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ALL EYES ON CABINET MAKER, HIS CREATION

DEEPAK KUMAR JHA/ RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Ahead of the swearing in ceremony of Prime Minister-designate Narendra Modi for the third consecutive term, a high level meeting of BJP top brass held at the residence of Amit Shah to finalise the composition of new Cabinet in the Modi 3.0. BJP national president JP Nadda and national general secretary BL Santosh attended the meeting. Sources said the BJP is likely to keep Home, Finance, External Affairs, Railways, Road and Transport, Law and Justice, Information Technology, and Education Ministries. The alliance partners are likely to get 12 to 15 Ministers. The NDA partners might not have some of their big demands met, despite speculations to the contrary. The JD (U) has asked for Railways and is persistently pressing on it. The TDP has asked for Information Technology, which it is likely to not get.

Telangana BJP may get four Ministers and JD (United) three seats each. Three of the four TDP leaders who may find a place in PM Modi's new Cabinet are - Ram Mohan Naidu, Harish Balayogi and Daggumala Prasad. JD (U) has proposed the name of two senior leaders - Lalan Singh and Ram Nath Thakur. Lalan Singh was elected to the Lok Sabha from Bihar's Munger, while Ram Nath Thakur is a Rajya Sabha MP. Thakur is the son of Bharat Ratna recipient Karpoori Thakur. The JD (U) and TDP both are interested in funds for the



Preparations underway for the swearing-in-ceremony of the new Government, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan in New Delhi

PTI

development of Bihar and Andhra Pradesh respectively. The Tribal Affairs Ministry is likely to go with an NDA ally while the Ministry of Power may go with TDP or JD (U). From Shiv Sena Prataprao Jadhav name is being discussed. There is no indication yet on how many Ministers will be sworn in, though it is expected to be at least a 30-member strong Cabinet. It is also being considered that in first round of Cabinet formation there would be one MP from major allies to be given Cabinet

berth. As per sources, JD (S), LJP (Ram Vilas), HAM, Shiv Sena, NCP, RLD and Apna Dal (S) could have one Minister each. From JD(S) HD Kumaraswamy, Jayant Chaudhary of RLD, Chirag Paswan of LJP (Ram Vilas) and Anupriya Patel of Apna Dal (S) may become Ministers. JD(S) is eyeing Agriculture Ministry. Bihar BJP and JD (United) will get equal number of ministries in view of next year Assembly polls in the State. Telangana BJP may

get four ministries and Odisha can get lion share of six to seven Ministries. Shah and Singh are seen within the party as a certainty in the new Cabinet, former Chief Ministers who have won the Lok Sabha polls like Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Rajiv Pratap Rudy, Basavaraj Bommai, Manohar Lal Khattar and Sarbananda Sonowal are strong contenders for joining the Government. BJP leadership had earlier met their National Democratic Alliance partners discuss their cabinet berths on Friday. Nadda, Shah held discussion with JD(U) chief and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, TDP supremo N Chandrababu Naidu and Shiv Sena president and Maharashtra Chief Minister Eknath Shinde. After discussing with allies, Nadda and Shah held discussions with senior BJP leader and outgoing Defense Minister Rajnath Singh.

'Premature to wish Modi yet'

Pakistan has said it is "premature" for the country to congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi for securing third consecutive term since the formation of Government was going on in India. These remarks by Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch came on Friday two days ahead of Modi's swearing-in ceremony. "We do not have any comments on their electoral process," Baloch said, adding that since the formation of Government was going on in India, it is "premature" to talk about congratulating the Indian Prime Minister.

Leaders of seven countries start arriving in Delhi



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina arrived in New Delhi on Saturday afternoon to attend the swearing-in ceremony of Narendra Modi as Prime Minister on the evening of June 9.

India on Friday formally announced that the leaders of seven countries from the neighbourhood and the Indian Ocean region will attend the ceremony.

Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe, his Maldivian counterpart Mohamed Muizzu, Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Nepalese Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal "Prachanda" will attend the ceremony, according to the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Modi is expected to hold separate meetings with the visiting leaders, it was learnt.



Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with party leaders Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi during the extended Congress Working Committee meeting, in New Delhi

PTI

CWC wants Rahul as LoP, he says let me sleep on it

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congress Working Committee (CWC) on Saturday unanimously urged Rahul Gandhi to take on the mantle of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha to which he told the party's top brass that he will take a decision on it "very soon". At a meeting of the CWC, the party's highest decision-making body, chaired by Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge and attended by Sonia Gandhi, Rahul and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, among others, the party's Lok Sabha polls showed was hailed but it was also decided that separate committees would be set up in States where the performance was not good or below expectations, to take corrective measures.

Kharge said the Lok Sabha poll mandate is a "decisive rejection" of the politics of divisiveness and hate, and stressed that the INDIA bloc must continue functioning cohesively both inside and outside Parliament.

Two resolutions were unanimously passed by the CWC, including one requesting Rahul to assume the position of the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

Asked if had agreed to take on the position, Congress general secretary K C Venugopal said Rahul took note of the sentiments of the CWC members and told them that he would take a decision on it "very soon".

In the other resolution, the CWC congratulated the people for voting so powerfully to preserve democracy, protect the Constitution and enhance social and economic justice. "They have decisively rejected both the substance and style of governance over the past decade. The verdict of the people is not just a political loss but a personal and moral defeat for the Prime Minister who sought the mandate in his name and ran a campaign anchored in lies, hate, prejudice, divisiveness and extreme bigotry," the resolution alleged.



Sena's claim of UBT MPs crossing over 'baseless'

TN RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI

The Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) on Saturday rubbished as "baseless" a claim by Shiv Sena MP and Chief Minister Eknath Shinde's confidant Naresh Mhaske that at least two Shiv Sena (UBT) MPs were likely to support the NDA Government of Prime Minister-elect Narendra Modi who will be sworn into office on Sunday. Within hours after Mhaske went to town claiming that at least two MPs from the Uddhav Thackeray-led Sena "were in touch with his party" and may join the NDA, Shiv Sena (UBT)'s deputy leader Sushma Andhare mocked at the rival Sena MP saying: "Making such baseless claims does not augur well for the newly elected MP. If what he is saying is true, he should come out with the names of two MPs".

But, he should realise that there are already Ministerial aspirants like Prataprao Jadhav (Sena's newly elected MP from Buldhana constituency) whom Shinde will favour". Earlier in the day, Mhaske had refused to name the two Lok Sabha members "who were in touch" with the party, citing the anti-defection law. "Four more Sena (UBT) MPs would soon join these two MPs. Together, they would join MV our party," Mhaske had said.

Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Assembly Vijay Wadettiwar of the Congress said: "Such ridiculous claims made by the ruling party leaders reflect their mindset of the ruling alliance. They have not understood the current political situation". "The Maharashtra Assembly elections are just a few months away. No MP will think of taking such steps at a politically crucial time like this. Mhaske should be aware of this. The MVA won the peoples' confidence and is fully united, so his comments are baseless," Wadettiwar said. In the recently concluded Lok Sabha elections, the Opposition MVA won 31 seats (Congress 14 — which include the support it has received from one Independent MP, Shiv Sena (UBT) — 9, and NCP (Sharad Pawar) — 8), while the ruling MahaYuti bagged 17 seats (BJP — 9, Shinde Shiv Sena — 7 and Ajit Pawar NCP-1).

NEET grace marks fine but panel to review results: NTA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid allegations of inflation of marks in the NEET-UG medical entrance exam, the National Testing Agency (NTA) announced on Saturday that the Education Ministry has set up a four-member panel to review the grace marks awarded to more than 1,500 candidates. The NTA denied any irregularities and said the changes made in the NCERT textbooks and grace marks for losing time at the examination centres were some of the reasons behind the students scoring higher marks.

