

"Panse will not be in the fray from the Konkan Graduates' constituency," said party spokesperson Sandeep Deshpande.

The development comes after Maharashtra Deputy Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis met MNS chief Raj Thackeray last week.

BJP MLC Niranjan Davkhare currently represents the constituency, and the party has renominated him.

The biennial elections to four legislative council seats — Mumbai Graduates, Konkan Graduates, Mumbai Teachers and Nashik Teachers — became necessary as the terms of sitting members are expiring in July.

The last date for filing the nominations is June 7. Voting will be held on June 26, and results will be declared on July 1.

The Maharashtra legislative council is a 78-member house. The Uddhav Thackeray-led Shiv Sena has named MLC Anil Parab and party functionary J M Abhyankar as candidates for the Mumbai Graduates' and Mumbai Teachers' constituencies, respectively, and the Congress has announced the candidature of Ramesh Keer from the Konkan Graduates' constituency.

The Shiv Sena has fielded Deepak Sawant from the Mumbai Graduates' constituency, while the BJP has fielded Kiran Shelar.

The BJP is backing Shivnath Darade, the candidate of Maharashtra Rajya Shikshak

Parishad, for the Mumbai Teachers' constituency.

The Mumbai Teachers, Mumbai Graduates and Nashik Teachers constituencies are currently represented by Kapil Patil of the JD(U), Vilas Potnis of the Shiv Sena (UBT) and independent MLC Kishore Darade, respectively.

Out of 78 seats in the legislative council, the Shiv Sena (undivided) has 11 members, NCP (undivided) 9, Congress 8, and BJP 22. The JD (U), Peasants and Workers Party, and Rashtriya Samaj Paksha have one member each, while four are Independents, and 21 seats are vacant.

Water situation grim in Marathwada

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

There is no water left in five out of 11 major reservoirs in Maharashtra's Marathwada region, while the Jayakwadi dam, the biggest of them, currently holds only four per cent of its total storage capacity, officials said on Friday.

The Marathwada region comprises Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar, Jalna, Beed, Parbhani, Hingoli, Dharashiv, Latur and Nanded districts. Eleven major projects in this region are facing no availability of water due to scanty rainfall last year.

The water stock in four of these reservoirs has gone down to zero per cent. The Jayakwadi dam, the biggest reservoir in the Marathwada region, is currently holding only three TMC (thousand million cubic feet) water, which is only 4 per



cent of its total storage capacity, the divisional commissioner office said in its report.

The five reservoirs where the water level has dipped to zero per cent are Siddheshwar (Hingoli), Majalgaon and Manjara (both Beed), Nimna Terna and Sina Kolegaon (both Dharashiv). Other water level in seven other projects is as follows: Jayakwadi (Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar)

4.04 per cent, Nimn Dudhna (Parbhani) 6.23, Vishnupuri (Nanded) 15.58, Manar (Nanded) 22.63, Yeldari (Parbhani) 26.66 and Penganga (Nanded) 29.23 per cent, the report said.

The current aggregate water stock in these projects is 11.28 per cent as on Friday, which was 38.64 per cent on the same day last year, it said. In the Jayakwadi dam the water stock on the same day last year was 34.94 per cent, it said. Despite the water stock level of Manjara dam hitting rock bottom, the civic authorities said no water cut will be implemented in the city.

"At present, we are supplying water every four days in Latur. Though we are going into dead storage, we have no issue for the next 3-4 months. So there will be no water cut in Latur city," a senior municipal official said.

73 per cent of newly elected MLAs in Odisha are crorepatis

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Seventy-three per cent of the newly elected MLAs in Odisha are 'crorepatis' with BJD's Sanatan Mahakud the richest legislator having total assets worth Rs 227.67 crore, a report said. The Odisha Assembly has 147 members. Odisha Election Watch and Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) have analysed the self-sworn affidavits of all 147 elected MLA candidates and found that 73 per cent of the newly elected MLAs in 2024 are 'crorepatis' while 95 (65 per cent) 'crorepatis' MLAs were elected in 2019 polls.

Kangana Ranaut airport incident: Farmer outfits throw their weight behind CISF woman constable

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Some farmer outfits on Friday threw their weight behind the CISF woman constable who allegedly slapped actor and BJP MP-elect Kangana Ranaut, saying the entire sequence leading to the incident needs to be properly investigated.

Ranaut, in a video message, had on Thursday said she was hit in the face and abused by the constable during security check at the Chandigarh airport, the ugly fracas breaking out two days after she was elected to the Lok Sabha from Mandi in Himachal Pradesh. The Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and the Kisan

Mazdoor Morcha were among the prominent outfits which said they stand in support of the Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) woman constable.

The constable, who appeared to be upset with Ranaut over her stance on the farmers' protests, has been suspended and an investigation has been launched. The CISF, tasked with providing security at airports, had also ordered a court of inquiry into the incident.

SKM (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher said they will meet Punjab's Director General of Police



(DGP) Gaurav Yadav for a proper investigation into the matter.

"We will demand a proper investigation and we will tell him that there should be no

injustice with the woman constable," Dallewal said addressing a press conference here with Pandher and some other farmer leaders. On June 9 in Mohali, an

"Insaaf march" to Mohali the senior superintendent of police's office will be taken out "to demand that no injustice be done in this case with the constable", he said.

In a video statement titled "Shocking rise in terror and violence in Punjab" posted on X after she landed in Delhi after the incident on Thursday, Ranaut said she was safe and fine.

The constable, Ranaut had said, came towards her from the side. "She hit me in the face and started abusing me. I asked her why she did it and she said she supports the farmer protests." "I am safe but my concern is that terrorism and extremism are increasing in Punjab...

How do we handle that?", Ranaut had said.

Another video doing the rounds of social media had shown the agitated constable talking to people presumably after the incident.

"Kangana made a statement (earlier) that farmers were protesting in Delhi because they were paid Rs 100 or Rs 200. At the time, my mother was one of the protesters," she said in the purported video. The brother of the constable on Thursday said they learnt about the incident through the media. The constable's brother, who is based in Kapurthala, had said his sister has been in service for the past 15 years and had served at many places

including Kerala, Chennai and Amritsar.

Dallewal and Pandher said the constable's brother was active in farmer movements and was part of their organisation. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher alleged that Ranaut had hurt sentiments with her comments against farmers, elderly women and Punjabis in the past.

Both Dallewal and Pandher lashed out at the actor for stating that terrorism was increasing in Punjab. Dallewal said from various reports what they have come to know is that there was some argument from Ranaut's side during security check when her purse and mobile-phone was being put for checking.

If this is so, then the constable is not to be blamed, she was doing her duty, he said.

"And everyone knows the previous track record of Ranaut and the kind of language she has used towards farmers. There must have been an argument and the result of which must have led to the incident. All these things need proper investigation," he said. Taking on Ranaut over her "terrorism" and "extremism" remark, Dallewal said, "In Punjab, communities of all faiths are peacefully co-existing. We demand that a case should be filed and courts should take suo motu cognisance of the wordings used by the BJP MP."



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Balancing act

Regional allies driving a hard bargain will test Modi's skills in running a coalition Govt like never before

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) has emerged as the most potent coalition to form the next Government under the leadership of Narendra Modi. Central to its strength is the support of regional parties for maintaining a parliamentary majority. Nevertheless, the hard bargaining by these allies, though politically essential for them, affects the Government's policy formulation exercise and the nation's progress. The NDA's regional allies, such as the Chandrababu Naidu-led TDP, Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) and others, are engaging in intense negotiations to secure their interests. The JD(U) has already demanded a special status for Bihar while Naidu has a long list of demands. Coalition Governments, by their very nature, are unstable and we have had a long history of coalitions that failed to complete their term. Regional parties serve as the voice of their respective States, advocating for localised interests that might otherwise be overlooked in the Union



Government's broader agenda. This ensures a more inclusive approach to governance, reflecting the diverse needs and aspirations of different parts of the country. However, this hard bargaining can have several negative implications for policy making. The need to accommodate the diverse, and sometimes conflicting, demands of various regional partners can lead to fragmented policies. Instead of a coherent national strategy, policies may become a patchwork of compromises, weakening their overall impact. Prolonged negotiations and the need to achieve consensus among coalition partners can slow down the decision-making process.

No doubt coalition Governments have played a significant role in governance, especially in the 1990s. One of the most notable coalition Governments was led by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who not only faced numerous challenges but also set a precedent for future coalition politics in India. Vajpayee's Government was an alliance of more than 20 parties, each with its agenda and demands. Managing such a diverse coalition required significant diplomatic skill and often led to compromises on policy decisions. Following the nuclear tests, India faced international sanctions, which posed a significant challenge to the economy. The Government had to navigate these sanctions while continuing to pursue economic growth and development. The Kargil conflict with Pakistan in 1999 was another major challenge for the Vajpayee Government. The conflict tested the Government's ability to manage national security issues while maintaining internal political stability. The Government's response to the 2002 riots was seen as inadequate by many, raising concerns about the coalition's ability to address communal harmony and human rights issues. It was only Vajpayee's leadership and statesmanship that pulled off a near-impossible feat and completed full term. It remains to be seen if Modi can do the same.

PICTALK



A parachutist lands ahead of the Canadian ceremony marking the 80th anniversary of the World War II D-Day

Overcoming child sexual abuse stigma

The profound and lasting impacts of child sexual abuse necessitate dismantling systemic barriers and fostering supportive environments

According to the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, 64,469 victims were reported in 2022 under the POCSO (Protection of Children from Sexual Offences) Act. Despite the alarming prevalence of reported cases of Child Sexual Abuse, it remains hidden behind layers of denial, silence, stigma and shame as the issue is deeply rooted in societal structures, such as patriarchy and gender bias, which often prioritize family honour and silence over confronting abuse.



Research suggests that 90 per cent of the perpetrators are known to the child, such as family members, trusted neighbours, or teachers. These individuals often hold positions of trust and responsibility, making it even more challenging to address the issue.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) is a serious issue that affects many individuals. Research highlights the profound and lasting impacts of CSA, including detrimental effects on mental health, emotional stability and social functioning, which can persist into adulthood if not properly addressed. Addressing child sexual abuse requires dismantling these systemic barriers and promoting an open, supportive environment that prioritizes the well-being and rights of children.

Recognizing the Signs of Sexual Abuse: Understanding the signs that a child may have been subjected to sexual abuse is the first step in addressing this grave issue. Sudden changes in behaviour can be indicative of underlying abuse. Children may exhibit a range of physical and emotional behavioural changes like: *Unexplained injuries or bruises in the genital or anal area. *Sudden changes in behaviour such as withdrawal, unusually quietness, aggression, or depression. *Nightmares or bedwetting. *Displaying knowledge or interest in sexual acts beyond their age.

Preventing The Abuse: Preventing child sexual abuse (CSA) demands a collective effort where the responsibility doesn't solely fall on children. There are steps parents, caregivers and trusted adults can take to minimize the risk and empower their children in navigating this complex world. The stigma and shame attached to sex and sexuality often translate into not having open conversations with children and giving them the appropriate vocabulary to express such concerns. On one hand, it makes it difficult for them to articulate if they've experienced abuse and on the other it hinders prevention. It is important to start conversations about body autonomy, boundaries and consent from an early age. Teaching children the proper names for their body parts and emphasizing the power of saying "no" to any touch that feels uncomfortable or unwanted is important. However, the onus of preventing CSA cannot and should not solely rest on the child. Building a foundation of open communication is equally essential from the parents' side. This is possible only when adults create a safe and nurturing environment where a child feels comfortable expressing any concerns or discomfort they may have. Adults must take responsibility for creating safe spaces and intervening when they suspect abuse may be occurring. Child sexual abuse shatters a child's sense of safety and trust. It can leave them feeling confused, ashamed and isolated. As a caregiver, the first step is to acknowledge the gravity of the situation. Recognising the abuse and validating their experience is crucial.

(The writer is executive director, Sakshi - a rights-based NGO; views are personal)



SMITA BHARTI

Other political parties such as Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and Akali Dal (Maan), CPI-CPIM had also fielded their candidates. But the voters surprised most of them by electing seven congresses, three AAP, one SAD and two independent raw candidates. The ruling party in the state, the AAP, has won only three seats with a vote share of 26.02%, reduced from 42% in 2022 against its claim for all the thirteen in the state; it has managed to lead only in 32 assembly segments against its victory in 92 assembly constituencies in 2022 state assembly elections. Some of its candidates holding state government ministerial portfolios have trailed behind opponents in their assembly segments. All this is a matter of serious concern for the AAP to introspect. The ruling party in the Centre, the BJP, has not been able to win any seats though it was quite hopeful for their victory with a team of the top brass of the state Congress 'taken over' by it on its side. Of course, to its satisfaction, it has succeeded in raising its vote bank share to 18.56% and leading in 23 assembly segments. The Congress has won 7 seats and has gained the lead in 38 assembly segments against its victory only in 18 assembly

constituencies in 2022. It has succeeded in managing the vote share of 26.3%, winning seven out of 13 seats in this election despite the unexpected defection by almost all its senior leaders to the BJP and other parties. The two independent candidates who were neither very big leaders nor supported by any political party, have won by defeating the established leaders of established political parties by sizable margins. The voters of Punjab have spelt out that although they maintain their identities, their political and interpersonal behaviour is predominantly secular and prejudice-free. Although it is a fact that Punjab's population is majority Sikh and rural, its other population being 40% Hindu, one-third Dalit and other horizontal and social categories, it has distributed its representation neither based on religion, nor region and social hierarchies, but based on local issues of development. Secondly, in the absence of sound trust in the political class, its choice reflects a rejection of the other 'not chosen', who is or has been in power, rather than the choice itself. The voters in Punjab have painted their character and power by maintaining

Punjab quietly yields surprising results

Punjab's voters remained uncharacteristically silent, leaving political parties hopeful yet uncertain about the election outcome, which ultimately did not favour any single party



SUKHDEV SINGH



silence before voting but exercising their power independently and wisely on the day of voting. They have rejected the dominant discourses of religion, caste and urban/rural polarization, the discourse of victimization justifying non-performance. They have voted for Congress on its promise of MSP for agricultural produce, a promise to pull agriculture out of distress since it is agriculture that is the spleen of Punjab's economy so far. Whether a Hindu or a Sikh, whether an urban or a rural person, whether an upper caste or a Dalit - everybody, as a part of their collective consciousness, understands the relevance of agriculture in the state. It has chosen independent candidates exercising their rejection of all others and expressing their sympathy for their 'condition' against the state power. Thus, their victory can be attributed to local sentiments and political dynamics rather than any other radical ideology influencing voter preferences. In fact, for them, it would be a difficult choice between the Congress and the BJP.