"A high-powered committee has been set up to review the results of over 1,500 candidates. The four-member panel headed by a former UPSC chairman will submit its recommendations within a week and the results of these candidates might be revised," NTA Director General Subodh Kumar Singh said at a Press conference on Saturday. The issue took a political turn with the AAP demanding a Supreme Court-monitored SIT probe into the alleged irregularities and the Congress alleging paper leaks, rigging and corruption have become an integral part of many examinations. The party also accused the BJP of cheating youngsters and playing with their futures. Indian Medical Association too has demanded as CBI probe on the allegations. The Maharashtra Government has sought immediate cancellation of



Photo: The Pioneer

last month's NEET exam, alleging that its results have caused injustice to the students from the state. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M K Stalin said the trends from the latest NEET results have once again vindicated the DMK on its stand opposing the exam and reiterated that the entrance test goes against social justice and federalism. There have been calls from several quarters for a re-examination that the grace marks awarded to make up for the loss of time at six exam centres have led to the inflation of marks and tampered with the chances of other candidates. These centres are from Meghalaya, Bahadurgarh in Haryana, Dantewada and Balodh in Chhattisgarh, Surat in Gujarat and Chandigarh. Singh denied any paper leak and irregularities in the exam and reiterated that the integrity of the crucial test had been compromised. He further said awarding of grace marks has not impacted the

qualifying criteria of the exam and the review of results of the affected candidates will not impact the admission process. According to experts, the mark inflation in NEET UG 2024 result is expected to make securing a spot in medical school this year more difficult. Some aspiring students have turned to online platforms to demand the cancellation of the results and a re-examination. Asked about whether the exam will be re-conducted for certain students, the NTA DG said, it will be decided depending upon the committee's recommendations. "The idea is to ensure that students who lost time or other students are not at any disadvantage," he said. The result of the medical entrance exam was announced on June 4. Sixty seven candidates had shared the first rank in the exam including six from the same centre in Haryana. A record more than 24 lakh candidates had registered for the exam this year.

The Congress in Kerala alleged that results have raised concerns about the authenticity of the national exam for medical courses, with many students casting doubt on the procedure. "The Modi government is directly responsible for this. For the candidates appearing in recruitment exams, then facing several irregularities, getting caught in the labyrinth of paper leaks, is playing with their futures. The BJP has cheated the youth of the country," Congress Chief Mallikarjun Kharge said in a social media post.

"We demand that a high-level investigation should be conducted under the supervision of the Supreme Court so that our talented students appearing in NEET and other exams get justice," he had added. The NTA DG reiterated that the increase in cutoff reflects the competitive nature of the examination and the higher performance standards achieved by the candidates this year. "The number of candidates who appeared in 2023 was 20,38,596 while the number of candidates who appeared in 2024 increased to 23,33,297. The increase in candidates naturally led to an increase in high scorers due to a larger pool of candidates," he said. Explaining the rationale behind the awarding of grace marks, Singh said, the process has been completed using a formula devised and adopted by the Supreme Court in a 2018 judgement.

President, Modi condole death of doyen Ramoji Rao

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu and Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday condoled the demise of renowned media tycoon Ramoji Rao and said his contributions to the industry will be long remembered. Rao, who revolutionised the news and entertainment industry, died at a hospital in Hyderabad early on Saturday. He was 88.

"With the demise of Shri Ramoji Rao, India has lost a titan of the media and entertainment sector," President Murmu said in a social media post. An innovative entrepreneur, Rao pioneered a number of ventures, including the Eenadu newspaper, ETV news network and Ramoji Film City, President Murmu said.

"Honoured with Padma Vibhushan, he succeeded as his vision was essentially rooted in society. His contributions to this industry will be long remembered. My condolences to his family and well-wishers," she said. Prime Minister Modi expressed grief at the death of noted media personality Ramoji Rao, describing him as a visionary who revolutionised Indian media. Rao's rich contributions have left an indelible mark on journalism and the world of films, Modi said in a social media post, adding that through his noteworthy efforts, he set new standards in innovation and excellence in the media and entertainment world.



Nightbirds, hit the sack early for mental health, longevity

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Night owls, take note: Grandma was right all along about the benefits of an early bedtime, irrespective of your chronotype (the natural inclination of your body to sleep at a certain time). A new study has upended the traditional belief that aligning sleep schedules with one's natural sleep preference, or chronotype, is the best approach for mental well-being.

The research shows that staying up late is linked to higher rates of mental health disorders, regardless of whether individuals are morning people or night owls. To safeguard mental health, researchers recommend turning off the lights by 1 a.m. Conducted by Stanford Medicine, the study analysed nearly 74,000 adults and found that the timing of

sleep itself plays a critical role in mental health. Surprisingly, the findings highlight that early bedtimes offer significant benefits for everyone, across all chronotypes. Published in Psychiatry Research, the study's senior author, Jamie Zeitzer, a professor of psychiatry and behavioural sciences, remarked, "We found that alignment with your chronotype is not crucial here, and that really it's being up late that is not good for your mental health. The big unknown is why."

Renske Lok, a postdoctoral scholar in psychiatry and behavioural health, led the study, which presented unexpected results. Previous research by Zeitzer's team suggested that women with cancer who did not align their sleep with their chronotype had shorter lifespans. This led to an expectation that aligning sleep schedules with



chronotype would be beneficial. However, the new findings challenge this assumption. The researchers examined middle-aged and older adults in the United Kingdom, gathering data on their sleep habits, including their morning or evening preferences. Participants wore wearable accelerometers for a week

to track their sleep patterns, and their mental health status was assessed through health records, covering any mental or behavioural disorder listed in the International Classification of Diseases. Among the 73,880 participants, 19,065 identified as morning types, 6,844 as evening types, and 47,979 fell somewhere in between. The results were revealing: both morning and evening types who stayed up late exhibited higher rates of mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety.

The study showed that night owls who adhered to their natural late schedules were 20 per cent to 40 per cent more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health disorder compared to those who adopted an early or intermediate sleep schedule. Likewise, evening types who went to bed earlier fared better in terms of

mental health, while morning types who went to bed later suffered less severely.

The study also explored whether poor mental health led people to stay up late but found that late-night wakefulness itself was a significant risk factor for developing mental health issues. Harmful behaviours, such as suicidal thoughts, violent crimes, alcohol and drug use, and overeating, are more common at night, further exacerbating mental health risks.

Strategies like getting morning sunlight and maintaining a consistent early routine could help shift sleep patterns, though changing one's chronotype remains difficult. "Biologically speaking, it's very much like a rubber band—you take a day off and you snap back to where your body wants to be," Zeitzer explained.

IPS officer Singh found medically 'fit'

ECI directs action against him for misrepresentation of facts



IPS officer DS Kutey's suspension revoked

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Election Commission of India (ECI) has directed the Odisha Government to take appropriate action against IPS officer Ashish Kumar Singh for misrepresentation of facts about his health.

Special Medical Board of AIIMS, Bhubaneswar after his health checkups. As per the report, Singh is "physically and mentally fit" and he has no health issues. The medical report has been sent to the Chief Secretary and necessary action has been directed against Singh as he had taken medical leave without

having any health issues. "After perusing the report of Special Medical Board, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar, declaring Ashish Kumar Singh, IPS physically and mentally fit, the Commission, prima facie, found it a case of misrepresentation of facts on the part of Ashish Kumar Singh, IPS. It is directed that the report

of Special Medical Board, AIIMS, Bhubaneswar be forwarded to Chief Secretary, Government of Odisha for appropriate necessary action against the officer as deemed fit," read the ECI letter addressed to the Chief Electoral Officer, Odisha. The ECI had directed a detailed medical examination of Singh, IG (CM Security), who has been on medical leave since May 4, 2024. The BJP had earlier accused Singh of showing favouritism to the BJD during elections. The party had filed a complaint against the IPS officer at the ECI. On the other hand, the ECI has revoked the suspension of senior IPS officer DS Kutey.

"The suspension of Shri D S Kutey, IPS be revoked with immediate effect with condition that other directions given vide ECI letter dated 28.05.2024 will continue as per the rules applicable. Departmental proceedings, if instituted, can only be decided with the concurrence of the Commission. Shri D S Kutey, IPS may report to Chief Secretary Odisha for further posting, as deemed fit," the letter read. Notably, ECI had earlier ordered the suspension of Special Secretary to Odisha Chief Minister's Office (CMO) DS Kutey in a bid to 'curb undue influence on the election machinery and maintaining the level playing field and fairness in the electoral process'.

Speculation as Naveen's nephew Arun reaches BBSR

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
After the Biju Janata Dal's (BJD) electoral debacle, all eyes are now set on party supremo Naveen Patnaik to know his next move following the end of his 24-year rule in the State. Amid various speculations in political circles, Naveen's nephew Arun Patnaik has reached Bhubaneswar. His sudden arrival at the Naveen Niwas has triggered fresh speculations in political spheres. Arun happens to be Naveen's elder brother Prem Patnaik's son and the grandson of legendary



leader Biju Patnaik. Observers do not rule out the possibility of Arun getting ready to take over the leadership of BJD as Naveen's successor. However, several others are of the view that he may return to New Delhi after comforting

uncle Naveen in the aftermath of the BJD's poll debacle. Arun, significantly, arrived in Bhubaneswar along with BJD leader VK Pandian. Both were received at the city airport by BJD organisational secretary Pranab Prakash Das. They all proceeded to the Naveen Niwas, residence of the BJD president. In the run-up to the elections, Naveen had made it clear that Pandian is not his political successor. In this backdrop, observers are of the opinion that Arun may be entrusted with the task of leading the regional party.

Removal of Shreemandir beautification lights decried

Chief Secy directs Collector to take action after probe

PNS ■ PURI
Devotees of Lord Jagannath and local residents have expressed their resentment over the removal of various focus lights installed to illuminate the exterior of the Shreemandir in Puri soon after the government changed in Odisha. Several focus lights had been installed for the beautification and illumination of the temple, the Bada Danda and the Meghanada wall as part of the Srimandir Parikrama project undertaken by the State Government. The lights were not installed permanently; an event com-

pany had installed them on a rental basis, sources said. Though voices were also raised against such a temporary arrangement during its installation, such pleas were allegedly ignored. Following the BJD's debacle in the elections, the company has allegedly dismantled the lights overnight causing huge inconvenience to the devotees and local residents. The servants of the temple have slammed the administration over this development. "The BJD government doesn't have any devotion for Lord Jagannath and concern for the residents of Puri. The project was carried out because of petty politics. It could be the reason why the illumination arrangement was not done permanently and it was removed immediately after the fall of the BJD govern-



ment," rued a servitor. However, no reactions could be obtained from the administration in this regard. Following the development, Chief Secretary Pradeep Kumar Jena has instructed the Puri district Collector to initiate an enquiry into this matter and take appropriate action against the persons involved. "I have instructed Collector Puri @dm_puri to cause an enquiry into this matter and take appropriate action against

New Delhi removed the lights without any prior intimation. Some employees of the company have been detained and an investigation is underway to identify the exact supplier. As per the orders of the Chief Secretary, an inquiry into the incident has been initiated. Action will be taken against erring officials if found guilty following the completion of the inquiry," said Swain. The temple administration has already started an initiative to restore the illumination arrangement. "Hopefully, it will be restored soon. As per my knowledge, there was a project with ASI regarding the permanent illumination in Shreemandir. The exact status of the project will be revealed soon," he added. Now, questions have been raised on whose direction the lights were removed.

Rs 123-cr fraud: EOW arrests firm director from WB

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The Odisha Economic Offences Wing (EOW) has arrested the director of a company from West Bengal in connection with a scam worth Rs 123 crore. The arrested was identified as Tushar Bhanjo. Reports said Bhanjo was arrested on June 4 and brought to Bhubaneswar on a transit remand. He was produced before the Designated Court under the OPID Act, Cuttack on Saturday. A case was registered by the EOW based on the written allegation of Manmohan Dora of Bhubaneswar against the company Harit Krishi Nidhi Ltd, Transvision Dream Multi Trade Pvt Ltd and its director Tushar Bhanjo. It is alleged that the accused introduced and lured investors to invest with his company for high monthly returns with an interest of 11 per cent on the invested amount apart from the 4% to 5% extra commission on adding new members.



The company also promised to provide a monthly salary of Rs 4,000 on investment of Rs 4 lakh and Rs 8,000 on investment of Rs 8 lakh. The accused director Bhanjo used social media, leaflets, and brochures and conducted physical meetings to lure the investors. As per the EOW, the complainant subsequently joined the Harit Krishi Nidhi company as a member by depositing Rs 4,000 in 2023 and deposited Rs 2 lakh in the company's bank account after which he was able to open three wallet IDs in which he had deposited total Rs 1.7

lakh and got 11% interest only for one month. According to the EOW, no amount was paid to the complainant by the accused director, who went absconding with the invested amount of thousands of investors. As found during the investigation, Bhanjo had earlier formed a company, Transvision Dream Multi Trade Pvt Ltd, registered with ROC, Cuttack. He then opened Harit Krishi Nidhi Ltd in 2023, which was incorporated with ROC, West Bengal. But in violation of the Nidhi rules, he opened the offices of the Nidhi Company in Odisha, Chhattisgarh, Assam though the Nidhi Company cannot operate beyond the State of its incorporation, said the EOW. "The accused collected more than Rs 123 crore from around 34,000 investors of Odisha, West Bengal, Chhattisgarh, Assam, Tripura, Maharashtra and even in Bangladesh," said the EOW.

In Cuttack 15 injured as truck hits Mo Bus



PNS ■ CUTTACK
At least 15 persons were injured as a truck hit a 'Mo Bus' from the rear at Pratapnagari on the National Highway on the outskirts of Cuttack city on Saturday. The accident occurred when the bus with around 60 passengers was hit by the speeding truck from behind. As a result, the passengers sitting in the back seats of the bus were injured. Locals rushed to the spot and rescued the passengers from the

BJD leaders desperate to upkeep Naveen's brand image

NALINI SAHU ■ BHUBANESWAR
Leaders of the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) are now seemingly making desperate attempts to upkeep the brand image of party president and former Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik. These leaders and their followers, both in their respective constituencies and social media platforms, have begun to portray him as a "visionary leader" who served with a mission to develop the State. Besides, they have launched a campaign saying that Naveen, even after his defeat in the polls, rules in the hearts of people. "Naveen Patnaik was the No.1 and the most popular CM in India. Naveenbabu still rules the hearts of all

the Odia people," said BJD leader Pratap Jena. The BJP took a dig at Patnaik by saying that he can't escape by blaming others for the BJD's poll debacle. "Who had given appointment to VK Pandian who was on a looting spree in Odisha? Who helped Pandian? Both Pandian and Naveen are equally responsible for the situation. They (BJD leaders)

are doing drama over the matter which will not help them anymore. Naveen Patnaik is mainly responsible for it," said BJP leader Jayanarayan Mishra. "The BJD leaders are proffering a weak narrative for the freedom to choose Shakuni as his guide or any other character. If Arjun chose Srikrishna, why did Duryodhan choose Shakuni? Who had given the power to Pandian? Had people chosen Naveen Patnaik or Pandian as the Chief Minister? A government servant tried to make the people of Odisha his servants and treated BJD's Ministers and MPs as servants. Couldn't Naveen understand it?" asked BJP leader Pratap Sarangi. On Thursday, newly elected BJD MLAs and senior leaders of the party met Naveen Patnaik at his residence where they discussed the poll debacle. Many of them told Patnaik that over-reliance on Pandian was the major cause of the party losing power to the BJP.