(The writer is a retired Professor from Guru Nanak Dev University Amritsar; views are personal)



THE VOTERS OF PUNJAB HAVE SPELT OUT THAT ALTHOUGH THEY MAINTAIN THEIR IDENTITIES, THEIR POLITICAL AND INTERPERSONAL BEHAVIOUR IS PREDOMINANTLY SECULAR AND PREJUDICE-FREE

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

MORE VOTERS BUT LOWER ENGAGEMENT

Madam — Apropos the news story "More voters but lower turnout in 2024, confirms EC," published on June 7, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, it's heartening to see the Election Commission lifting the model code of conduct following the announcement of election results and the beginning of government formation. The overall voter turnout in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections was 65.79 per cent, which, although slightly lower than 2019's 67.40 per cent, still indicates robust democratic engagement. Notably, the data reveal a significant surge in women voter participation, with a turnout of 64.72 per cent compared to men's 63.11 per cent. This trend is particularly pronounced in states like Himachal Pradesh, Jharkhand and Odisha, where women's turnout surpassed men's by notable margins. This increase in female voter engagement is a positive sign of growing political awareness and empowerment among women, which can lead to more inclusive governance. The turnout of the third gender, although low at 22.33 per cent, suggests there is still work to be done to ensure their full participation in the democratic process. Overall, these elections highlight the evolving dynamics of voter engagement in India, reflecting a more diverse and representative electorate.

Ananya Sharma | Nashik

MARKETS BOUNCE BACK

Madam — Apropos the news story "Markets extend winning momentum to 2nd day running," published on June 7, this is my response. As a daily newspaper reader, it's fascinating to see how the market's optimism can be so closely tied to political stability. The recent surge in the Sensex and Nifty, following the unanimous election of Narendra Modi as the leader of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), underscores the confidence that investors place in political continuity and leadership. The 30-share BSE

Taiwan greets Modi, China fumes



Regarding the news story "China lodges protest with India over PM Modi's response to Taiwan President Lai's greetings on his poll victory," published on June 7, here are my thoughts. As a regular newspaper reader, the recent diplomatic spat between China and India over Prime Minister Narendra Modi's social media interaction with Taiwan President Lai Ching-te is quite intriguing. Modi's expression of enthusiasm

for strengthening ties with Taiwan, following Lai's congratulatory message, has irked China, which sees Taiwan as a breakaway province. China's swift protest underscores its sensitivity to any international recognition of Taiwan's sovereignty. The geopolitical chessboard in the Indo-Pacific region is complex and Modi's statement hints at India's potential shift towards deeper engagement with Taiwan, especially in trade and technology. This could be a strategic move to counterbalance China's growing influence. However, it also risks straining India-China relations, which have already been tense. China's insistence on the One China policy and its warning against Taiwan's "political calculations" highlight the delicate nature of this issue. As an observer, I see this as a significant moment that could reshape regional alliances and economic partnerships in the coming years.

Kabir Patel | Rajkot

Sensex's impressive jump to 75,078.70 points and the NSE Nifty climbing to 22,799.50 signal a strong market reaction to Modi's impending third term as Prime Minister. The gains in companies like NTPC, State Bank of India and Tata Steel reflect a broader bullish sentiment, though some laggards like Hindustan Unilever and Nestle temper the overall enthusiasm. It's noteworthy that despite the positive domestic sentiment, Foreign Institutional Investors are still cautious, selling off equities amid high valuations in India compared to Chinese stocks. This juxtaposition of political stability and cautious foreign investment paints a complex but intriguing picture of the current market dynamics.

Ishani Malhotra | Gwalior

EMBRACING SOCIAL WORK

Madam — Regarding the news story "Rejuvenating Indian social work, culturally," published on June 7, here are my thoughts. Every profession is unique and essential for societal growth and develop-

ment. Social work, however, carries an added responsibility - to serve people and communities, striving to uplift them. It involves working with people and their surroundings, considering external and internal factors simultaneously. Social work is not just about empathising with others' circumstances but also about reflecting on potential solutions and alternatives. In today's India, social work as a profession is emerging as one of the crucial sectors. Over the last decade, this profession has expanded its horizon and established itself across the country. It is encouraging to see a growing number of young professionals choosing this career path. India needs more such young minds and professionals who can work on the ground and formulate policies to address critical societal issues. However, it is essential to question whether we are truly fulfilling this need.

Ishita Verma | Bhopal

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN COALITION GOVERNMENT AND DIPLOMACY

Recalibration of diplomatic priorities due to coalition compulsions is on the cards



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

India has voted and the verdict is out. It has brought back the era of coalition governments, the pressures of alliance partners weighing in on key policy matters, back to India's polity after a decade. The era of robust, single-source decisions is most likely over and may not return for a decade. The voter's verdict will have long-reaching impact on India's foreign policy and diplomatic trajectory for a long time to come. The relations with the US which were nurtured by the Modi Government in the past decade and which have reached a certain stable platform, are unlikely to be disturbed. The technology partnership added to the existing trade partnership, has bipartisan support in Washington. This means in the eventuality of Trump returning to the US, towards the year's end, it won't be a spoiler in India US bilateral relationship. India and the US have in the past, shown enough maturity in discussing sensitive issues, such as the alleged hit plan on India-designated terrorist G S Pannun, behind closed doors. Most US businesses operating in India may be relieved, with a coalition verdict, as it could, take away many concerns (expressed by their US-based colleagues behind closed doors) regarding the overreach by a PM, with a brute majority. They may be relieved to find several pockets of influence, with more alliance partners coming in the Government, weighing on crucial policy decisions. The US and global capital would feel safe in India as a market, as long as it is business as usual, no surprise protectionist regulations and there is a growth market. In a coalition government, with several checks and balances, the scope for unilateral decisions, is less likely. Also, as many experts mentioned to this author, the US would be happy to have a peaceful democratic ally in Asia, to counter



an aggressive China in the Indo-Pacific. Joint exercises, with Indian defence forces, sharing of crucial intelligence of strategic importance (even though India is not part of the five eyes network), sharing and empowering India on semiconductors, close co-creation of standards and regulations on critical and emerging technologies such as AI are not likely to be impacted. India and the US on plurilateral platforms such as QUAD, the I2U2 and on wider UN etc would not be impacted. However, pompous, state visits and hosting each other's leaders on a grand scale (reference Trump in 2019 and Indian PM state visit to the US in 2023) could move to more sober, away from the camera, diplomatic conversations. Despite an occasional criticism of India, by mainly US think tanks and policy experts, primarily on human rights, polarising speeches, freedom of speech and religion in India etc, there is bipartisan support for India and deep relations between the two nations and it is not likely to change. If the India-US civil nuclear deal proved to be the cause of a weak coalition government (due to the withdrawal of support by a crucial ally from the UPA government 1.0), there exist no such threats to the bilateral relationship currently. Even with a coalition Indian government at the centre. Washington and New Delhi have successfully managed to educate their senior lawmakers/politicians/think tanks/experts on either side of the aisle, regarding the strategic importance of the relationship. President Biden, even though faces occasional criticism from his party colleagues or pressure groups, regarding being a bit too lenient approach towards India on several issues, he understands the relevance of this relationship in the current context. There is likely to be a new Indian ambassador to the US (the former ambassador post-retirement unsuccessfully contested elections in 2024) in the next few months. The Indian ambassador to the US does most of the heavy lifting on building consensus across the aisle on several mutual bilateral issues. The choice of the next ambassador would be a space to watch out for.

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

Indian electorate ushers in a new political era



NILANTHA LANGAMUWA

By rejecting divisive politics and reducing the BJP's dominance, voters have endorsed a new era of coalition politics favouring regional and smaller parties

The outcomes of the recently concluded Indian Lok Sabha elections signal promise for the region, prompting nations to reconsider and reassess their democratic political frameworks. In a resounding declaration of democracy's resilience, the once seemingly invincible fortress of the Modi-Ka Parivar lies shattered. The echoes of this strong message from the public reverberate louder than the emotional sensationalism, resonating with the collective voice of a nation that has spoken unequivocally for the power of balance. Despite the relentless onslaught of propaganda and fervent efforts to manufacture public opinion, the Indian electorate has delivered a decisive blow, reclaiming their power and rejecting the facade of religious fervour masquerading as governance. Narendra Modi, the erstwhile political juggernaut, now stands at the precipice of his last tenure, his aspirations of perpetual rule dashed against the rocks of reality. His grandiose ambitions of global dominion and spiritual leadership lie in tatters, mere relics of a bygone era marked by hubris and delusion.

The BJP's significant loss, laid bare in the aftermath of the election, paints a stark portrait of defeat. With 92 seats lost out of their previous 303, including once impregnable strongholds in rural heartlands and urban bastions like Mumbai, the party finds itself relegated to the sidelines of political discourse. The myth of invincibility shattered, the BJP stands exposed, its veneer of infallibility stripped away to reveal the inherent flaws and fallacies of its governance model. The result also exposes the impact of heavy spending on AI-driven social media manipulation. Government agencies outspent political parties on Google ads leading up to India's national elections, with the BJP ranking second. This stark contrast in spending highlights the influence of advertising in shaping democratic norms, serving as a stark reminder of democracy's vulnerability to manipulation.

Yet amidst the debris of defeat lies the triumph of democracy. The people have spoken, their voices resonating with clarity and conviction, reaffirming their allegiance not to religious ideologies or cults of personality, but to the principles of democracy and secular governance. This electoral upheaval serves as a clarion call for change, a witness to the indomitable spirit of a nation that refuses to be swayed by divisive verbiage or empty promises. As the dust settles on the frontline of Indian politics, the narrative of triumph and victory spun by the BJP and its leader Narendra Modi stands starkly contrasted against the reality of their electoral performance. Despite Modi's impassioned spiel and grandiose claims of India's newfound global prominence, the truth remains irrefutable: the BJP's grip on power has weakened, its once impregnable fortress breached by the resolute will of the Indian electorate. The BJP's electoral arithmetic, touted as proof of its enduring popularity, belies a deeper truth of diminishing returns and waning support. While the party managed to retain a significant portion of its 2019 tally, the loss of 92 seats, coupled with the failure to secure the predicted landslide victory, exposes the chinks in its armour and the vulnerabilities lurking beneath the



THE PEOPLE HAVE SPOKEN, THEIR VOICES RESONATING WITH CLARITY AND CONVICTION, REAFFIRMING THEIR ALLEGIANCE NOT TO RELIGIOUS IDEOLOGIES OR CULTS OF PERSONALITY, BUT TO THE PRINCIPLES OF DEMOCRACY AND SECULAR GOVERNANCE

surface of its facade. Modi's campaign discourse has taken a sharp turn towards foreign affairs and diplomacy, perhaps as a tactic to deflect attention from his administration's domestic shortcomings. By emphasizing India's global ascendancy and economic strength, Modi aims to eclipse the harsh realities of mounting unemployment, economic disparity and social turmoil within the nation. Amidst his grandiose assertions of India's international accomplishments, including hosting global summits and economic growth, Modi's narrative conveniently obscures governance failures and policy deficiencies. Despite his celebrations of India's elevated global standing, the everyday struggles of citizens remain overshadowed by political oratory, highlighting a growing disparity between political narratives and lived experiences.

Facing electoral setbacks and a reduced mandate, Modi and the BJP confront a populace increasingly demanding accountability and change. The rejection of empty promises signals a call for transparent, people-centric governance, underscoring the need for a political shift away from complacency towards accountability. Modi's foreign policy rhetoric aligns with his domestic agenda, framing a narrative of "us-vs.-them" and emphasizing resolve against perceived threats like Pakistan and China, particularly in combating terrorism. Despite clashes with Pakistan and the 2020 China confrontation showcased as symbols of national strength, critics challenge Modi's response to Chinese aggression, while BJP members rally behind his assertive stance. Yet, beneath this facade, lie intricate geopolitical complexities and diplomatic hurdles. India's navigation among

global powers demands a nuanced approach, prioritizing national interests amidst turbulent international dynamics. Accusations against the BJP for prioritising foreign affairs over domestic concerns challenge Modi's nationalist narrative, despite his claims of India's global ascendancy. Opposition voices condemn the party's erosion of democratic norms, yet Modi's firm stance resonates with many voters, reflecting a desire for a stronger international presence. However, mounting criticism of the BJP's handling of issues like inflation and unemployment casts doubt on its commitment to democracy. Recent electoral setbacks, notably in Uttar Pradesh, reveal deep-seated discontent, with opposition framing the BJP's governance as a threat to constitutional rights, leading to disillusionment among both critics and former supporters.

The symbolism of Ayodhya, from the demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 to the consecration of the Ram temple in 2021, epitomizes the BJP's journey to power and its subsequent challenges. While Modi's imprint on Varanasi is undeniable, with infrastructure development projects transforming the city's landscape, the cost of progress has been the erosion of its unique identity, lamented by many locals. The electoral panorama in Uttar Pradesh unveils a complex interplay of shifting loyalties and deep-rooted grievances, particularly within marginalized communities such as the Dalits. Despite Modi's enduring popularity, evidenced by his victory in Varanasi albeit with a notably reduced margin, the BJP's electoral fortunes have been tempered by various concerns, notably regarding constitutional rights and social equi-

ty. The BJP's ambitious electoral slogan, promising an overwhelming triumph, stirred apprehensions among the Dalit populace, raising fears of potential amendments to the constitution. This apprehension, as the media reports asserted, stemming from the fear of diluting protections advocated by Bhimrao Ambedkar, prompted numerous Dalit voters to align with the opposition INDIA alliance, which adeptly mobilised a coalition of marginalised groups. Modi's language targeting Muslims as "infiltrators" further galvanised opposition to the BJP, particularly among Dalit and Muslim communities, despite the party's efforts to allay Dalit fears and disavow any intentions of rescinding their constitutional privileges. The electoral terrain in Uttar Pradesh reflects a shifting paradigm, with marginalized communities asserting their voices and demanding accountability from political incumbents. The narrative of disillusionment and disenchantment highlights the intricate nature of Indian politics and the hurdles confronting the BJP as it navigates the evolving currents of public opinion. Despite facing electoral setbacks, the BJP remains a potent political force, positioned to forge the next government alongside its allies. However, the undercurrents of discontent and unmet assurances could potentially influence the trajectory of Indian politics in the years ahead. The resounding voice of the nation echoes: it's now up to the government, poised to lead for the next five years, to heed the lessons of tolerance spoken by the populace of the world's most populous country.

(The writer is a Sri Lankan journalist and author; Views are personal)

Soaring milk prices may hit affordability, health

Growth in the dairy industry necessitates ethical, accessible and safe milk production; without these, milk could become inaccessible to the general public

For ages, milk has been universally acknowledged as an excellent source of nutrition, especially for children. A good sign that milk & dairy production in our country is increasing fast. However, if the trend of consistently rising milk prices is not held up, it may be hard for the common man to afford it, thus impinging on the health of their family. Whole milk price of popular brands is presently hovering around Rs. 66 a litre. Nutritionists recommend routine intake of milk and its derivatives to maintain a balanced diet. So ironic that the legendary repository of milk, 'a country with rivers overflowing with milk' is now concerned with feeding safe milk to its people!