1 quintal ganja seized; 3 held in city

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
Police have seized more than a quintal of ganja while being smuggled to West Bengal and arrested three persons in this connection in the capital city on Saturday. The Bharatpur police had received inputs about smuggling of the ganja in a car, following which, a team was deployed on the road behind a petrol pump in Kalinganagar. The police team intercepted the car and, on checking it, found the ganja. The contraband, which was being taken in six polythene sacks, weighed around 101 kg. The police seized the ganja, the car and Rs 35,250 from the possession the three per-



sons and arrested them. The arrested were identified as Chandan Swaraj Naik and Ajaya Kumar Naik of Angul and Rakesh Mondal of West Bengal. They confessed that they had procured the ganja from Kandhamal and were transporting it to West Bengal. Police registered a case under the NDPS Act and forwarded the arrested to court.

sons and arrested them. The arrested were identified as Chandan Swaraj Naik and Ajaya Kumar Naik of Angul and Rakesh Mondal of West Bengal. They confessed that they had procured the ganja from Kandhamal and were transporting it to West Bengal. Police registered a case under the NDPS Act and forwarded the arrested to court.

Expectations high on BJP's CM pick in State

SRIKANTA K TRIPATHY ■ BHUBANESWAR:
Even as the BJP is in a celebratory mood after its stupendous success in the Lok Sabha and Assembly polls in Odisha and is all set to form the Government on June 10, the suspense over who will be the CM in the new BJP government continues. PM Modi during his campaigning at Brahmapur had announced that the BJP was going to form government in Odisha on June 10 and its CM candidate would be decided on June 6. Though the PM's predictions about the party's prospects in Odisha have gone true, but selecting a CM can-

didate is no child's play, given the number of contenders in the State unit and the public expectations on the stature of the next CM candidate who will be replacing none other than a tall leader like Naveen Patnaik. Despite the debacle of the BJD and his personal defeat in Kantabanji, Patnaik still remains a popular leader in the State indicated amply by the buzz in social media where people are found bidding an emotional adieu to him after he put in his papers at the Raj Bhawan on June 5. The 2024 election results not only marked the BJP's landslide victory, but saw the crumbling of an empire—a 24-year-old BJD government by Patnaik, the longest in tenure and

most popular a Government Odisha has ever had. Against such a backdrop, the BJP will be forming its Government for the first time though the party was a partner of the BJD during the coalition Government from 2000 to 2009. Needless to say, in such a scenario, the BJP Government will be judged in the light of the Government preceding it immediately. The CM candidate of the BJP will too be tallied with the tallness of the outgoing CM. Notably, Patnaik's popularity was based not just on the delivery front but on his personal traits. He was found to be a very humble, sober, reticent, well-mannered and noncontroversial leader throughout his five terms in

office. Simplicity was his hallmark. Another strong point of Patnaik was that he used to manage a very good synergy with Centre. Especially with the Central BJP leadership, he managed to maintain a very good rapport, a mystery that could not be decoded by the State BJP unit in Odisha which as principal opposition often had to face embarrassments while criticising Patnaik. Odisha under Patnaik also bagged many awards in the national level for implementing the Central schemes successfully and got a pat on the back many a time. Consequently, the BJP has to proffer a CM pick that matches the stature of Patnaik. Besides, he or she has to deal with a strong opposi-

tion in the Assembly as BJD has 51 MLAs and Congress has 14. Patnaik had not faced a strong opposition as he managed to put the BJP and Congress at bay by means of the brute majority of his party in the House. But the BJP Government will not enjoy that privilege and for smooth functioning of the Government, a dynamic and experienced and pan-Odisha CM needs to be in place. Of the contenders for the post of CM in the BJP, the name of Dharmendra Pradhan comes on the top. Pradhan has many pluses to his advantage vis-a-vis the others in the race like Pratap Sarangi, Suresh Pujari, KV Singh Deo, Laxman Bag and CAG Girish Chandra Murmu as the names

and Education and Skill Development. Most pertinently, Pradhan was made party pravar in a few States and was instrumental in the BJP's win in some of the crucial State elections. In Odisha, Pradhan seemed the lone daring leader to criticise Patnaik openly on a series of issues and played a crucial role in the rise of the State BJP unit since 2009. Pradhan's most notable trait as a leader was his allegiance with the BJP through thick and thin. He never switched sides like the opportunist leaders. However, in case he becomes the CM pick, he has to contest a by-election from any Assembly seat. On the contrary, Pujari, Sing Deo and Bag have won as MLAs. The former two have

wide experiences though Pujari has been elected member of the Odisha Assembly for the first time. Both were party presidents. While Pujari was the MP Bargarh last time, Sing Deo was a Cabinet Minister from 2000 to 2004 and from 2004 to 2009 under BJP-BJD coalition Government. Bag, on the other hand, is a debutant and enjoys the halo after the recent elections by defeating the once 'unbeatable' Patnaik by a huge margin of votes in Kantabanji, which helped him shot to the limelight. Murmu is a close confidant of PM Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah. In 2001, when Modi became Gujarat CM, Murmu held many plum positions in his government.

In Jajpur 2 die, 13 injured as bus rams into truck

PNS ■ JAJPUR
Two persons died and 13 were injured when a tourist bus collided with a cement-laden truck at Kamdhei Chhack on National Highway-16 under the Barchana police station in Jajpur district on Saturday morning.

The deceased were said to be the driver and helper of the tourist bus, which was en route to Puri from Kolkata. The conditions of seven persons were stated to be critical and they were shifted to the Cuttack SCB Medical College Hospital.

Barchana police station IIC Sarat Patra said, "The accident occurred at around 3:45 am. After getting information, the night patrol and NH patrol-



ling team rushed to the spot along with police staffs. There were around 60 passengers in the bus."

According to Patra, the bus

had caught fire after the accident and immediately Fire Service personnel were called and two bodies were pulled out.

"We had rescued some pas-

sengers by breaking the windows. Seven passengers have sustained critical injuries and they have been shifted to Cuttack," Patra added.

In Baleswar 6 including woman hurt in leopard attack



PNS
BALESWAR: Panic gripped the Khaira area in Baleswar district after six persons, including a woman and forest personnel, were injured in an attack by a leopard attack in Gada village near the market on Saturday.

One Satyabhama Nayak (50), who was seriously injured, was initially admitted to the Khaira CHC. Later, she was shifted to the Bhadrak District Headquarters Hospital after

her condition deteriorated. Reports said Satybhama and her husband were working on their backyard when the leopard attacked her. Hearing her screams, neighbours rushed to the spot. But spotting them, the animal fled. Later, it attacked wildlife personnel and escaped to a nearby jungle.

Getting information, a team of wildlife personnel led by the DFO along with villagers began searching for the big cat.

IN BRIEF

TRIBUTES PAID TO RAMOJI RAO AT BBSR

Bhubaneswar: Legendary Indian cinema and media personality Ramoji Rao passed away at Hyderabad early morning on Saturday. The iconic figure was paid tribute at the stage of Bhubaneswar Film Festival (BFF) in Jayadev Bhawan. His contributions to the entertainment and media industry of the country as well as Odisha were highlighted.



TRANSGENDERS HOLD SAVITRI BRATA AT P'KHEMUNDI

Paralakhemundi: Transgenders at Paralakhemundi observed Savitri Amavasya dressed as married women and performing the rituals. Following the traditions, they offered fruits to their goddess. They prayed to their guru and parents. Peace and harmony was the motto behind such commemoration. The aim was to build an inclusive society which sees them with respect and honour. Such observation by them has been followed since years, said Madhusmita, a transgender.



ENVIRONMENT DAY HELD IN JAJPUR ROAD

Jajpur Road: The World Environment Day was celebrated at the Central School, Ittapur, Korai by the Jajpur Road Forest Range. The speakers expressed deep concern about the environmental degradation and urged to keep the environment healthy for better sustainability of living creatures including mankind by enormous plantations. On the occasion, 100 saplings were planted. The function was presided over by TGT English Simantini Mishra. Jajpur Road Forest Range Officer Jyotiranjana Mohapatra, environmentalist Dushmantha Kumar Rout and Central School Principal Kamallesh Kumar were guests. Forester Nilima Priyadarshini, teachers Sabyasachi Debasish Patra, Pravat Kuanr, Priyanka Sahoo, Archana Palai, forest staffs Trilochan Dash, Swarup Nayak, Nirmal Mallick, many guardians, summer trainee students were present.