HARISH BARTHWAL

India has been consistently atop in milk production since 1997 and contributes about 25% to the global milk output. In 2023, India produced 231 million metric tonnes of milk with a decadal compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 6%. More important than NITI Ayog's prediction of achieving the 300 million metric tonnes mark by 2030 is the need to ensure that this staple nutrition is accessible to

the countrymen at large. The fault lines must be identified and addressed in time. Beyond just a fluid secreted by the mammary glands of female mammals for nourishing their young ones, cow milk and cows are special to India, sacred and pure since the Vedic era. Along with its other holy derivatives like curd and ghee, it is a routine offering to Gods at religious observances particularly during Shivaratri and Nag Panchami festivals. To Hindus, the cow is sacrosanct, at par with Gods. As against other milch animals, buffalo, sheep, goats and camel, the cow is also a symbol of motherhood, fertility, prosperity, health and strength. It has had sanctity in other faiths as well. Egyptians

accorded cow the status of goddess of milk, 'Iat' due to its association with nurturing attributes. Among early Christians, milk was figuratively used for abundance, blessings, spiritual food and purity. Prophet Muhammad said, "The milk of the bovine (cow) contains healing, its fat is a medicine and its meat a cause for sickness." This is despite most milk in India being derived from buffalo, which is valued for its higher fat content and its use as a draught animal. In our country, 60% of the milk is produced by the unorganised sector, remaining 40% is from the organised sector, mostly dairy cooperatives and private players. However, the scenario is set to reverse and in a few years the milkman of

the unorganised sector may have to shift the profession for numerous reasons. For one, the city folks prefer value-added or packaged milk & dairy wrapped in pouches or packets made of LDPE, LLDPE, HDPE or EVA; cans and tetra packs. Admittedly, the products from the organised sector are superior; pasteurised (i.e. heating for a while up to 700C to minimise infection, then cooling) and sticking to certain quality specifications yet it has its pitfalls partly the deliberate ones. I recall the description of the Vijaya brand milk tetra pack of an Andhra Pradesh dairy in the early 80s while I was in Bhopal. It guaranteed freshness without refrigeration for up to six months in any ambient temperature - decades

after, we witnessed Amul, Britannia and other popular brands taking the cue. Mind that the milk in the pouch procured from the booth degenerates when heated just in 10 to 15 minutes, it is so delicate. There is more to tetra packs than tetrahedron texture to keep its non-degradability intact for long. It is toxic preservatives like formaldehyde and other additives in play to extend the shelf life of milk and its derivatives. Studies have already shown serious health consequences like food poisoning, gastrointestinal and cardiac issues, hepatic and renal failure and even cancer. It is like lethal insecticides being spread 400 times more than the permitted doses on maturing crops to avert food-

grain loss and ensure enhanced shelf life. Also, witness many popular desi ghee brands selling at Rs. 450 a litre while in villages it costs between Rs. 1200 to Rs. 2400 although dairy people confide that per kg cost of desi ghee is Rs. 500 to Rs. 600. Indian dairy business is incessantly growing at 4.5% annually. The organised milk sector is elated at the growing international and domestic demand and business prospects. Yet it must be monitored that the ethical aspects are not compromised and the domestic consumers are not taken for a ride. Fodder availability for large milch cattle, education & training and technology improvement are the other formidable issues in dairy to

be addressed. Our young ones also must be made to learn that saying no to milk is saying no to nutrition and that almond milk, soy milk, rice milk and coconut milk are poor substitutes. Amul Federation, the undisputed leader has planned expansion activity abroad and is targeting one Rs one lakh crore business now. Dairy supports the livelihoods of one billion people worldwide. As we celebrate Milk Day, an FAO initiative, to recognise the importance of milk as a global food let us not overlook that the common people are not deprived of this staple nutrition.

(The writer is a blogger and writes on health, social and other issues, views are personal)

'Houthi rebels detain 9 UN staff in sudden crackdown'

AP ■ DUBAI

At least nine Yemeni employees of United Nations agencies have been detained by Yemen's Houthi rebels under unclear circumstances, authorities said Friday, as the rebels face increasing financial pressure and airstrikes from a US-led coalition. Others working for aid groups also likely have been taken.

The detentions come as the Houthis, who seized Yemen's capital nearly a decade ago and have been fighting a Saudi-led coalition since shortly after, have been targeting shipping throughout the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip.

But while gaining more attention internationally, the secretive group has cracked down at dissent at home, including



recently sentencing 44 people to death.

Regional officials, speaking to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity as they were not authorised to brief journalists, confirmed the UN detentions. Those held include

staff from the United Nations human rights agency, its development program, the World Food Program and one working for the office of its special envoy, the officials said. The wife of one of those held is also detained.

The UN declined to immediately comment.

The Mayyun Organisation for Human Rights, which similarly identified the UN staffers held, named other aid groups whose employees were detained by the Houthis across four provinces the Houthis hold — Amran, Hodeida, Saada and Saana. Those groups did not immediately acknowledge the detentions.

"We condemn in the strongest terms this dangerous escalation, which constitutes a violation of the privileges and immunities of United Nations employees granted to them under international law, and we consider it to be oppressive, totalitarian, blackmailing practices to obtain political and economic gains," the organisation said in a statement.

Activists, lawyers and others

also began an open online letter, calling on the Houthis to immediately release those detained, because if they don't, it "helps isolate the country from the world."

Yemen's Houthi rebels and their affiliated media organisations did not immediately acknowledge the detentions. However, the Iranian-backed rebels planned for weekly mass demonstrations after noon prayers Friday, when Houthi officials typically speak on their actions.

It's unclear what exactly sparked the detentions. However, it comes as the Houthis have faced issues with having enough currency to support the economy in areas they hold — something signalled by their move to introduce a new coin into the Yemeni currency, the riyal. Yemen's exiled government in Aden and other nations

criticised the move as the Houthis turning to counterfeiting. Aden authorities also have demanded all banks move their headquarters there.

"Internal tensions and conflicts could spiral out of control and lead Yemen into complete economic collapse," warned Yemeni journalist Mohammed Ali Thamer in an analysis published by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Bloomberg separately reported Thursday that the US planned to further increase economic pressure on the Houthis by blocking their revenue sources, including a planned USD 1.5 billion Saudi payment to cover salaries for government employees in rebel-held territory.

The war in Yemen has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civil-

ians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more. The Houthis' attacks on shipping have helped deflect attention from their problems at home and the stalemated war. But they've faced increasing casualties and damage from US-led airstrikes targeting the group for months now.

Thousands have been imprisoned by the Houthis during the war. An AP investigation found some detainees were scorched with acid, forced to hang from their wrists for weeks at a time or were beaten with batons. Meanwhile, the Houthis have employed child soldiers and indiscriminately laid mines in the conflict. The Houthis are members of Islam's minority Shiite Zaydi sect, which ruled northern Yemen for 1,000 years until 1962.

Sunak apologises for skipping D-Day ceremony

London (AP): British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak apologised on Friday for leaving D-Day commemorations in France early to return to the election campaign trail — a decision slammed as disgraceful by his political rivals. Sunak, who is fighting to keep his job in Britain's July 4 election, said that, "on reflection" the decision was a mistake.

Sunak was not alongside leaders including US President Joe Biden, French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy for the major memorial event at Omaha Beach in Normandy on Thursday. Former Prime Minister David Cameron, who is now foreign minister, represented the UK. Labour Party leader Keir Starmer, the current favorite to win the election, attended and was pictured meeting Zelenskyy and other leaders. Sunak had earlier attended a ceremony at the British memorial in Normandy alongside King Charles III and surviving World War II veterans. He also attended a commemoration in Portsmouth, England, the day before. Sunak wrote on X, formerly Twitter, that the 80th anniversary of the Allied invasion that helped free Europe from the Nazis "should be about those who made the ultimate sacrifice for our country. The last thing I want is for the commemorations to be overshadowed by politics."

He added: "On reflection, it was a mistake not to stay in France longer — and I apologise," he wrote.

The prime minister recorded an interview with broadcaster ITV on Thursday after returning from France, though he said that was not the reason he cut short his trip.

Sunak insisted he "stuck to the itinerary" that had been laid out for him for D-Day weeks before he called the election. "On reflection it was a mistake not to stay longer and I've apologised for that, but I also don't think it's right to be political in the midst of D-Day commemorations," he said. "The focus should rightly be on the veterans and their service and sacrifice for our country."

A clip released from the inter-

'Actions against Philippines in SCS threaten global security'

AP ■ MANILA

Sweden's defense chief has expressed alarm over Beijing's repeated dangerous maneuvers against Philippine vessels in the South China Sea, saying such actions threaten security, undermine stability and underscore the need to invest "for our security and freedom."

Defense Minister Pål Jonson spoke Thursday night in a diplomatic reception in Manila for Sweden's national day after meeting his Philippine counterpart, Gilberto Teodoro Jr., on expanding defense relations. Sweden is one of the possible sources of supersonic fighter jets that the Philippines plans to acquire as its military shifts focus from decades of fighting communist and Muslim insurgencies to territorial defense.

"Let me express my deep concern on the repeated dangerous maneuvers against Philippines vessels that have been taking place in the West Philippine Sea and the South China Sea, Jonson said. He did not mention China in his speech but drew applause from an audience that included top Philippine military

and security officials and Western and Asian diplomats. Jonson used the name the Philippines has adopted for the stretch of waters called the exclusive economic zone extending from its western coast to the South China Sea, which Beijing claims virtually in its entirety and guarded closely with its coast guard, navy and other ships.

Confrontations between Chinese and Philippine government ships over two disputed shoals have flared alarmingly since last year, causing collisions. China's use of powerful water cannons had damaged Philippine vessels, injured several Filipino navy personnel, and strained diplomatic relations. Manila has filed diplomatic protests and publicized Chinese actions against the Philippine coast guard and navy vessels in an effort to gain international support.

"These acts put human lives at risk, they undermine regional stability and international law and they threaten the security in the region and beyond," Jonson said. "These are not only threats to your national security but threats to our common global

security?"

The Philippines coast guard belatedly reported Friday that one of its high-speed boats was blocked and surrounded by Chinese coast guard vessels as it approached a Philippine territorial outpost in the Second Thomas Shoal on May 19 to get a sick Filipino military sailor from a navy boat deployed near the shoal outpost.

"Despite informing the Chinese coast guard via radio and public address system about the humanitarian nature of our mission for medical evacuation, they still engaged in dangerous maneuvers and even intentionally rammed the Philippine navy boat while transporting the sick personnel, the Philippine coast guard said.

Despite the dangerous blockings, the Philippine coast guard said the medical evacuation was carried out successfully. Chinese officials had no immediate comment on Jonson's remarks and the Philippine coast guard report, but in the past they have accused the Philippines of instigating the hostilities by repeatedly straying into what they say are Chinese territories.

'Fewer women, children died in Israeli strike on school than reported earlier'

AP ■ DEIR-AL-BALAH

The hospital where bodies were brought after an Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in the Gaza Strip has amended its records to show that fewer women and children were among those killed. The Israeli military says it carried out a precise strike early Thursday on three classrooms in the U.N.-run school where it says around 30 Palestinian militants were planning and orchestrating attacks. It said it has confirmed killing nine militants.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital initially reported that nine women and 14 children were among 33 people killed in the strike on the school.

The hospital morgue later amended those records to show that the dead included three women, nine children and 21 men. It was not immediately clear what caused the discrepancy.

An Israeli strike early Thursday on a school sheltering displaced Palestinians in central Gaza killed more than 30 people, including 23 women and children, according to local health

officials. The Israeli military said that Hamas militants were operating from within the school.

It was the latest instance of mass casualties among Palestinians trying to find refuge as Israel expands its offensive. A day earlier, the military announced a new ground and air assault in central Gaza, pursuing Hamas militants it says have regrouped there. Troops repeatedly have swept back into parts of the Gaza Strip they have previously invaded, underscoring the resilience of the militant group despite Israel's nearly eight-month onslaught.

Witnesses and hospital officials said the predawn strike hit the al-Sardi School, run by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees known by the acronym UNRWA. The school was filled with Palestinians who had fled Israeli operations and bombardment in northern Gaza, they said.

Ayman Rashed, a man displaced from Gaza City who was sheltering at the school, said the missiles hit classrooms on the second and third floor where families were sheltering. He said he helped carry out five dead,

including an old man and two children, one with his head shattered open. "It was dark, with no electricity, and we struggled to get out the victims," Rashed said.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, the spokesman for the Israeli military, said it carried out a "precise strike" based on concrete intelligence that militants were planning and conducting attacks from inside three classrooms. He said only those rooms were attacked.

"We conducted the strike once our intelligence and surveillance indicated that there were no women or children inside the Hamas compound, inside those classrooms," he said.

Hagari said there were around 30 suspected militants in the three rooms. He said the military had confirmed killing nine of them, and displayed a slide showing their names and photos. He provided no other evidence to substantiate the military's claims. Casualties from the strike arrived at the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in nearby Deir al-Balah, which had already been overwhelmed by a stream of constant ambulances since the central Gaza

incursion began 24 hours earlier, said Omar al-Derawi, a photographer working for the hospital.

Videos circulating online appeared to show several wounded people being treated on the floor of the hospital, a common scene in Gaza's overwhelmed medical wards. Electricity in much of the hospital is out because staff are rationing fuel supplies for the generator.

"You can't walk in the hospital — there's so many people. Women from the victims' families are massed in the hallways, crying," he said.

Hospital records and an Associated Press reporter at the hospital recorded at least 33 dead from the strike, including 14 children and nine women. Another strike on a house overnight killed six people, according to the records. Both strikes occurred in Nuseirat, one of several built-up refugee camps in Gaza dating to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fled or were driven from their homes in what became the new state.

S African opp parties holding crunch talks on ANC's unity plan

AP ■ JOHANNESBURG

South African opposition parties were meeting Friday and will continue crunch talks into next week to consider the ruling African National Congress' offer to become part of a government of national unity.

ANC failed to secure a majority in last week's highly contested election, but some opposition parties are already rejecting the party's offer because of deep-seated divisions.

Senior officials of the main opposition Democratic Alliance, or DA, will meet on Monday to discuss the centrist party's approach to the negotiations. The top leadership of the leftist Economic Freedom Fighters, or EFF, party were holding talks on Friday. Parties are under pressure to conclude negotiations and reach an agreement by June 16, because South Africa's constitution requires them to do so

within 14 days after the declaration of the election results.

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, who is ANC leader, announced on Thursday that the party had decided to form a government of national unity and had invited all parties to join, a process that is expected to be complex considering vast divisions among the opposition parties themselves. Most of the opposition parties don't differ only with the ANC on various socioeconomic policies, but are also at extreme odds with each other on economic policies like land redistribution and affirmative action.

Opposition party ActionSA has already declared it won't be part of the negotiations, saying that it refuses to work with the ANC.

In what looks likely to be a government of national unity reminiscent of a path taken by the Nelson Mandela-led ANC after the country's first democratic

election in 1994, the party has decided to invite a myriad of opposition parties to be part of the government.

While Mandela insisted on a unity government despite the ANC having won by an overwhelming majority with nearly 63 per cent of the national vote, the ANC has been forced into the current situation by its worst electoral performance ever, dropping from the 57.5 per cent it got in the 2019 election to 40 per cent this year, a decline of 17.5 per cent.

Shortly after Ramaphosa's announcement, the EFF's leader took to X to reject Ramaphosa's proposal of a government of national unity and accused the ANC of arrogance despite failing to win a majority.

The EFF is among the top five parties after the election with just over 9 per cent of the national vote, having declined from the 11 per cent it garnered in 2019 but is expected to

form a crucial part of the eventual outcome of the negotiations.

"The arrogance continues even after the South African voters issued warning signs. You can't dictate the way forward as if you have won elections," EFF leader Julius Malema said. "We are not desperate for anything, ours is a generational mission. We can't share power with the enemy," Malema said.

In 2023, DA declared the Economic Freedom Fighters as its No. 1 enemy.

DA, which got just over 21 per cent of the national vote to remain the second-biggest party, said its highest decision-making body, the Federal Council, would meet on Monday to consider its options. "I can't say now what the position of the DA is, we have a whole negotiation team and we are meeting as the federal council on Monday. We will have a framework for negotiations that we will release this

weekend," Democratic Alliance federal chairperson Helen Zille said Friday.

The fifth-biggest party with nearly 4 per cent of the national vote, the Inkatha Freedom Party, on Friday expressed willingness to be part of the government of national unity, but was also set to discuss the matter with its party structures over the next few days.

"In principle, the IFP is not averse to a GNU (government of national unity). However, the devil is in the details, which will become clearer in the coming days ... enabling the IFP to make a well-considered decision," IFP spokesman Mkhuleko Hlengwa said.

The uMkhonto weSizwe Party led by former President Jacob Zuma, who left the ANC, was the latest to enter the negotiations, with the party confirming on Thursday that it had begun talks with the ANC after initially failing to respond to the party's invitation.



SNP leader John Swinney, centre, and parliamentary candidate Chris Stephens, right, are shown the kitchens during their visit to the Glasgow Gurdwara, while on the General Election campaign trail, in Glasgow, Scotland, Friday. AP/PTI

Boeing's astronaut capsule arrives at space station after thruster trouble

AP ■ CAPE CANAVERA

Boeing's new capsule arrived at the International Space Station on Thursday, delayed by last-minute thruster trouble that almost derailed the docking for this first test flight with astronauts. The 260-mile-high (420-kilometer-high) linkup over the Indian Ocean culminated more than a day of continuing drama for Boeing's astronaut flight debut carrying NASA test pilots Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams.

Boeing plans to keep Starliner at the space station for at least eight days before guiding it to a landing in the western US.

"Nice to be attached to the big city in the sky," Wilmore said once the hooks between the two spacecraft were tight.

Williams entered the space station first, dancing on the way in to music. Wilmore followed, snapping his fingers. They embraced the seven space station residents.

"It was such a great welcome,



a little dance party," said Williams. "That's the way to get things going."

The Starliner capsule already had one small helium leak when it rocketed into orbit with two NASA astronauts Wednesday. Boeing and NASA managers were confident they could manage the propulsion system despite the problem and that more leaks were unlikely. But just hours into the flight, two more leaks cropped up and another was discovered after docking.

Later, five of the capsule's 28 thrusters went down. The

astronauts managed to restart four of them, providing enough safety margin to proceed. By then, Starliner had passed up the first docking opportunity and circled the world for an extra hour alongside the station before moving in.

The thrusters problems were unrelated to the helium leaks, NASA's commercial crew program manager Steve Stich said after the docking.

Going forward in the flight, "we have some tools in our tool kit to manage this," Stich said. Earlier in the day, before the thrusters malfunctioned, offi-

cialists stressed that the helium leaks posed no safety issues for the astronauts or the mission. Helium is used to pressurize the fuel lines of Starliner's thrusters, which are essential for maneuvering. Before liftoff, engineers devised a plan to work around any additional leaks in the system. A faulty rubber seal, no bigger than a shirt button, is believed responsible for the original leak.

Boeing program manager Mark Nappi said there should be plenty of helium in reserve for the trip home.

After the space shuttles retired, NASA hired Boeing and SpaceX to ferry astronauts to and from the space station. SpaceX's taxi service began in 2020. Boeing was supposed to start around the same time, but was held up for years by safety concerns and other troubles.

Stich said none of the problems so far would require a repeat of an astronaut test flight before certifying the capsule for regular use.

Records tumble in US as temp soar well into triple digits and 122 in Death Valley

AP ■ RENO

Records tumbled across the Southwest United States as temperatures soared past 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 degrees Celsius) from southeast California to Arizona, where the region's first heat wave of the year was expected to maintain its grip for at least another day. Although the official start of summer is still two weeks away, roughly half of Arizona and Nevada were under an excessive heat alert, which the National Weather Service said it was extending until Friday evening.

The heat alert for Las Vegas was extended through Saturday.

"It's so hot," said Eleanor Wallace, 9, who was visiting Phoenix from northern Utah Thursday on a hike celebrating her birthday with her mother, Megan Wallace.

The National Weather Service in Phoenix, where the new record high of 113 F (45 C) on

Thursday leap-frogged the old mark of 111 F (44 C) set in 2016, called the conditions "dangerously hot."

There were no immediate reports of any heat-related deaths or serious injuries. But at a campaign rally for presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump in Phoenix, 11 people fell ill from heat exhaustion by late afternoon and were taken to the hospital, where they were treated and released, fire officials said. And in Las Vegas, with a new record of 111 (43.8 C) Thursday that also equaled the earliest time of year the high reached at least 110 (43.3 C), the Clark County Fire Department said it had responded to at least 12 calls for heat exposure since midnight Wednesday. Nine of those calls resulted in a patient needing hospital treatment.

Several other areas of Arizona, California and Nevada also broke records by a degree or

two, including Death Valley National Park with a record high for the date of 122 (50 C) topping the 121 (49.4 C) dating to 1996 in the desert that sits 194 feet (59 meters) below sea level near the California-Nevada line. Records there date to 1911.

The heat has arrived weeks earlier than usual even in places farther to the north at higher elevations — areas typically a dozen degrees cooler. That includes Reno, where the normal high of 81 F (27 C) for this time of year soared to a record 98 F (37 C) on Thursday. Records there date to 1888.

The National Weather Service forecast mild cooling region-wide this weekend, but only by a few degrees. In central and southern Arizona, that will still mean triple-digit highs, even up to 110 F (43 C).

On Thursday in Phoenix, the unseasonably hot weather did not prevent Oscar Tomasio of Cleveland, Ohio, from propos-

ing to his girlfriend, Megan McCracken, as they sweltered to the peak of a trail on Camelback Mountain with 3 liters of water each in tow.

"It was a grueling hike," Tomasio told The Associated Press. "It was extra hot, so we started extra early."

"The views were beautiful. We didn't make it quite to the top because she was a little nervous with the heat," he said. "So, I proposed to her when the sun rose."

McCracken confirmed they'd planned a sunrise hike and awoke about 5 a.m. in an effort to beat the heat and an impending closure of the trail.

"Probably not early enough," she said. Megan Wallace, mother of the birthday girl from Utah who also came packing water bottles, said: "We started just a few minutes after 6 and it's like we came prepared, but we got through all of our water and it was hot — was hotter than we're used to."

'Russia's economy growing despite heavy sanctions'

AP ■ ST. PETERSBURG
President Vladimir Putin said on Friday that the Russian economy is growing despite heavy international sanctions and the country has expanded economic ties with countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia, as he sought to court investors. Addressing the leaders of Bolivia and Zimbabwe and business leaders at the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, Putin said Russia "remains one of the key participants in world trade", despite the fact that the country is under sweeping sanctions for sending troops in Ukraine. The forum has been used by Russia for decades as a showcase for touting the country's development, though Western officials and investors have steered clear of the session since sanctions cut off much of Russia's trade with Western Europe, the US and their allies. The main driver of Russia's economic growth is the fighting in Ukraine — now as important to the Kremlin economically as it is politically. Russians are finding a few



imported staples, and most global brands have disappeared — or been reincarnated as Russian equivalents. But not much else has changed economically for most

Russians, with massive state spending for military equipment and hefty payments to volunteer soldiers giving a strong boost to the economy. Putin has heavily controlled his media appearances since sending his forces into Ukraine but he took questions Wednesday from international journalists, including some from Western countries he has criticized, on the sidelines of the forum. At that meeting, Putin warned that Russia could provide long-range weapons to others to strike Western targets in response to NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use their arms to attack Russian territory. He also reaffirmed Moscow's readiness to use nuclear weapons if it sees a threat to its sovereignty. Last year, journalists from countries that Russia regards as unfriendly — including the US, the UK and the European Union — were not invited to the forum.

4 Indian medical students drown in St. Petersburg

PTI ■ MOSCOW

Four Indian medical students drowned when they entered a fast-flowing river near St Petersburg in Russia, authorities said on Friday, in the worst tragedy to hit the Indian student community in the country. The four students from Maharashtra — Harshal Anantao Desale, Jishan Ashpak Pinjari, Jia Firoj Pinjari and Malik Gulamgous Mohammad Yakub, were studying at the Novgorod State University in Veliky Novgorod city. A fifth student, Nisha Bhupesh Sonawane, was rescued. The Ministry of External Affairs in New Delhi termed it an unfortunate incident. "Four Indian students who were studying at the Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University located in Veliky Novgorod, Russia, drowned in an unfortunate incident in the Volkhov river. In the incident, a fifth Indian student was saved from drowning and is presently receiving medical attention," it said.

US to send new \$225 mn aid package to Ukraine: Officials

AP ■ WASHINGTON

The US will send about USD 225 million in military aid to Ukraine, U.S. officials said Thursday, in a new package that includes ammunition Kyiv's forces could use to strike threats inside Russia to defend the city of Kharkiv from a heavy Russian assault. The officials said the aid includes munitions for the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, or HIMARS, as well as mortar systems and an array of artillery rounds. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss aid not yet publicly announced. Under a new U.S. directive, Ukraine can use such weapons to strike across the border into Russia if forces there are attacking or preparing to attack. That change, however, does not alter U.S. policy that directs Ukraine not to use American-provided ATACMS or long-range missiles and other munitions to strike offensively inside Russia, according to U.S. officials.

The new aid package comes as President Joe Biden used his speech Thursday at the American cemetery in Normandy on the 80th anniversary of D-Day to vow that the U.S. "will not walk away" from the defence of Ukraine and allow Russia to threaten more of Europe. To do so, he said, would mean the U.S. has forgotten "what happened here on these hallowed beaches." Biden is expected to meet with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris on Friday. On Wednesday, a Western official and a U.S. senator said Ukraine has used U.S. weapons to strike inside Russia. And a June 3 report from the Institute for the Study of War suggests that Ukrainian forces used a HIMARS system to strike a Russian S-300/400 air defense battery in the Belgorod region in recent days. The new aid package is being provided through presidential drawdown authority, which pulls systems and munitions from existing U.S. stockpiles so they can go quickly to the war front. Officials said the aid package also includes missiles for the HAWK air defense system, Stinger anti-aircraft missiles, Javelin and AT-4 anti-armour systems, 155mm Howitzers, armoured vehicles, trailers, patrol boats, demolition materials and a wide range of other spare parts and equipment. Ukrainian officials have pressed the U.S. to allow Kyiv's forces to take actions against attacks originating from Russian territory. Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, sits just 20 kilometers (12 miles) from the Russian border and has come under intensified Russian attack. In response to NATO allies allowing Ukraine to use their arms to attack Russian territory, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned on Wednesday that Russia could provide long-range weapons to others to strike Western targets.

Biden apologises to Zelenskyy

AP ■ PARIS

US President Joe Biden on Friday for the first time publicly apologised to Ukraine for a monthlong congressional holdup in American military assistance that let Russia make gains on the battlefield. Biden met in Paris with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who appealed for bipartisan US support going forward "like it was during World War II." A day earlier, the two had attended ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, where Biden had drawn common cause between the allied forces that helped free Europe from Nazi Germany and today's effort to support Ukraine against Russia's invasion and Zelenskyy had been greeted with a rapt ovation. "I apologize for those weeks of not knowing what's going to happen in terms of funding," Biden said, referring to the six-month holdup by conservative Republicans in Congress to a \$61 billion military aid package for Ukraine. Still, the Democratic president insisted that the American people were standing by Ukraine for the long haul. "We're still in. Completely. Thoroughly," he said. The apology — and Zelenskyy's plea for rock-solid support akin to the allied coalition in WWII — served as a reminder that for all of Biden's talk of an unflagging US commitment to Ukraine, recalcitrance among congressional Republicans and an isolationist strain in American politics have exposed its fragility. And, although unremarked upon, the specter of Donald Trump's candidacy

loomed over the discussion, as the Republican former president and the presumptive nominee has spoken positively of Russian President Vladimir Putin and sparked Ukrainian concerns that he would call for it to cede territory to end the conflict. Zelenskyy pressed for all Americans to support his country's defense against Russia's invasion, and he thanked lawmakers for eventually coming together to approve the weapons package, which has allowed Ukraine to stem Russian advances in recent weeks. "It's very important that in this unity, United States of America, all American people stay with Ukraine like it was during World War II," Zelenskyy said. "How the United States helped to save human lives, to save Europe. And we count on your continuing support in standing with us shoulder to shoulder." The United States is by far Kyiv's biggest supplier of wartime support, and Ukraine is trying to fend off an intense Russian offensive in eastern areas of the country. The push is focused on the Ukrainian border regions of Kharkiv and Donetsk, but Ukrainian officials say it could spread as Russia's bigger army seeks to make its advantage tell. The offensive is seeking to exploit Kyiv's shortages of ammunition and troops along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line. The slow pace of delivery of pledged Western weaponry has long frustrated Zelenskyy, as has Biden's hesitation over supplying more hardware for fear of provoking Russian aggression. Ukraine depicts its fight against the Kremlin's forces as a clash between Western

democratic freedom and Russian tyranny. Russia says it is defending itself against a menacing eastward expansion of the NATO military alliance. In a 20-minute speech Friday at the National Assembly, the lower house of the French parliament, Zelenskyy drew a parallel with the sacrifices made during World War II and his country's current fight. "This battle is a crossroads," Zelenskyy said. "A moment where we can now write history the way we need it. Or we can become victims of history as it suits... our enemy." Zelenskyy, who spoke in Ukrainian, was frequently interrupted by lawmakers' applause and cheers. He prompted a standing ovation when he said in French: "Dear France, I thank you for standing by our side as we defend life." French President Emmanuel Macron, meanwhile, announced late Thursday that France will provide Ukraine with its Mirage combat aircraft. Macron has been a vocal supporter of Ukraine. He said in February that putting Western troops on the ground in Ukraine is not "ruled out." Zelenskyy began a day of meetings in Paris with an official welcome ceremony at the golden-domed Invalides monument, site of Napoleon's tomb. During the day, Zelenskyy skipped a scheduled visit to the Nexter arms manufacturer in Versailles, which makes the Caesar self-propelled howitzers that are among the weapons provided by France to Kyiv's forces. He went instead to France's military headquarters with defense manufacturers, and his delegation signed defense agreements.