'UDAYABATA' OBSERVES WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY

Jajpur Road: The 52nd World Environment Day was celebrated by 'Udayabata' with its editor and environmentalist Dushmantha Kumar Rout presiding over the event. Educationalist Dr Akshaya Kumar Panda, Rama Chandra Barik, Dipakranjan Panigrahi, Basant Patra, Sarat Biswal, Biplab Dutta, Bidyutprava Ray, Hardayal Singh, Suman Ray, Umakant Mohapatra, Arun Das, Sanatan Patra, Amar Das, Chakradhar Mallick, Sujata Jena, Sumitra Mishra and several others attended the programme and expressed their concern about the environmental degradation. Rout said, "If Nature dies then we will die; so, we should keep the Nature as healthy as possible by more plantation programmes."



In Ganjam Army recruitment under Agnipath from July 2

RAJEEV RATHAN ■
BRAHMAPUR

A district-level preparation meeting was held under the chairmanship of Additional District Magistrate Pramod Kumar Prusty in anticipation of the upcoming Army recruitment under the Agnipath scheme, at the Ganjam collectorate in Chhatrapur on Friday.

The recruitment drive will take place from July 2 to July 6 at Rangeilunda Airstrip in the district. Candidates from 10 to



12 districts of Odisha who have applied under the Agnipath scheme are expected to participate in the recruitment drive. Colonel Anand from Army

AD College, Gopalpur, provided detailed information about the arrangements for the selection process. District Skill Development and Em-

ployment Officer Falguni Sahay Nayak discussed the comprehensive arrangements for the recruitment rally.

Previously, a selection event held in Sambalpur saw 76% participation from Ganjam district's youth, who incurred significant travel and accommodation expenses. To mitigate this, the upcoming event at Rangeilunda is expected to save both time and money for the candidates.

Colonel Anand emphasized that the selection process would be conducted with

complete transparency, ensuring that only eligible candidates are recruited under the Agnipath scheme. Any form of bribery related to the recruitment process will be treated as a punishable offense, he said.

The selection event, commencing on July 2, is expected to see the participation of over 400 youth candidates daily. Comprehensive arrangements, including security, transportation, cleanliness, health checks, drinking water, lighting, and sanitary facilities, have been planned. Authorities have also

coordinated to facilitate the candidates' transportation from Brahmapur railway station and bus stand.

Present at the meeting were senior officials, including the Army AD College representatives, Brahmapur Municipal Corporation Commissioner Bhabani Prasad Mishra, Additional Superintendent of Police Ramesh Chandra Sethi, Regional Transport Officer Manas Ranjan Sahu, and District Information and Public Relations Officer Rabi Narayan Behera.

Man killed in lightning in Keonhar

PNS ■ KEONJHAR

A person was killed in lightning at Gumura village under the Town police station here on Friday afternoon. The deceased was identified as Pradeep Kumar Jena (60).

Jena had gone to graze cattle when there was a sudden downpour and lightning. He was struck by a lightning bolt and collapsed. Villagers rushed him to the District Headquarters Hospital, where doctors pronounced him dead.

"The body was sent for post-mortem after registering a UD case" said Town police station IIC Ramakant Soi.

In another incident, two cattle of Harekrushna Mohanta of Belapasi village under the Sadar police station in the district were also killed in lightning.

Environment Day Plantation drive undertaken by Dalmia Bharat

PNS ■ RAIRANGPUR/ BHUBANESWAR

To mark the World Environment Day and reaffirm its commitment to sustainability, Dalmia Bharat Limited hosted a series of activities and events in Odisha. The celebration featured several key activities aimed at supporting local farmers and enhancing the green cover of the region.

The company through Project Annadaata (a grain bank rotation initiative) conducted distribution of seeds to around 150 farmers, having a plan to extend it to another 850 farmers shortly. Farmers were also given 500 bamboo saplings. The event was graced by the presence of esteemed guests including Range Officer, Rajgangpur Guru Charan Mandal, Unit Head, DCBL,



Rajgangpur Chetan Shrivastava, Mines Head, Lanjiberna Mines Om Prakash Khelkar and Head of HR and Corporate Social Relations Dr Niladri Bhushan Parhi, besides Head-Environment, DCBL Ashok Kumar Mishra.

A green shed nursery was also inaugurated under the Farm Sector Promotion Fund (FSPF), a project of NABARD. On Environment Day, a plantation green drive was also organised under which 1,000 saplings and trees were planted across Lanjiberna, Kukuda villages, R&R colony and power plant area. In another initiative under "Harnessing the power of Sun (A Green Energy Initiative)" the team converted a car parking shed to a solar energy source with a capacity to generate 21.8KW power. It will be used for street lighting.

Sabritri Brata Women observe for hobbies, transgenders for 'gurus'

RAJESH BEHERA ■
KENDRAPADA

Sabritri Brata was observed by the transgenders with religious fervour at Shyamasundarpur on the outskirts of Kendrapada township, on Thursday.

Though the Sabritri Brata is exclusively meant for married Hindu women, here the transgenders observe it with great dedication and pray for their gurus to have a long life. They also observe a fast dedicated to Sabitri, who saved her husband Satyaban from being taken by Yamraj, the God of death.

With puja thalis in their hands, the transgenders performed all the rituals of the festival and offered sindur,



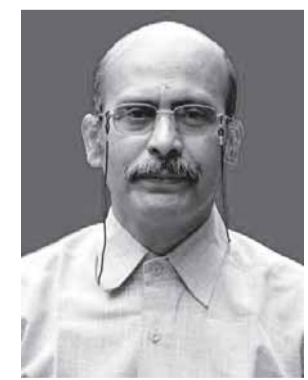
alata, flowers and fruits to the deity as part of the worship.

As the ritual goes in the early morning, the women take bath, wear new clothes and bangles, and apply vermilion to their foreheads. Nine types of fruits and nine types of flowers are offered to the Goddess Sabitri. Wet pulses, rice, mangos, jackfruits, palm fruits, kendu, bananas, and several other fruits are offered as Bhoga (offering) to the goddess and Sabitri Brata katha is narrated. After fasting for the whole day, the

women take Bhoga post-sunset. In the afternoon, they bow to their husbands and touch their feet.

But the festival celebrated by the transgender community differs from the general in a specific way. "The custom is followed all over the country. Members of transgender community observe Sabritri Brata and worship their gurus. We consider our Gurus as our husbands and pray to the goddess for their good health and long life. Nowadays, kinnars are also getting married and living with their husbands. The married kinnars are observing the Brata and praying for their husbands also," said the kinnar community members of Kendrapada.

Empowering of Knowledge Society through archives



SATYA NARAYAN MISHRA

Archives are called records or record office. It is the repository for an organized body of records produced or received by a public, semi-public, institutional or business entity in the transaction of its affairs and preserved by it or its successors.

The term 'archives', which also designates the body of

records themselves, derives from French. The terms 'records' and 'record office' are used in the United Kingdom and in some parts of the British Commonwealth.

The science of records control has had to face at least three central issues: (1) the determination of types of records to be removed from agencies of origin. (2) The time of disposition. (3) The manner of disposition. Practice has varied, but elimination usually has occurred before records have been transferred from the agency of origin. Some countries, especially those whose history reaches back many centuries, have prohibited the elimination of records made before a specified date.

The archival records and data landscape in the 21st century is changing public expecta-

tions, how we do our work, what constitutes credible evidence and how we protect our holdings. The profession can provide opportunities for ensure to deliver benefits to citizens and Empowering of Knowledge Society. Empowering of Knowledge Society is basically focused on Digital Preservation and Emerging Technologies. These technologies will also impact how we preserve information and make accessible information to preserve records and data in a sustainable, practical and cost-effective way.