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China's exports grow 7.6%, despite trade tensions

AP ■ HONG KONG

China's exports in May grew at their fastest pace in more than a year despite trade tensions, though imports fell short of analyst expectations, according to customs data released on Friday. Exports jumped 7.6 per cent in May from the same month last year to USD 302.35 billion, rising at the fastest pace since April 2023. Imports rose by 1.8 per cent to USD 219.73 billion, missing estimates of about 4 per cent growth. The uptick in exports is also partly due to a lower base in the same period last year, when exports declined 7.5 per cent. In comparison, exports grew by 1.5 per cent in April compared with the same period last year, while April imports rose by 8.4 per cent. The strong exports caused China's trade surplus to widen to USD 82.62 billion, up from April's USD 72.35 billion. The growth in exports comes as China faces escalated trade tensions with the US and Europe. The US is ramping up tariffs on Chinese-made electric cars while Europe is considering levying similar tariffs. Tariffs are unlikely to immediately threaten exports; if anything, they may boost exports at the margin as firms speed up shipments to front-run the duties," said Zichun Huang of Capital Economics in a note.



Huang also said that exports would be supported by a weaker real effective exchange rate. "Import volumes were little changed last month, but they will probably rise soon, with increased government spending supporting the import-intensive construction sector," she said. The 10 nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations remained the largest destination for Chinese products, with exports to ASEAN growing 9.7 per cent from year-on-year in the January to May period to USD 50.83 billion. Exports to the US grew just 0.2 per cent in the January through May period compared with the same time last year, while shipments to the European Union declined, slipping 3.9 per cent year-on-year. Steel, automobiles, home appliances and ships have been the fastest growing categories of Chinese exports this year. Automobiles have climbed at the fastest rate, with China exporting 2.4 million vehicles in

the first five months of the year, up 26.8 per cent compared with the same period last year. China is facing accusations from the US and the European Union of overproducing and flooding overseas markets with cheap electric vehicles. Both have worked to impose tariffs on such vehicles. Meanwhile, China is also concerned that duties imposed on its EVs would reduce exports amid weakening demand at home. Lynn Song of ING Economics said that should tariffs on Chinese strategic exports and automobiles be aggressive, there is "potential for retaliation and escalation of trade friction." "We remain cautious about the trade outlook for the second half of the year and expect its contribution to growth to decline," Song said.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY
ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENT
e-TENDER CALL NOTICE No.
AD/OE/GC-73/2023/1134 Dtd.03.06.2024
Name of the work:- "Supply of Ex-Servicemen for Port Security and Related work of PPA". Estimated cost put to tender ₹2,51,27,385.00 (excluding service charges @ 10%). The last date & time of submission of bid is 20.06.2024 upto 1700 Hrs. For details please refer our website:
www.paradipport.gov.in/
https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app.
Sd/- Asst. Secretary (Admn.),
Paradip Port Authority
PPA/PR/10/2024-2025 dtd.07.06.2024

China & Pak vow to protect CPEC from 'adversaries'

AP ■ ISLAMABAD/BEIJING

Pakistan and China on Friday vowed to protect the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) from its "detractors and adversaries", as Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met his Chinese counterpart Li Qiang and assured Beijing of providing complete security to Chinese personnel working on the USD 65 billion project. Sharif is currently on a visit to China at the invitation of President Xi Jinping, seeking to upgrade cooperation under the multi-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a key part of Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative. In a statement, the Pakistan Prime Minister's Office said during the meeting, the two sides discussed the significance of Gwadar as an important pillar of the CPEC and agreed to expedite the timely completion of all related infrastructure projects to transform Gwadar in Balochistan province into a regional economic hub. "They also expressed their firm commitment to protect CPEC from its detractors and adversaries and to upgrade

CPEC in the form of enhanced cooperation," the statement said. The two leaders reaffirmed unwavering support for each other on core issues and expressed continued commitment and support for the high-quality development of the CPEC, Geo News reported. They also emphasised the timely completion of all ongoing projects with a special focus on industrial development, agriculture modernisation, Science & Technology and the development of Special Economic Zones for mutually beneficial and socio-economic development of Pakistan. Sharif also reaffirmed Pakistan's unflinching resolve to ensure the safety and security of Chinese personnel and projects in Pakistan. Chinese investment and financial support since 2013 have been key for the South Asian nation's struggling economy, including the rolling over of loans so that Islamabad can meet external financing needs at a time when foreign reserves are critically low.

PPGCL
PRAYAGRAJ POWER GENERATION COMPANY LIMITED
Regd Office: Shatabdi Bhawan, B12 & 13, Sector 4, Gauram Budh Nagar, Noida, Uttar Pradesh-201301
Plant Address: PO- Lohgara, Tehsil-Bara, Prayagraj (Allahabad), Uttar Pradesh-212107
Phone: +91-120-6102000/6102009 CIN: U40101UP2007PLC032835
NOTICE INVITING EXPRESSION OF INTEREST
Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited invites expression of interest (EOI) from eligible vendors for Procurement of "ERW PIPE FOR FLY ASH LINE" JUNE '24" of 3x660 MW Thermal Power Plant at Prayagraj Power Generation Company Limited, Bara, Dist. Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, India. Details of pre-qualification requirements, bid security, purchasing of tender document etc. may be downloaded using the URL-<https://www.ppgcl.co.in/tenders.php> Eligible vendors willing to participate may submit their expression of interest along with the tender fee for issue of bid document latest by 14th June 2024.

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Tender Notice Reference No.44/ DR
The Department of Director of Research invites online bids for the following:

Sr. No.	Item	Quantity
1	Fluorescence Spectrophotometer	1 No.
2	UV-V Spectrophotometer	1 No.
3	HPLC - high Performance Liquid Chromatography	1 No.

Closing date & Time: 22/06/2024 at 4:00 PM
For details log onto: www.eproc.punjab.gov.in
Note: Any corrigendum(s) to the Tender Notice shall be published on the above website only.
Director of Research
Guru Nanak Dev University,
Amritsar-143005 (Punjab) India
NA/12/23208/2023/34233 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024

verka
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting e Tender
www.verka.coop
e-tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following item :-

Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh	
• 180 ml Glass Bottle for Verka Patiala Dairy.	Annual/ 85,00,000 No's
• Di-Calcium Phosphate for Cattle Feed Plant Khanna & GKB.	Annual/1100 MT

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.
NA/12/23240/2023/34281 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024. Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar
Advertisement No. 02/2024
Walk-in-Interview
Online applications are invited from eligible candidates for the Posts of Assistant Professors in various teaching Departments of Guru Nanak Dev University, Main Campus Amritsar and its Regional Campuses (on contractual basis) for the session 2024-25. Online registration process will start on 10-06-2024 and close on 24-06-2024, for interview schedule and further details visit www.gndu.ac.in
07-06-2024 Registrar
Amritsar
NA/12/23252/2023/34300 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Faridkot
(University Centre of Excellence in Research (UCER, Faridkot))
Baba Farid University of Health Sciences Sadiq Road, Faridkot - 151203
Ph: 01639-256232, 256236
ADMISSION NOTICE - 2024
MSC. (PHYTOMEDICINE) COURSE
Online applications are invited through University website for admission to MSc. (Phytomedicine-40 Seats) Session 2024 at Department of Phytomedicine, University Centre of Excellence in Research (UCER), BFUHS, Faridkot from 15-06-2024 to 15-07-2024, alongwith requisite fee of Rs. 5000/+18% GST (Rs. 5900) and SC candidates Rs. 2500/+18% GST (Rs.2950) through University Payment Gateway. The prospectus for admission will be available on the University website w.e.f. 15-06-2024.
Notes: For Eligibility/Detail/Fee/Prospectus visit University website i.e. www.bfuhhs.ac.in
For details/updates kindly visit University website (www.bfuhhs.ac.in) regularly. No separate communication will be made. Any corrigendum/amendments will be followed.
Registrar
NIL/12/180/2023/34206 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024

verka
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting e Tender
www.verka.coop
e-tender is hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following item :-

Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
For Verka Head Office, Chandigarh	
Hiring of commercial vehicles for supply of Verka Milk Products from Milkfed Branch state Office Dehradun to different stations in Uttarakhand state.	Annual

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.
NA/12/23196/2023/34220 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024. Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

verka
THE PUNJAB STATE COOPERATIVE MILK PRODUCERS FEDERATION LTD.
SCO 153-155, SECTOR 34-A, CHANDIGARH-160022, EPABX NO. 0172-5041812,66
Notice Inviting Tender
www.verka.coop
Tenders are hereby invited for the purchase and supply of following items:-

Sr. No.	Name of Work/Item	Period/Tentative Qty
1.	For Verka Mohali Dairy Renovation/Upgrade of Electrical Sub-station.	Job Work
2.	For Verka Chandigarh Dairy • Loading/Unloading of Verka milk & milk products corrugated boxes, sugar bags. • Vehicles i.e.2.5 MT, 4.5 MT, 9 MT, 15 MT, 20 MT, 27MT and 32 MT for the transportation of UHT Milk, Milk Products, Beverages, Juice and other Verka Ambient products etc., from Verka Chandigarh Dairy to other Verka Dairy Units, Milkfed Branches & Depots (In the state of Punjab & Upcountry Level) and Defence Units.	Annual (from the date of issue of work order)
3.	For Verka Sangrur Dairy • Fresh Cut Firewood • Hiring of Pick-up or equivalent vehicle for transportation of Cattle feed and other products. • Husk feeding in boiler and transportation of its Ash.	500MT 01 for two years Annual
4.	For Verka Ferozpur Dairy Unserviceable material and plant Machinery Scrap	
5.	For Verka Amritsar Dairy a) Sealed tenders for Demolition of:- • Building near coal yard. • Over head water tank near main store. b) Sealed tender for open auction of approx.420 no. of trees (Safeda, drek etc.). c) E tender for Hiring of vehicles for supply of fresh milk and milk products.	Complete Job Complete Job 01 No.
6.	For Verka Bathinda Dairy a) Viscometer. b) Tintometer. c) Single Lever Auto clava. d) Water double distillation unit, incubator, BOD incubator. e) Weighing balance up to 4 decimal places having max weighing capacity of 220 gm. f) Digital holding moisture analyzer for milk powder testing.	01No. 01No. 01No. 02No/s 01No.
7.	For Verka Mega Dairy, Bassi Pathana • Transport Vehicles for 1.5 MT, 2.5 MT, 4.5 MT, 9 MT, 15 MT, 20 MT, 27 MT & 32 MT for supply of UHT Milk & Milk Products to Army stations. • Design, supply, installation and commissioning of 375 KW grid connected rooftop solar power plant.	Annual 01 Complete Setup

NOTE:
1. For complete details regarding above tender (NIT), please visit our website i.e. www.verka.coop & e Tendering portal i.e. eproc.punjab.gov.in.
2. Corrigendum, if any, will be uploaded on website only.
NA/12/23246/2023/34289 Dated CHD :- 6/7/2024. Dy. General Manager (Purchase)

RBI keeps interest rates unchanged; policy committee more divided

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) left its key interest rates unchanged on Friday as expected, keeping the focus on inflation amid robust economic growth that is likely to provide the new Modi government headroom for manoeuvring reforms. The Monetary Policy Committee, consisting of three RBI and an equal number of external members, kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent for an eighth straight policy meeting and stuck to its relatively hawkish stance of "withdrawal of accommodation", Governor Shaktikanta Das said in his statement. However, there were signs of a more divided policy committee, with one additional member voting for a softening in stance as well as policy direction. Two external members, Ashima Goyal and Jayanth Varma, voted for a

cut, compared to one in the previous meeting. The decision comes just days ahead of Narendra Modi assuming the office of the Prime Minister of India for the third straight time but with a smaller-than-expected election victory that forced his party BJP to share power in a coalition government. The slim majority, according to global rating agencies, may delay more far-reaching elements of economic and fiscal reforms like land and labour, and impede progress on fiscal consolidation. With the Indian economy, Asia's third-largest, growing faster than expected in the previous year, the RBI raised its GDP growth projection for the current fiscal through March 2025 to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent while maintaining its inflation forecast at 4.5 per cent. India's real GDP grew by 8.2 per cent in the 2023-24 (April



2023 to March 2024) fiscal year, while inflation was 4.83 per cent in April, above the RBI's target. The FY24 growth was helped by a faster-than-expected pace of 7.8 per cent in the March quarter. Das said while the MPC took note of the disinflation achieved so far without hurting growth, it remains vigilant to any upside risks to

would set strong foundations for a period of high growth." The RBI, he said, will continue to be nimble and flexible in its liquidity management through fine-tuning operations in repo and reverse repo. "We will deploy an appropriate mix of instruments to modulate both frictional and durable liquidity so as to ensure that money market interest rates evolve in an orderly manner, which preserves financial stability." The governor hinted that the RBI may be willing to move before the US Federal Reserve pivots a rate cut, saying the central bank's monetary policy actions are determined by domestic growth and inflation conditions. "I'd like to unambiguously state while we do keep a watch on whether clouds are building up or clearing out in the distance horizons, we play the game according to the

local weather pitch conditions," he said. Commenting on the MPC decisions, Radhika Rao, Executive Director and Senior Economist, DBS Bank, said there were signs of a more divided policy committee, with one additional member voting for a softening in stance. "The majority retained their cautious stance to guide inflation towards the 4 per cent target on a durable basis, despite recent signs of disinflation." The MPC also signalled that they will not react to the upcoming base-effect-driven correction in inflation in 2Q FY25, lowering the probability of a shift in 2H 24. In all, the mix of strong growth and above-target inflation does not make a case for a shift to a less restrictive policy setting yet, validating our view that rate easing is not on the cards this year. Political developments are not expected to sway the