Empowering of Knowledge Society is about Sustainable of Knowledge. Trust and evidence also mean reaching out and understanding what our users need, so that they can believe in what we do and how we acquire, preserve and make

accessible information. Keeping in the above view, 2000 participants adopted a resolution in the international Congress in Vienna in 2004, requesting the United Nations to create an International Archives Day. Some countries had already decided to have a national archives day, to raise awareness of the general public and the decision-makers about the importance of archives. In 2005, the UNESCO General

June 9 International Archives Day

Conference at its 33rd session in Paris proclaimed the 27th October as the World Day for Audiovisual Heritage. The World Day is an appropriate opportunity to raise public awareness of the importance of audiovisual archives. It brings new incentives to the benefit

of the preservation of these archives. This is the reason why the ICA decided at its Annual General Meeting in November 2007 to launch the International Archives Day by its own, on the 9th of June. The date was obvious: on the 9th of June 1948, the International Council on Archives was created under the auspices of the UNESCO.

It is therefore essential to remember that records and ar-

chives are documents, created, received and maintained as evidence and information by an organization or person, in pursuance of legal obligations, or in the transaction of business. Archival records are those documents that are preserved by their creators, successors or

an appropriate archive institution because of their legal value or enduring historical significance. Archives constitute a major cultural heritage and information resource. The archival heritage is a valuable testimony about the economical, political and social development of humanity. The diversity of archival sources and formats is considerable. To ensure the preservation of these sources, a comprehensive approach that considers all types and formats of archives, is required. It is not possible to focus solely on one type of record, as other categories of archives also deserve attention. Archives represent an unparalleled wealth. They are the documentary product of human activity and as such constitute irreplaceable testimonies of past events. They ensure the demo-

cratic functioning of societies, the identity of individuals and communities and the defense of human rights. Archives record decisions, actions and memories.

Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory.

Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the qual-

ity of life. It really empowers the stable knowledge in the society for making of bright future through achieves and digitization, conservation, preservation is the measure to protect the knowledge through technology. If a nation or society does not keep the past glory or history, the future generation will definitely be ignorant and they will blame. Hence to create a knowledge society, it is the duty and responsibility of all citizens to reach the knowledge through the devices of technology which will bring an authentic information and better history.

(Dr Mishra is Assistant Director, National Archives of India, Madhusudan Nagar, Bhubaneswar 751001. Phones: 0674-2391042, 9937345900. satyanarayan_mishra2003@yahoo.co.in)

Modi condemns attack on Danish PM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister designate Narendra Modi on Saturday expressed concern over attack on Denmark Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen who was hit by a man in Copenhagen and condemned the incident. "Deeply concerned by the news of the attack on Mette Frederiksen, Denmark's Prime Minister. We condemn the attack. Wishing good health to my friend," Modi said in a social media message. The assault comes amid the European Union (EU) parliamentary polls in Denmark and follows recent violent inci-

dents involving European political figures. Local media in Denmark reported that the assailant approached Frederiksen forcefully and pushed her hard while she was passing Kultorvet Square, a central piazza in Copenhagen. The police arrested a 39-year-old man in connection with the attack. The Danish prime minister suffered minor injuries but is otherwise fine after the incident, her office confirmed in a statement on Saturday. The suspect was scheduled to appear in a pre-trial custody hearing at 1100 GMT on Saturday at the Copenhagen District Court in Frederiksberg.



Earlier on Saturday, French President Emmanuel Macron denounced the "unacceptable" attack. "The attack on the Danish Prime Minister is unacceptable," Macron said in a social media message. "I strongly condemn this act and wish Mette Frederiksen a speedy recovery," he added. Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary-General, said he was shocked to hear what happened to Frederiksen, whom he called a friend. Charles Michel, president of the European Council, condemned on X what he called a "cowardly act of aggression." The assault comes two days before Denmark head to the polls in the EU election. Three

weeks ago, Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico was seriously injured in an assassination attempt. The attack on Frederiksen comes amid European Union parliamentary elections, which are underway in Denmark and across the 27-nation bloc. Frederiksen has been campaigning with the Social Democrats' EU lead candidate, Christel Schaldemose, though media reports indicate the attack was not linked to a campaign event. In May, a German candidate from the centre-left Social Democrats was beaten and seriously injured while campaigning for the European Parliament.

Premature to congratulate Modi on securing third consecutive term: Pakistan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Pakistan has said it is "premature" for the country to congratulate Prime Minister Narendra Modi for securing third consecutive term since the formation of government was going on in India. These remarks by Pakistan's Foreign Office spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch came on Friday two days ahead of Modi's swearing-in ceremony. This statement by Baloch came after she was asked whether her country had officially congratulated Narendra Modi on winning the general elections. "We do not have any comments on their electoral process," Baloch said, adding that since the formation of Government was going on in India, it is "premature" to talk about congratulating the Indian Prime Minister. Addressing her weekly Press briefing, Baloch said Pakistan desired "cooperative ties" with all neighbours, including India, and resolution of disputes through talks. Baloch also said Pakistan has been acting in a "responsible manner, notwithstanding the difficulties and rhetoric coming from India". "Pakistan has always desired cooperative relations with all its neighbours including India. We have consistently advocated constructive dialogue and engagement to resolve all outstanding issues, including the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir," she said. Pakistan downgraded its ties with India after the Indian Parliament suspended Article 370 on August 5, 2019, a decision that Islamabad believed undermined the



environment for holding talks between the neighbours. India has been maintaining that it desires normal neighbourly relations with Pakistan while insisting that the onus is on Islamabad to create an environment that is free of terror and hostility for such an engagement. "Pakistan believes in peaceful co-existence. We hope that India will take steps to create a conducive environment for the advancement of peace and dialogue and resolution of long-standing disputes for the mutual benefit of the peoples of Pakistan and India," Baloch said at the briefing. Asked if Pakistan has congratulated Modi on winning the elections, Baloch said it is the right of Indian citizens to decide about their leadership. Earlier this year, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said India "never closed doors to talking to Pakistan" but the terrorism issue should be "fair, square at the centre of the conversation". "We have never closed our doors on talking with Pakistan. The question is what to talk about... If some guy has that many terrorist camps... that should be the central part of the conversation," he said.

India thanks China for congratulating Modi, says look forward to stable ties

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India on Saturday thanked China for congratulating Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his election victory and said it would continue to make efforts for normalisation of the bilateral ties based on "mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity". The comments by External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal came as relations between India and China remained frosty in view of the lingering border row along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in eastern Ladakh. Jaiswal was replying to a congratulatory message to Modi posted by the Chinese Foreign Ministry. "Thank you @MFA_China for congratulating PM @narendramodi on his election victory. Will continue to pursue efforts towards normalisation of India-China ties based on mutual respect, mutual interest and mutual sensitivity," Jaiswal said in a social media post. India has been consistently maintaining that peace and tranquility along the LAC were key for normalisation of overall ties. On June 5, the spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry said: "Congratulations to Prime Minister @narendramodi, BJP and the National Democratic Alliance on the election victory. We look forward to a healthy & sta-



ble China-India relationship." Leaders of four out of five P-5 countries have congratulated Modi on winning a third term. However, there is no congratulatory message yet from Chinese President Xi Jinping. The permanent members of the UN Security Council, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, China and France are known as P5 nations. The Indian and Chinese militaries have been locked in a standoff since May 2020 and a full resolution of the border row has not yet been achieved though the two sides have disengaged from a number of friction points.