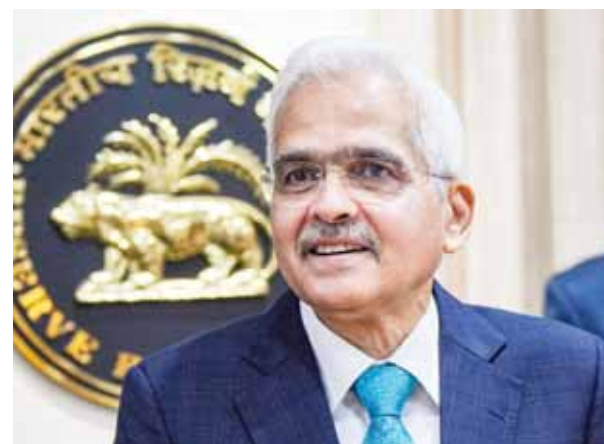
monetary policy direction or outlook," she said. Suman Chowdhury, Chief Economist and Head-Research, Acuite Ratings & Research said there were no surprises in the RBI decision. "The RBI has continued to reaffirm its commitment to sustainable disinflation and price stability without providing any indication on the monetary policy pivot. The central bank would continue to watch out for any upward risks in food inflation in the near term, despite the forecast of an 'above normal' monsoon. Further, it may also monitor the revised upcoming Union Budget to track the possible increases in welfare spend and its potential impact on inflation, although the high RBI dividend of Rs 2.1 trillion will mitigate the potential risks for now." On liquidity, Chowdhury said the high dividend of Rs 2.1 lakh crore by the RBI to the

government has been positive for short-term interest rates. "But we expect the RBI to calibrate system liquidity appropriately and facilitate better monetary transmission through absorption of any excessive liquidity portion that may arise after the restart of government spending and the expected inflows from debt FPIs amidst India's inclusion in the JPM bond indices." Given the tone of the MPC statement and the expectation of stronger domestic growth, there is a low likelihood of any rate cut by the RBI in the current calendar year, he added. Among other decisions, the RBI raised the bulk deposit limit to Rs 3 crore from Rs 2 crore currently and allowed the inclusion of payments like replenishment of balances in Fastag in e-mandates for recurring payments as well as automatically replenishing UPI Lite wallets.

RBI raises GDP growth projection to 7.2 per cent for FY25

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India on Friday revised upwards the GDP growth projection for the current fiscal to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent on rising private consumption and revival of demand in rural areas. Unveiling the bi-monthly monetary policy, RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das said estimates released by the National Statistical Office (NSO) placed India's real gross domestic product (GDP) growth at 8.2 per cent in 2023-24.



"During 2024-25 so far, domestic economic activity has maintained resilience," he said, adding that manufacturing activity continues to gain ground on the back of strengthening domestic demand. Also, the services sector maintained buoyancy, as evident in available high-frequency indicators. Governor Das said private consumption, the mainstay of aggregate demand, is recovering with steady discretionary spending in urban areas. The revival in rural demand is getting a fillip from improving farm sector activity and investment activity continues to gain traction on the back of ongoing expansion in non-bank credit. He also said the forecast of above normal south-west monsoon by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) is expected to boost kharif production and replenish the reservoir levels. "Taking all these factors into consideration, real GDP

growth for 2024-25 is projected at 7.2 per cent with Q1 at 7.3 per cent, Q2 at 7.2 per cent, Q3 at 7.3 per cent, and Q4 at 7.2 per cent. The risks are evenly balanced," Das said. He also emphasised that the healthy balance sheets of banks and corporates, the government's continued thrust on capex, high capacity utilisation, and business optimism augur well for investment activity. External demand should get a fillip from improving prospects of global trade, the governor said. The developments relating to growth and inflation are unfolding as per "our expectations", he noted. When the projected GDP growth of 7.2 per cent for 2024-25 materialises, it will be the fourth consecutive year with growth at or above 7 per cent. On global economic growth, Das said the growth is sustaining its momentum in 2024 and is likely to remain resilient, supported by a rebound in global trade.

Sensex, Nifty hit all time closing high levels

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty climbed over 2 per cent to settle at record closing high levels on Friday after the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) revised upwards the GDP growth projection to 7.2 per cent for 2024-25 from 7 per cent earlier. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 1,720.8 points, or 2.29 per cent, to hit a new record peak of 76,795.31 in day trade. The benchmark ended at 76,693.36, up 1,618.85 points, or 2.16 per cent. The NSE Nifty climbed 498.8 points, or 2.18 per cent, to 23,320.0 during the day and is just 18.5 points from hitting its record high level. It settled with a jump of 468.75 points, or 2.05 per cent, at 23,290.15.

IT and interest rate-sensitive bank, realty, and auto stocks ended with sharp gains. The RBI left its key interest rates unchanged on Friday as expected, keeping the focus on inflation amid robust economic growth that is likely to provide the new Modi government headroom for manoeuvring reforms. The Monetary Policy Committee, consisting of three RBI and an equal number of external members, kept the repo rate unchanged at 6.50 per cent for an eighth straight policy meeting and stuck to its relatively hawkish stance of "withdrawal of accommodation", Governor Shaktikanta Das said in his statement. With the Indian economy, Asia's third-largest, growing faster than expected in the previous year, the RBI raised



its GDP growth projection for the current fiscal through March 2025 to 7.2 per cent from 7 per cent while maintaining its inflation forecast at 4.5 per cent. "The anticipation of stability within the coalition government at the centre, coupled with the RBI's upward revision of its growth forecast for FY25 to 7.2 per

Mahindra, Bharti Airtel, Infosys and Tata Steel emerging as the biggest gainers. In Asian markets, Seoul, and Shanghai settled with gains while Tokyo and Hong Kong ended lower. European markets were trading lower. US markets ended on a mixed note on Thursday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.04 per cent to USD 79.95 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 6,867.72 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. Regaining the 75,000 level, the BSE benchmark jumped 692.27 points, or 0.93 per cent, to settle at 75,074.51 on Thursday. The Nifty climbed 201.05 points, or 0.89 per cent, to 22,821.40.

RBI brings 100 metric gold reserve from UK to India; nothing more should be read into it: Das

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Reserve Bank of India has brought 100 metric tonnes of gold reserve from the UK to India as there is enough domestic storage capacity, and nothing more should be read into it, Governor Shaktikanta Das said on Friday. The RBI moved 100 metric tonnes of its gold stored in the UK to domestic vaults in FY24. This is one of the biggest movements of gold undertaken by the country since 1991, when pledging a substantial part of the gold holding to tide over a foreign exchange crisis resulted in its movement out of vaults. The quantum of gold stored outside was static for a long time, Reserve Bank of India Governor Das said here. "In recent years, the data shows that the Reserve Bank is buying gold as a part of its reserves, and the quantum was going up. We have domestic (storage) capacity," he said. Therefore, it was decided to move part of the reserve outside India to be stored within the country, he said, adding, "That's it. Nothing more should be read into it." The country's overall gold holding increased by 27.46



metric tonnes in FY24, and it stands at 822 metric tonnes, as per official data. A substantial part of the precious commodity is stored abroad, the sources said, adding that India also had its holding with the Bank of England like other countries. The movement of 100 metric tonnes into India has taken the overall quantity stored locally to over 408 metric tonnes of gold, which means the local and foreign holding is now split almost evenly. As per the annual report of the central bank for FY24 released last month, over 308 metric tonnes of gold is held in India as backing for notes issued, while another 100.28 tonnes is held locally as an asset of the banking department. Of the overall gold reserves, 413.79 metric tonnes are held abroad, the annual report said.

Sebi recognised for innovative regulatory practices



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Sebi has been given 'Best SConduct of Business Regulator' award in Asia Pacific by The Asian Banker for its role in enhancing the regulatory framework for securities markets in India. The award was received by Sebi's Whole Time Member Kamlesh Chandra Varshney in a ceremony held in Hong Kong. "This authority (Sebi) has been actively working towards instantaneous settlement. In 2021, T+1 settlement was introduced in a phased manner, which was fully implemented from January 2023. This move has provided investors with faster access to their funds following trade execution and settlement, enhancing market efficiency and liquidity," The Asian Banker said in a statement. Through rigorous enforcement and innovative regulatory practices, Sebi has significantly improved the conduct of business in the country's financial markets, it added.

India's strong growth leading to trend of reverse flipping for startups

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India's strong growth is leading to a trend of 'reverse flipping' as domestic startups that once used to move abroad for capital access and tax benefits are now returning home, a top government official has said. Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal also said that the digital economy along with emerging technologies like AI and the rise of data centres were key to future Indian growth. He was speaking at an event in Singapore organised by the commerce ministry to showcase various investment opportunities in India. It was organised on the sidelines of the inaugural Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) Clean Economy Investor Forum in Singapore. Barthwal stressed how India's growth rate is nearly double that of other emerging market economies. "He remarked on how this strong growth is also leading to a trend of 'reverse flipping', where Indian startups that



once moved abroad for capital access and tax benefits are now returning home," the ministry said in a statement on Friday. India's economy grew by 8.2 per cent in the fiscal year that ended in March 2024, cementing the country's position as the fastest-growing major economy in the world. The country has over one lakh government-recognised startups. The meeting attracted more than 60 participants, including global investors from the US, Singapore, Japan, Australia, Korea, and other countries, as well as India's private sector and government officials. The event brought together

investors and financial institutions from IPEF Member countries like those of Temasek, Global Infrastructure Partners, GuarantCo, Private Infrastructure Development Group (PIDG), Goldman Sachs, I Squared Capital, Mizuho Bank Ltd, Advantage Partners, Nomura, DBS Bank and Citi Bank. The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) was launched in May 2022 and currently includes 14 partners — Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Fiji, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, the US and Vietnam.

Saudia Group keen to offer MRO services for Indian airlines

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Saudia Group is keen to increase the number of flights connecting Saudi Arabia and India as well as provide MRO services to Indian carriers. Saudia Airlines, part of the group, currently operates 54 weekly flights connecting seven destinations in India, including Delhi, Mumbai and Hyderabad. An executive of the group said on Thursday it has also set up a Maintenance, Repair and Overhaul (MRO) facility in Saudi Arabia and is keen to provide MRO services for the aircraft of Indian carriers. The facility will be fully operational next year. Around 1.5 million tourists from India visited Saudi Arabia last year and expectations are that the count will rise to 7.5 million by 2030, Saudia Group Director General Ibrahim Alomari said.

Speaking at the CAPA India Aviation Summit 2024, he said the group will increase the frequencies of flights between Saudi Arabia and India and want Indian airlines to increase their flights. "We need to work together," he said while mentioning about Indian and Saudi carriers. Meanwhile, Riyadh Air is set to be launched next year with its hub in Riyadh. The group had discussions with Air India about the MRO village, which can accommodate 48 aircraft at a time. The MRO village can do the work for A320 and B787 planes as well as for LEAP engines. It will also have the assembly lines for Brazil's plane maker Embraer and Italy's helicopter manufacturer Leonardo, according to Saudia Group's GM Corporate Communication and Media Affairs Abdullah M Alshahrani.

Navigate financial market dynamics with HDFC Multi Asset Fund

PNS ■ MUMBAI

Investors often fall prey to recency bias, a tendency to favour asset classes that have recently performed well. This inclination can lead to chasing momentum and making investment decisions at inopportune times. Given the unpredictable nature of market and the varying performance of asset classes across economic cycles, attempting to time the market becomes challenging. Hence, a prudent strategy involves diversification across negatively correlated or less correlated asset classes. HDFC Multi-Asset Fund emerges as a dynamic choice, offering investors a pathway that aims towards balanced growth and stability. Crafted for those seeking long-term capital appreciation and

income generation, HDFC Multi-Asset Fund presents an avenue for investment across diverse asset classes. The Multi-Asset Allocation Funds are particularly well-suited for investors aiming to diversify their portfolios and manage risk effectively, they not only help in mitigating portfolio volatility but also reduce reliance on any single asset class for generating returns. With a strategic allocation to equity, debt, and gold-related instruments, the fund aligns with the goal of achieving better returns while mitigating volatility. By seamlessly blending growth opportunities with risk management, HDFC Multi-Asset Fund positions itself as a good option for investors navigating the financial landscape with prudence and foresight.

China's exports grow 7.6 per cent in May

AP ■ HONG KONG

China's trade surplus to widen to USD 82.62 billion, up from April's USD 72.35 billion. The growth in exports comes as China faces escalated trade tensions with the US and Europe. The US is ramping up tariffs on Chinese-made electric cars while Europe is considering levying similar tariffs. "Foreign tariffs are unlikely to immediately threaten exports; if anything, they may boost exports at the margin as firms speed up shipments to front-run the duties," said Zichun Huang of Capital Economics in a note. Huang also said that exports would be supported by a weaker real effective exchange rate. "Import volumes were little changed last month, but they will probably rise soon, with increased government spending supporting the

China's exports in May grew at their fastest pace in more than a year despite trade tensions, though imports fell short of analyst expectations, according to customs data released on Friday. Exports jumped 7.6 per cent in May from the same month last year to USD 302.35 billion, rising at the fastest pace since April 2023. Imports rose by 1.8 per cent to USD 219.73 billion, missing estimates of about 4 per cent growth. The uptick in exports is also partly due to a lower base in the same period last year, when exports declined 7.5 per cent. In comparison, exports grew by 1.5 per cent in April compared with the same period last year, while April imports rose by 8.4 per cent. The strong exports caused

import-intensive construction sector," she said. The 10 nations of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations remained the largest destination for Chinese products, with exports to ASEAN growing 9.7 per cent in May year-on-year to USD 50.83 billion. Exports to the US grew just 0.2 per cent in May compared with the same time last year, while shipments to the European Union declined, slipping 3.9 per cent year-on-year. Steel, automobiles, home appliances and ships were the fastest growing categories of Chinese exports. Automobiles climbed at the fastest rate, with China exporting 569,000 cars at a growth rate of 26.8 per cent compared with the same time last year.

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DON'T HAVE TIME TO FEEL SORRY FOR OURSELVES, WE'RE STILL ALIVE: STIMAC

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Defiant India football coach Igor Stimac said his team has no time "to feel sorry" for itself after the disappointing goalless draw against Kuwait in a crucial World Cup qualifying match here as it is "still alive" in the race to enter the third round.

India were thoroughly disappointing in the game that marked the end of talismanic skipper Sunil Chhetri's international career after a glorious run of 19 years in which he scored 94 goals in 151 games.