Mandate of LS polls moral defeat for Modi: Congress

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday claimed the mandate of the Lok Sabha polls has been a "moral, political and personal" defeat for Prime Minister Narendra Modi and said efforts were now being made to justify his "pathetic" electoral performance. The BJP has won 240 seats in the just-concluded Lok Sabha polls, falling short of the halfway mark in the 543-member House, but the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) together won 293 seats. The Congress has won 99 seats. Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said the drumbeat to find silver linings in the mandate that has been a "moral, political and personal" defeat for Modi has started. "It is being propagated that Mr. Narendra Modi is the first



to receive a mandate thrice in a row after Jawaharlal Nehru. How leading a party to 240 seats and becoming an 'one-third' Pradhan Mantri is a mandate is not explained," the Congress leader said. "Nehru, on the other hand, got 364 seats in 1952, 371 seats in 1957, and 361 seats in 1962 - a 2/3rd majority each time. Yet he remained a complete democrat, nurturing Parliament so very carefully with his constant presence," Ramesh said in a social media post. Neither is Modi the only man since Nehru to be sworn in

No shelters safe for winged creatures in scorching heat

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

As heat wave conditions prevail in Delhi and most of us prefer to stay indoors, avoiding the scorching heat is simply not an option for the winged creatures particularly pigeons and eagles who have made skyscrapers, buildings, and high mast towers as their shelters. These structures, once their sanctuaries, now act as lethal furnaces under the scorching sun, leading to a surge in heat-related illnesses among avian species, said the wildlife bird rescue centres and hospitals busy nursing the heat-struck avian species. "These structures, acting like furnaces, have become lethal for birds such as eagles and pigeons. At least 50 per cent of the injured birds we are receiving these days are victims of heatstroke," said Dr Har Avtar Singh, a vet at Jain Charitable Birds Hospital in Central Delhi. Some birds may fall while flying, not necessarily due to a lack of energy, but often because of various factors such as exhaustion, injury, illness, or adverse weather conditions. Birds, like all animals, expend



energy during flight, and if they become fatigued or weakened for any reason, they may struggle to maintain altitude or control their flight, leading to falls. "Tragically, at least ten per cent of these birds perish," he lamented. The hospital, one of the oldest bird care centers in the capital, currently houses around 2,500 birds. Dr. Singh noted that most of the 80 daily cases they handle involve heat-related illnesses, including heatstroke, diarrhea, and dry

eyes. Dr Singh added that besides pigeons and eagles, parrot species like ladybirds and macaws are struggling to cope with the blistering weather. Residents have reported instances of birds dropping from trees due to exhaustion or straining to take flight from the ground or terraces. Dr. Singh explained that birds lack sweat glands, making it difficult for them to escape the heat. Without timely treatment, birds suffering from

heatstroke can face paralysis or lifelong disabilities. Ornithologists and bird enthusiasts have raised alarms over the rise in heat-related disorders among birds. Karthik Satyanaryan from Wildlife SOS pointed out that birds are often the first victims of rising temperatures because their small organs cannot retain water and nutrients for long periods, leading to rapid energy depletion. "Feeding them water and food at regular intervals is crucial, but this is often chal-

lenging for free-ranging birds that struggle to find water and food, making them more prone to heatstroke," Satyanaryan said. Experts recommend that bird feeders be cleaned regularly to prevent infections. "One should keep cold water in shaded areas and if possible add ORS or electrolytes to the water to ensure birds receive adequate nutrients. In cases where birds are immobilized by the heat, moving them to a shaded area and providing first aid promptly can be life-saving," said Dr Vinod Sharma, a vet expert from Tri Nagar in the national capital. According to ornithologists, eagle populations have adapted to nesting in urban environments, favoring man-made structures like skyscrapers, communication towers, and utility poles. However, these nesting sites can become unbearably hot during heatwaves, posing significant risks to the birds. Eagle chicks, for example, are vulnerable to heat stress, which can cause them to become restless and agitated, leading to accidental falls from nests precariously built on high poles near the city.

Asia's largest health, fitness event kicks off at Pragati Maidan

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Asia's largest health and fitness extravaganza, three-day International Health, Sports, and Fitness Festival (IHFF) was kicked off here in the national Capital's Pragati Maidan. The highlights of the mega event are two colossal bodybuilding championships - the coveted Steadfast Nutrition Pro Show - Asia's biggest bodybuilding championship - and the Sheru Classic Pro Qualifiers - India's biggest bodybuilding tournament for amateur athletes, both sponsored by leading sports and wellness nutrition brand Steadfast Nutrition. In partnership with Steadfast Nutrition, the festival is expected to attract a large audience of around 1.5 lakh spectators. Asked about the significance of these championships and why Steadfast has thrown its weight behind them, Steadfast Nutrition founder Aman Puri said, "The Steadfast Nutrition Pro Show is a milestone event for Indian bodybuilding and



the only road in India to the world's most prestigious bodybuilding championship - Mr Olympia, USA, offering a life-changing opportunity to Indian bodybuilding athletes. Past champions like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Phil Heath celebrated their legendary status on this very stage. Steadfast is the first brand in the country to bring a pro show on home soil. "The Sheru Classic is India's biggest bodybuilding event for amateur athletes and brings together fitness enthusiasts and amateurs, giving them global exposure. The events

also promote physical health, contributing to a fitter and more active nation," Aman Puri added. The event promises to be a focal point for fitness expertise, networking, and knowledge exchange, making it an essential event for those engaged in the fitness and nutraceutical industry. Four winners will be chosen at the Steadfast Nutrition Pro Show in their respective categories: Men's Physique, Men's Classic Physique, Women's Bikini, and 212 Bodybuilding. The grand finale will take place on June 9.

394 officer cadets, including 39 from friendly nations, pass out from IMA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

A total of 394 officer cadets of 154 Regular Course and 137 Technical Graduate Course, including 39 from 10 friendly countries, passed out from the portals of Indian Military Academy (IMA), Dehradun on Saturday, Defence Ministry said here. Northern Command chief Lt General M V Suchindra Kumar reviewed the Passing Out Parade. He congratulated the officer cadets on the successful completion of their training. He complimented them and the instructors for the excellent parade as well as the crisp and synergised drill movements, indicating high standards of training and discipline imbued by the young officer cadets. "The parade is the culmination of your training and the commencement of professional career. This is a moment that comes once in your life-



time and shall be an inspiration for all future endeavours. The pledge that you take and the vows that you make to your nation are sacred and shall precede all your commitments, henceforth. The fact that you stand proud and strong today is testimony to the hard work and labour that you have put in to become an officer. The IMA is an elite institution that has harnessed your potential and has equipped you with all the

knowledge and attributes befitting an officer," the Reviewing Officer told the officer cadets. He reiterated that the Indian Army is proud to have the best soldiers in the world, who have the wisdom derived from combat and years of operational experience. He urged the officer cadets to always lead with honour; serve with distinction; and inspire those around with unwavering commitment to duty.

TERI presents 100 days agenda to tackle green issues

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As the new Government settles in for its five-year term, The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), a policy research body working in the fields of energy, environment, and sustainability has presented a comprehensive 100-day green agenda aimed at tackling pressing environmental issues while fostering sustainable development. By embracing these initiatives, the government can effectively address climate challenges and fulfill its commitments to sustainable development and environmental protection, said Dr Vibha Dhawan, Director General, TERI. Key proposals include the introduction of green budgeting to align public spending with environmental priorities, and the inclusion of climate vulnerability in the devolution formula to provide additional resources for climate change adaptation at



the state level. Strengthening green public procurement and promoting plastic neutrality are also prioritized to reduce environmental impact across sectors. Furthermore, the agenda emphasizes the need for sectoral net zero targets and the finalization of the new National Water Policy to address water management challenges. Initiatives such as promoting tree planting outside forests and integrating pyrolysis oil into oil refineries aim to enhance carbon

sequestration and promote clean energy production. Additionally, the agenda calls for policies to incentivize biofertilizers, enhance soil remediation initiatives, and empower MSMEs to participate in carbon markets. Integrated approaches like establishing decentralized biogas plants for material recovery underscore the importance of maximizing resource efficiency and reducing waste. The 16th Finance Commission can include climate vulnerability (as part of