"We don't have time to feel sorry for ourselves as we are still alive. I need to do everything in the next five days to make the boys believe, make them create the environment of belief, which can take us into a challenge against Qatar who are a very different team," Stimac asserted in the post-match press conference.

"It's a small hope, but it's till there and we need to believe and trust in ourselves and give our best shot to win the game." India will next face Asian heavyweights Qatar in an away fixture on June 11 and will also keep a close watch on Kuwait's home match against Afghanistan on the same day. India need to avoid a defeat to have any chance of progressing to the next round, which would be a historic first for the side.

Stimac was critical of Sahal Abdul Samad and Anirudh Thapa who failed to impress. "When you don't win the game and aren't happy with the result, how can you say that some players impressed you. You could see that we couldn't start dominating the game in the middle even if we started with Sahal and Thapa. I expected much more from them in the first half. "Sahal didn't play in the final stages. He was covering lots of ground, his defensive work was fantastic and he looked nice with Sunil. But I needed Sahal to be playmaker to dictate the game, create chances and also put in defensive work." Speaking about Thapa, Stimac said his performance was underwhelming considering that he is an experienced player. "Thapa has got enough experience to adapt to situations. I expect more from them as they have enough experience to do so," he added. The coach further gave his thumbs up to the fans for turning up in huge numbers to make Chhetri's last match extra special. "Huge appreciation for the fans, for their support." Chhetri stirred up emotions in his final outing but the Indian football team failed to convert the chances. "We are obviously disappointed with the result. The game was tough, as we



expected. The draw is realistic tonight, they opened the game much better and with more confidence — in terms of passing, speed of passing and moving," Stimac said.

enough. Even in certain moments, when we put pressure on them, there was no quality in the delivery to help the forwards. Stimac was, however, happy with goalkeeper Gurpreet Singh Sandhu's performance. "That's not the reason we didn't win, we weren't clinical in front of the goal and our best player tonight was Gurpreet, which isn't a good sign. It's fantastic to have such a goalkeeper here, who we never doubted." The draw meant the long-serving Indian skipper had a tearful farewell, failing to add to his record tally of 94 goals. "I feel really sad for Sunil, really sad that he didn't go with a win. In regards to everything, he was not thinking of his last minutes, not a single player or staff member," he said. **NEED TO COPE WITHOUT SUNIL: GURPREET:** Sandhu said Chhetri's absence would be felt against Qatar but they need to cope and move forward. "Like any other team we prepare for, obviously this time around we won't have Sunil bhair with us, which is sad but as a nation we need to cope up with that and move forward. "The world doesn't wait for anyone and we need to prepare ourselves in the best manner possible. Any game is not a loss before the 90 minutes and we'll go out there against Qatar to win game and give our best shot to win it," he added.



Mbappé leads France in Euro 2024 group against teams he loves scoring against

AP ■ MUNICH

France and the Netherlands renew their recent rivalry at the European Championship with fresh memories of their hard luck exits at the World Cup 18 months ago. Both were beaten in Qatar in penalty shootouts against Argentina - France in the epic final, the Dutch in the quarterfinals - after rallying late from two goals down. The first post-World Cup game for each was the opener of their Euro 2024 qualifying group in March last year. France raced to an early three-goal lead and won 4-0 in Paris. France goes for three straight wins against the Netherlands when they meet in the late game on the longest summer day, June 21, in Leipzig. That will be the second round of games in Group D that includes Austria and Poland, which also played Argentina at the World Cup. The Poles also trailed 2-0 to the eventual champion and it stayed that way.

Here's a look at Group D: **FRANCE:** France reached the final in three of its past four major tournaments, winning the 2018 World Cup, with just Euro 2020 counting as a failure. Kylian Mbappé's penalty was saved and France lost the shootout to Switzerland after a 3-3 draw in the round of 16. Mbappé arrives for his first tournament game since that 2022 World Cup final hat trick in a losing cause against Argentina, as captain of the most talented squad at Euro 2024. He also might be feeling liberated after a testy final few months at Paris Saint-Germain ahead of his long-expected move to Real Madrid. Mbappé's appetite for goals against these group rivals is such that he scored twice against the Netherlands

in each of their qualifying group games, twice against Poland at the World Cup, and once in each game against Austria in 2022 in the Nations League. The 25-year-old superstar has 48 goals in 79 games for France, chasing down teammate Olivier Giroud's record of 57 for Les Bleus. Giroud's stellar international career ends after Euro 2024 when, at age 37, he will join Los Angeles FC. **NETHERLANDS:** Ronald Koeman has coached the Netherlands through qualifying for back-to-back European Championships. This time he sees the job through to the finals tournament. After Euro 2021 was postponed for one year in the COVID-19 pandemic, Koeman left to take the coveted job at his former club Barcelona, still then with Lionel Messi. The Dutch went to the last Euro coached by Frank de Boer and lost in the round of 16 to the Czech Republic. Koeman was fired by Barcelona after 14 months and one Spanish cup title, then rehired by the Dutch federation to succeed Louis van Gaal after the 2022 World Cup. In qualifying, Koeman's team was efficient in winning all six games against teams not named France and conceding just one goal, from a penalty by Ireland. Now he seems ready to unleash a reshaped formation with dynamic wing backs Denzel Dumfries and Jeremie Frimpong. **AUSTRIA:** Predicting a "dark horse" contender to be European champion has recently been a fool's errand. Austria in 2016 and Turkey three years ago both went home winless after the group stage. Still, Austria has been in the conversation again. Coach Ralf Rangnick has rebuilt his reputation after a few dysfunctional months at Manchester United ended in 2022 and created some expectation for this Austria team. At least until the knee injuries hit. Captain David Alaba's season was ended in December playing for Real Madrid. Since an impressive international break in March - beating Euro 2024 teams Slovakia and Turkey (a 6-1 rout in Vienna) - goalkeeper Alex Schlager and midfielder Xaver Schlager also got injured. The midfielder is still a strength with high-end talent in the Bundesliga: Bayern Munich's Konrad Laimer, Borussia Dortmund's Marcel Sabitzer and Leipzig's Christoph Baumgartner, whose goal after six seconds in Slovakia was the fastest ever in a men's national team game. **POLAND:** Poland was beaten easily by France at the World Cup, 3-1 in the round of 16 in Qatar. That tournament seemed to give little joy to the Polish players under cautious coach Czeslaw Michniewicz, who left soon after. It did not improve with Fernando Santos, the Euro 2016-winning coach for Portugal, who was fired last September. Poland eventually qualified via the playoffs under coach Michal Probierz after having zero shots on target in a 0-0 draw at Wales until the penalty shootout. Veteran goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny made the key save in Cardiff as captain Robert Lewandowski turned away unable to watch. They remain the core of the team and this could be their international farewell, as the 35-year-old Lewandowski looks to add to his national records of 148 games and 82 goals. Poland's last group game is against France in Dortmund, where he was a feted star from 2010-14.

Praggnanandhaa loses to Caruana, Carlsen beats Firouzja Alireza

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)

Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa went down fighting against Fabiano Caruana of United States while world number one Magnus Carlsen inflicted an Armageddon defeat on France's Firouzja Alireza in the penultimate round of Norway Chess tournament here. With 16 points in his bag, Carlsen stretched his lead to 1.5 points over nearest rival Hikaru Nakamura, who was in for a shock as World Champion Ding Liren, for once, did not blow his position away. Praggnanandhaa, despite the loss against Caruana in Armageddon, is still third on 13 points, a full point ahead of Alireza. Caruana on 10.5 comes in next in standings ahead of Liren (6), who spoiled Nakamura's party. In the women's section, R Vaishali succumbed to another



loss at the hands of Tingjie Lei of China and was relegated to fourth spot while Koneru Humpy went down to tournament leader Wenju Ju of China. Wenjun Ju of China strengthens her claim for the title by moving to 16 points. Tingjie Lei and Anna Muzychuk of Ukraine follow her 1.5 points behind while Vaishali on 11.5 is a distant

with the slightly favourable colour early in the opening as Vaishali's pawn structure became a bit dented. Picking out a pawn on the queen side, the Chinese capitalised on her better placed rook to invade the seventh rank and it was soon curtains for the Indian in just 28 moves. Humpy had her last chance but could not make most of it as white against Wenjun Ju. The Chinese equalised at ease in the early middle game as black in the Ragozine defense and drew comfortably in the ensuing rook and pawns endgame. Humpy decided to go all-in in the Armageddon but the plan boomeranged as Wenjun found a tactical skirmish to win a rook in the middle game. The game lasted 41 moves. In the men's section, Carlsen was not overjoyed that the Classical game ended in a draw but kept his nerves intact

to win the Armageddon while Liren finally had something to smile about as he defeated Nakamura in fine fashion. Praggnanandhaa did not have to sweat hard to hold Caruana under Classical but in the Armageddon the American was a transformed player as he took advantage of his white pieces. The Indian has white pieces in the last round game against Nakamura and will hope to make the most of it. **Results round 9 men:** Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 10.5) beat R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 13) 1.5-1; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 12) lost to Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 16) 1-1.5; Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 14.5) lost to Ding Liren (Chn, 6.5) 1-1.5. **Women:** Koneru Humpy (Ind, 9) lost to Wenjun Ju (Chn, 16) 1.5-1; Tingjie Lei (Chn, 14.5) beat R Vaishali (11.5) 3-0; Pia Cramling (Swe, 6.5) lost to Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 14.5) 1-1.5.

Kush Maini completes first F1 test with Alpine

AP ■ SPIELBERG (AUSTRIA)

India racer Kush Maini completed his first Formula 1 test with BWT Alpine F1 Team here earlier this week. The 23-year-old, competing in his second season of Formula 2, drove the A522 F1 car as part of Alpine's young driver test programme on Wednesday. The test in Austria marked Kush's first time in a modern-spec F1 car and second time testing with BWT Alpine F1 Team. Maini previously drove the A521 at Bahrain International Circuit in 2023 after joining the Alpine Academy programme in October last year. "My first full day in a Formula 1 car is complete in Spielberg. It was a dream come true and it was better than I could have ever imagined it to be. I am so grateful to BWT Alpine F1 Team for believing in me and giving me this opportunity," Maini said. "The Race Support Team did an incredible job to get me up to speed quickly and have the test



run as smoothly as possible, their hard work and effort does not go unnoticed, so a big thank you to them," he added. The event makes up part of the young driver testing programme, which both

McLaren's Lando gives nod to Ferrari as favourites at Canadian Grand Prix

AP ■ MONTREAL

Lando Norris is putting the Lpressure on Ferrari. The McLaren Formula 1 driver said the Canadian Grand Prix could be anyone's race Sunday, but he's giving the edge to the Italian team after Charles Leclerc's victory two weeks ago in Monaco. "I think they're favorites," Norris said Thursday. "It's impossible for me to say if it's going to be us, Ferrari or Red Bull on top. That's why it's exciting, because none of us really know." Led by three-time defending season champion Max Verstappen, Red Bull won 21 of 22 races last year. Verstappen had a record 19 victories. Red Bull tops the constructors' championship this season, but Leclerc's victory helped Ferrari move within 24 points. Norris thinks Ferrari could have the upper hand again this weekend, partially because curbing-riding is such a factor at recently resurfaced Circuit Gilles Villeneuve. Leclerc downplayed the favorite talk. "Everybody doesn't want to be going into a weekend hearing that they are favorites," Leclerc said. "You're never going to hear me (say) we are 100% the favorite this weekend and the same for them, so you've got to throw the ball to your closest opponents. "It might not be the true



picture once we hit the track, the reality is we are so closely matched between those three teams." Verstappen has a 31-point lead over Leclerc in the drivers' championship. Norris trails Leclerc by 25 points, equal to one race win. But three drivers from three teams - Norris, Leclerc and Verstappen - have won the last three races for the first time since 2021. Last season, Verstappen won his second consecutive Canadian Grand Prix amid a run of a record 10 straight victories. "I'm not focused on what the others are doing because that's just a waste of time and energy," the 26-year-old Dutchman said. "We know that from our side, there are things that we can do better and that's what we'll focus on." While Ferrari appears to thrive on courses where curbing-riding is a big factor, the opposite has been true for Red Bull. Verstappen called Monaco, where he finished sixth and Red Bull teammate Sergio Perez did not finish, a reminder of that. "This is something that we know, and we haven't been able to fix it yet. I do think that after Monaco, it gave us another wake-up call," Verstappen said. "With everyone catching up, naturally, you can't rely on your advantage anymore even though your curbing-riding is bad.

UP Kabaddi team to plant 100 saplings for every successful raid

SAMAR PANDEY ■ NOIDA

To contribute towards nature and environmental conservation, the Uttar Pradesh Kabaddi League, Yamuna Yodhas has announced a unique environmental initiative by planting 100 trees on every successful win in the upcoming season. This initiative introduced by team owner Rahul Sharma aims to combine sports with environmental conservation.

Also the CEO of the Vrinda Foundation, which organised the G20 International Yoga Festival and Yamuna cleaning programmes, Rahul emphasised the importance of this initiative. "We are playing for more than victory; we are playing for a greener, healthier future," he said. The Yamuna Yodhas plan to plant trees near the Yamuna River to help retain rainwater and ensure a consistent flow throughout the year. They have

partnered with environmental NGOs and local groups to maintain the trees, ensuring a high survival rate. This tree-planting commitment could result in thousands of new trees over the season, reflecting the team's strong performance. They will also conduct awareness campaigns and workshops in schools and communities to educate people on environmental conservation. "Noting that each raid will now

contribute to both the team's score and environmental well-being. The initiative has already received widespread support on social media," said Ravi kumar, a player of the team. The UP Kabaddi League season starting on July 11, at the Noida Indoor Stadium. Eight teams, including the Yamuna Yodhas, will compete for the championship title, with 120 participants from across Uttar Pradesh and India.

ENGLAND EYE IMPROVED BOWLING EFFORT TO HALT FORMIDABLE AUSSIES

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

Defending champions England will look to restitch their T20 World Cup campaign through an improved bowling effort when they face 'old' rival Australia in a Group B match here on Saturday. England's opening game against Scotland was rained off after the latter made 90 for no loss in 10 overs, forcing the teams to take home a point each. But even those 60 balls showed the need for England to buckle up in the bowling department, to begin with. Scottish openers George Munsey and Michael Jones scored freely against all England bowlers, and Australia carry far more lethal guns in their line-up. David Warner and Marcus Stoinis showed the extent of damage they can do while outclassing Oman in their tournament opener. Once again, there will be a lot of focus on Jofra Archer, who gave away 12 runs in two overs against Scotland, as the pacer continues his comeback trail into top-flight cricket. But bowling is just one part, as the English batters under

skipper Jos Buttler, who had a good run in the IPL 2024, will have to fire in unison against the Aussie attack. The Australian bowlers were potent against Oman even without Pat Cummins, who had a reasonable outing for Sunrisers Hyderabad in the IPL. Nathan Ellis played ahead of Cummins in that game, but Australia might bring back the premier pacer against a much more formidable opponent. While Australia's batting looks settled, the misfiring Glenn Maxwell remains a missing link. After enduring a shipwreck of an IPL campaign with Royal Challengers Bengaluru recently, the 'Big Show' got out for a first-ball duck against Oman. The 2021 champions will be eager to see Maxwell return to his best at the earliest, and a match against England offers him a perfect occasion. **TEAMS (FROM):** **Australia:** Mitchell Marsh (c), Ashton Agar, Pat Cummins, Tim David, Nathan Ellis, Cameron Green, Josh Hazlewood, Travis Head, Josh Inglis, Glenn Maxwell, Mitchell Starc, Marcus Stoinis,



Matthew Wade, David Warner, Adam Zampa. **Travelling Reserves:** Jake Fraser-McGurk, Matt Short. **England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood. **Match starts at 10.30 PM IST.**

SA FACE COURAGEOUS DUTCH: South Africa might have trotted past Sri Lanka in their first match, but they have a tricky opponent in Netherlands in their second group D match in New York on Saturday. The scars from their 38-run loss against the Dutch in last year's 50-over World Cup might still be fresh in the minds of the Proteas. The Aiden Markram-led side

would certainly want a reversal this time around. The most encouraging signal from their win over Sri Lanka was the form of Anrich Nortje. The pacer, who was a shadow of his intimidating self in the IPL, seemed to have regained his rhythm on a spicy New York pitch while grabbing four wickets against the Islanders. Along with Kagiso Rabada,

SA FACE NETHERLANDS



Nortje forms a strong combination upfront, and SA will require them in full flight against Netherlands, who started with a six-wicket win over Nepal. They also ticked a few boxes in that match as frontline batter Max O'Dowd made a fifty while leading pacers Tim Pringle and Logan van Beek took three wickets apiece. The Dutch side will be

hoping for another clinical outing from their top players to bruise their fancied opponent once more. **TEAMS (FROM):** **South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Ottniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje,

Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs. **Netherlands:** Scott Edwards (c), Aryan Dutt, Bas de Leede, Kyle Klein, Logan van Beek, Max O'Dowd, Michael Levitt, Paul van Meekeren, Ryan Klein, Saqib Zulfiqar, Sybrand Engelbrecht, Teja Nidamanuru, Tim Pringle, Vikram Singh, Viv Kingma, Wesley Barresi. **Travelling reserve:** Ryan Klein.

New Zealand face Afghanistan test



New Zealand will have no room for complacency when they begin the T20 World Cup campaign against a gutsy Afghanistan side full of IPL stars in a Group C fixture here on Saturday. New Zealand find themselves in a difficult group with two-time champions West Indies and Afghanistan also vying for the top two spots. With rain restricting their training sessions, New Zealand's preparation for the marquee event have been less than ideal. Additionally, they take on Afghanistan and West Indies in their opening two games. Come Saturday, Kane Williamson and Co. Will have to get the better of a side that is not only warmed up but has also registered a morale-boosting win and know the conditions here well. However, New Zealand's strength in ICC events has been their adaptability, they always manage to turn up, reaching the latter stages. And with a wealth of experience as well as an exuberance of youth in the likes of Finn Allen and Rachin Ravindra in the side, they will be expected to get past the Afghans. On paper, New Zealand have

all bases covered, they have depth in batting and variety in bowling. Trent Boult will look dominate with the new ball, with Lockie Ferguson and Tim Southee complementing him. Left-arm spinner Mitchell Santner has a phenomenal record in the Caribbean, averaging under 17 with the ball at an economy of 5.5 ad he will be look to outsmart the Afghans. Meanwhile, Afghanistan secured a thumping victory over Uganda in their opener. If the opening duo of Rahmanullah Gurbaz and Ibrahim Zadran provided the team a great start with the bat, pacers Fazalhaq Farooqi, Naveen-ul-Haq, and skipper Rashid Khan exhibited exceptional prowess with the ball. But apart from Gurbaz and Zadran none of the other batters manage to stick around and against a formidable Kiwi side, they will need to do better. **TEAMS (FROM):** **New Zealand:** Kane Williamson (c), Finn Allen, Trent Boult, Michael Bracewell, Mark Chapman, Devon Conway, Lockie Ferguson, Matt Henry, Daryl Mitchell, Jimmy Neesham, Glenn Phillips, Rachin Ravindra, Mitchell Santner, Ish Sodhi, Tim Southee.



Afghanistan: Rashid Khan (c), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fared Ahmad Malik. **Reserves:** Sediq Atal, Hazratullah Zazai, Saleem Safi. **Match starts 5am IST**

would fancy their chances against an out of form Bangladesh side. Bangladesh have struggled in the shortest format this year. The have had series losses against Sri Lanka and USA. They were handed a comprehensive defeat by India in their warm up game as well. **TEAMS (FROM):** **Sri Lanka:** Wanindu Hasaranga (c), Charith Asalanka, Kusal Mendis, Pathum Nissanka, Kamindu Mendis, Sadeera Samarawickrama, Angelo Mathews, Dasun Shanaka, Dhananjaya De Silva, Maheesh Theekshana, Dunith Wellalage, Dushmantha Chameera, Nuwan Thushara, Matheesha Pathirana, Dilshan Madushanka. **Travelling Reserves:** Asitha Fernando, Vijayakanth Vijaykanth, Bhanuka Rajapaksa, Janith Liyanage. **Bangladesh:** Najmul Hossain Shanto (c), Taskin Ahmed, Litton Das, Soumya Sarkar, Tanzid Hasan Tamim, Shakib Al Hasan, Tawhid Hridoy, Mahmudullah Riyad, Jaker Ali Anik, Tanvir Islam, Shak Mahedi Hasan, Rishad Hossain, Mustafizur Rahman, Shorif Islam, Tanzim Hasan Sakib. **Travelling reserves:** Afif Hossain, Hasan Mahmud.

Newcomers USA record historic win over Pakistan in T20 World Cup

PTI ■ DALLAS (USA)

Newcomers USA on Thursday shocked former champions Pakistan via the Super Over to record their biggest win in a T20 World Cup match that reflected the shambolic state of affairs in the Asian giants' cricket. The result was reminiscent of Pakistan's three-wicket loss to Ireland in the 2007 ODI World Cup in the West Indies, which knocked them out of that tournament. USA thus jumped to the top of Group A with two wins from as many games ahead of the clash against India. USA had defeated Canada by seven wickets in their opener. Opting to field, left-arm spinner Nosthush Kenjige scalped three wickets for 30 runs as Pakistan found it difficult to press the accelerator and were restricted to 159 for seven. While chasing, USA ended on the same score, reaching 159 for 3 with skipper Monank Patel (50 off 38), Aaron Jones (36 not out of 26) and Andries Gous (35 off 26) leading from the front. In the Super Over bowled by Mohammad Amir, USA piled up 18 runs, eight of which came from extras. Saurabh Netravalkar then kept his cool and bowled brilliantly to give away just 13 runs for a famous win. In another embarrassment for Pakistan, they took longer time than usual to come out to bat in the Super Over, keeping the USA fielders waiting and getting the on-field umpires involved. Earlier, USA's decision to bowl first worked as Mohammad Rizwan was dismissed in the second over, caught by Steven Taylor off Netravalkar (2/18). USA started their chase on a bright note, scoring 44 runs in the powerplay. Patel led from the front as he played his shots to pick up consecutive boundaries off Shaheen Shah



Afridi in the fourth over. Naseem Shah gave Pakistan the first breakthrough when Taylor nicked one to Mohammad Rizwan behind the stumps. Bur new man Andries Gous meant business as he picked up two fours in the same over. Gous was particularly elegant square of the wicket as he just opened his bat a bit to pick up another four off Haris Rauf. USA's body language was positive with Patel and Gous leading the charge. Patel showed his prowess through the off-side, picking up two consecutive boundaries off Iftikhar Ahmed through the cover region. Patel was at his destructive best as he first hit Afridi over mid-off for a boundary and then clobbered the bowler over his head for a six to bring up his 50 off 34 balls. A 68-run second wicket stand was finally broken by Rauf, who got the better of Gous with a quick delivery. Wickets were the need of the hour for Pakistan and they picked up the important scalp of Patel, who edged one to Rizwan off Mohammad Amir. Aaron Jones (36 not out off 26), who played a blinder against Canada in their last match, lived up to the

expectations again and in the company Nitish Kumar (14 not out off 14) took the match into the Super Over. With 12 needed off three balls, Jones smashed a full toss of Rauf over square leg for a six and then got a single to bring down the target to five off last ball. Earlier, Pakistan lost Usman Khan as he mistimed a Kenjige delivery. Fakhar Zaman tried to force his way with his aggressive instincts but fell short when he paddle-swept a simple catch to Taylor off Ali Khan in the fifth over, as Pakistan slumped to 26 for 3.

GOVT. OF ODISHA
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER,
MAHANADI NORTH DIVISION-I, JAGATPUR, CUTTACK
E-mail ID :- exengr.mnd@gmail.com
'e' Procurement Notice No- MND-01/2024-25
The bid documents consisting of work, estimated cost, cost of tender paper, EMD, time of completion, class of contractor, the set of term & conditions of contract and other necessary documents can be seen in e-procurement portal www.tendersodisha.gov.in. The tender submission process will be completely online.
BIDDERS REGISTERED THEMSELVES UNDER CDMs PORTAL ONLY CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE BIDDING PROCESS AFTER 31.12.2020 AS PER WORKS DEPTT. LETTER NO- 9100 DATED 17.07.2020.

- Nature of Work : Canal works
- Total No. of Works : 27 (Twenty Seven) works
- Bid Identification No : MND-01/2024-25
- Tender Cost : Rs. 0.78 Lakh to Rs. 17.70 Lakhs
- Class of Contractor : "D & C" Class
- Period of completion : 1 (One) month
- Other Details : As noted below
 - Procurement Officer : Superintending Engineer, Mahanadi North Division-I, Jagatpur email: exengr.mnd@gmail.com Ph:- 0671-2491546
 - Availability of Tender On-line for bidding : 10:00 Hours of 10.06.2024 to 17:30 Hours of 19.06.2024
 - Last date & time of submission of bid document : 17:30 Hours of 19.06.2024
 - Date, time & place of Opening of Bid : 20:06.2024 at 11:30 Hours in the O/S of the Superintending Engineer, Mahanadi North Division-I, Jagatpur
 - Date of Lottery (if required) : 26.06.2024 at 11.30 A.M.

Further details can be seen from the Govt. web site "<https://tendersodisha.gov.in>"
Superintending Engineer Mahanadi North Division-I Jagatpur
OIPR-32003/11/0001/2425

Pressure was on Pakistan, knew crowd support will backfire on them: USA skipper Patel

PTI ■ DALLAS

After scripting a win for the ages against Pakistan, USA captain Monank Patel said his team did not feel any pressure during the nerve-wracking Super Over as the crowd was mostly behind Babar Azam's men, which ended up backfiring on the visiting side in their T20 World Cup clash here. Patel made a composed 50 as co-hosts USA shocked 2009 champions Pakistan via Super Over here on Thursday. "I thought we should have finished the game (in regular time) and we should have never gone to Super Over. I mean the way we kept our nerves...and in the Super Over

particularly, scoring 18 runs gave us a big upper hand to defend the target," Patel said in the post-match press conference. So, what was the talk inside the team huddle at that crucial juncture? Were there any queasy stomachs? "In the huddle we talked about - there's no pressure for us. All the pressure is in front of Pakistan. We knew that we didn't have enough support from the crowd. Pakistan had more support from the crowd. "I thought it will backfire on them, and if we play good cricket, they'll be more under pressure," said Patel. Patel, who was born in Anand, Gujarat, said his side bowled brilliantly in the Power Play



segment and kept Pakistan batters on a tight leash. "The way we bowled in the first six overs, I felt we didn't give them enough opportunity to score runs and we kept them under more pressure and it helped us," he said. Patel said USA were always in the game once they restricted

Pakistan to 159. "The plan was to win the toss and bowl first. We knew the initial first half an hour would help pace bowlers and the way we kept them quiet and took the crucial wickets in the power play, it helped really well. "And yeah, 160 on this wicket with one side short boundary, I felt we were always in the game," he explained. The home side threw a surprise by handing the responsibility of bowling the Super Over to Saurabh Netravalkar instead of the more pedigreed Ali Khan. But the left-arm pacer successfully defended 18 runs to guide his side to a memorable victory.

"The plan was we wanted to make sure that we utilise the condition. The condition was left-arm bowler bowling cutters and wide yorkers from left-arm over. "Ali Khan usually hits the stump and we wanted to make sure that we make them play outside the off-stump. And as a left-hander, the angle helps it. Saurabh had a good day, and I backed Saurabh, and yeah, that was the decision," he explained. The USA also made a rather surprising decision to hold back a natural range-hitter like Corey Anderson and promoted Nitish Kumar up the order in the regulation time. Patel said they wanted to keep Anderson for the last three overs.

GOVERNMENT OF ODISHA
OFFICE OF PANCHAYAT SAMITI, JHUMPURA
KEONJHAR
I-02
NOTICE INVITING TENDER (e-Procurement)
Online Bid ID No. TCN No.01-Jhumpura / 2024-2025
The Block Development Officer, Jhumpura, Keonjhar on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites online percentage rate tender through "e" procurement to be received in online mode for the works as detailed in the Annexure to this bid notice.

Name of work	Civil Construction works
No. of Works	17 (Seventeen) Nos.
Estimated Cost put to Tender	Rs. 3,70,50,112.50
Tender Paper Cost	Mentioned in Column No. 7 of Tender call notice.
Period of completion	08 (Eight) Calendar Months
Availability of Bid Documents	From 11.06.2024 to 25.06.2024 during office hours in Website (www.tendersodisha.gov.in)
Period of receipt of Bid through online	From 11.06.2024 to 25.06.2024 through online.
Date of Opening of Technical Bid Documents	At 12.00 Noon, on 27.06.2024 in the office chamber of the BDO, Jhumpura, Keonjhar
Date of Lottery	Intimation Letter to be sent to concerned Bidder(s)
Digital Signature Certificate of Bidder	The bidder must possess compatible digital signature certificate (DSC) of Class-II, Class-III or Class-IV

Name and Address of the OIT: OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, JHUMPURA, Pin-758001. E-Mail ID: ori-jhumpura@nic.in
Further Details can be seen from the web site: www.tendersodisha.gov.in
Sri Hrudananda Adha
Block Development Officer
Jhumpura
OIPR-19108/11/0001/2425