environment criteria) in the devolution formula to states to create a climate fund and provide additional resources to state governments to address climate change, suggested RR Rashmi, a prominent climate change expert with the TERI. At the same time, Dhawan emphasized that the government should strengthen regulations and integrate environmental considerations into various sectoral and non-sectoral policies which will also help in achieving our national and international commitments such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Net Zero by 2070 target. Syamal Sarkar, senior consultant with the organisation pitched for a national policy for resource efficiency. Efficiency in use of material resources such as timber, plastic, steel, metals, textiles, construction materials (sand, earth, bricks, cement, etc) and their recycling, reuse needs to be promoted through mandates as well as incentives to sustain a circu-

lar economy. A draft policy has been in the making for almost five years with the Union Environment Ministry. Also, the Government can establish decentralized biogas plants and material recovery facilities in an integrated manner so that energy generated from biogas plants can be used for operation of material recovery facilities. This will also reduce cost of operations and improve viability. The government can mandate diversion of wet and dry wastes from the landfills and maximize resource recovery, said the experts. There are no policy or regulation mandating cities to collect GHG inventories or conduct climate risk assessments, nor are there targets, incentives, or guidelines for local government involvement in national climate action planning. A proposed solution is to launch a national mission similar to the Smart City Mission, focused on climate action and can be informed by spatial planning tools, they added.

Israel rescues 4 more hostages

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel said on Saturday it rescued four hostages who were kidnapped in a Hamas-led attack on October 7, in the largest such hostage recovery operation since the war with Hamas began in Gaza. Heavy fighting raged in central Gaza, where the hostages were rescued, and at least 55 people, including children, were killed in multiple attacks Saturday as people fled for safety, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The army said it rescued Noa Argamani, 25; Almog Meir Jan, 21; Andrey Kozlov, 27; and Shlomi Ziv, 40, in two separate locations in a complex special daytime operation in the heart of Nuseirat in central Gaza. Argamani, has been one of the most widely recognized hostages since she was abducted from a music festival in southern Israel. The video of her abduction was among the first to surface, images of her horrified face widely shared — Argamani detained between two men on a motorcycle, one

arm outstretched and the other held down as she screams "Don't kill me!" Her mother, Liora, has stage four brain cancer and in April released a video pleading to see her daughter before she dies. Hamas killed about 1,200 people and kidnapped some 250 hostages during the October 7 attack, which triggered the Israel-Hamas war. About half were released in a weeklong cease-fire in November. Israel says more than 130 hostages remain, with about a quarter of those believed dead, and divisions are deepening in the country over the best way to bring them home. The rescue comes as international pressure mounts on Israel to limit civilian bloodshed in its war in Gaza, which reached its eighth month on Friday with more than 36,700 Palestinians killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between fighters and civilians. Seeking a breakthrough in the apparently stalled cease-fire negotiations between Israel and

Hamas, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken will return to the Middle East next week. Palestinians are facing widespread hunger because the war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and other supplies. UN agencies say over 1 million in Gaza could experience the highest level of starvation by mid-July. Saturday's operation is the largest recovery of alive hostages since the war erupted, bringing the total of rescued captives to seven. Two men were rescued in February when troops stormed a heavily guarded apartment in a densely packed town, and a woman was rescued in the aftermath of October's attack. Israeli troops have so far recovered at least 16 bodies of hostages from Gaza, according to the government. Defence Minister Yoav Gallant called Saturday's rescue "a heroic operation" and said the army will continue fighting until all the hostages are returned. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is facing growing

pressure to end the fighting in Gaza, with many Israelis urging him to embrace a deal announced last month by US President Joe Biden, but far-right allies threatening to collapse his government if he does. Argamani spoke by phone with Israeli President Isaac Herzog and Netanyahu. In an audio message released by the government, Netanyahu is heard asking Argamani how she's feeling and said he hasn't given up on the hostages. She tells him she is "very excited", saying she hasn't heard Hebrew in so long. Her friend, Yonatan Levi, reacted to the news with a sense of disbelief. "Wow. Don't know what to say. So excited such a crazy reality. So happy now and joyful," Levi said. The rescue comes as Israel is intensifying operations across central Gaza, where the hostages were rescued. The bodies of the dozens of Palestinians killed on Saturday were taken to Al-Aqsa Hospital, where they were counted by Associated Press reporters.

Man assaults Danish PM, arrested

AP ■ COPENHAGEN (DENMARK)

A man who reportedly assaulted the Danish Prime Minister in central Copenhagen will appear in a pre-trial custody hearing on Saturday, authorities said. Police confirmed "there has been an incident" with Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen on Friday and that a 39-year-old man was arrested. They didn't provide further details and it wasn't clear if Frederiksen was hurt. The man is expected to arrive at 1100 GMT at the Copenhagen District Court in Frederiksberg, a municipality enclave within the Danish capital. The prime minister's office told the Danish state broadcaster DR on Friday that Frederiksen was "shocked" by what happened. Two eyewitnesses, Anna Ravn and Marie Adrian, told the daily BT that they saw a man walking toward Frederiksen and then "pushing her hard on the shoulder so she was shoved aside." They stressed that the premier did not fall down. Another witness, Kasper Jorgensen, told the Ekstra Bladet tabloid that a well-dressed man, who seemed part of Frederiksen's protection unit, and a police officer took down the alleged assailant. Soren Kjaergaard who was working at a



Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen

local bar on Kultorvet Square where the incident happened told the BT that he saw Frederiksen after the incident and she had no visible injuries to her face but walked away quickly. Politicians in the Scandinavian country and abroad condemned the reported assault. Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson said that "an attack on a democratically elected leader is also an attack on our democracy", while Charles Michel, president of the European Council, condemned on X what he called a "cowardly act of aggression". European Union parliamentary elections are currently underway in Denmark and the rest of the 27-nation bloc and will conclude on Sunday.

Frederiksen has been campaigning with the Social Democrats' EU lead candidate, Christel Schaldemose. Media reports said the attack was not linked to a campaign event. Violence against politicians has become a theme in the run-up to the EU elections. In May, a candidate from Germany's centre-left Social Democrats was beaten and seriously injured while campaigning for a seat in the European Parliament. In Slovakia, the election campaign was overshadowed by an attempt to assassinate populist Prime Minister Robert Fico on May 15, sending shockwaves through the nation of 5.4 million and reverberating throughout Europe. Frederiksen, 46, is the leader of the Social Democratic Party and has been Denmark's prime minister since 2019. She has steered Denmark through the global COVID-19 pandemic and a controversial 2020 decision to wipe out Denmark's entire captive mink population to minimize the risk of the small mammals retransmitting the virus. Assaults on politicians in Denmark are rare. On March 23, 2003, two activists threw red paint on then-Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen inside the parliament and were immediately arrested. Foreign Minister Per Stig Moller also suffered some splashes that day.

Ukrainian attacks leave 28 dead in Russian-occupied regions

PTI ■ NEW YORK

Russia-installed officials in the partially occupied Ukrainian regions of Kherson and Luhansk said Ukrainian attacks left at least 28 people dead as Russia and Ukraine continued to exchange drone attacks overnight into Saturday. A Ukrainian attack Friday on the small town of Sadove in Ukraine's partially occupied Kherson region killed 22 and wounded 15 people, Moscow-backed governor Vladimir Saldo said. Russian state news agency Tass cited Saldo as saying that Ukrainian forces first struck the town with a French-made guided bomb, then attacked again with a US-supplied HIMARS missile. He said Ukrainian forces had "deliberately made a repeat strike to create greater numbers of casualties" when "residents of nearby houses ran out to help the injured". Further east, Leonid Pasechnik,

the Russia-installed governor in Ukraine's partially occupied Luhansk region, said Saturday that two more bodies had been pulled from the rubble following Friday's Ukrainian missile attack on the regional capital, also called Luhansk. Russian state news agency Interfax cited regional authorities as saying this brought the death toll to six. Pasechnik also said 60 people were wounded in the attack. Pasechnik declared Saturday a day of mourning in the region, with public events cancelled. Ukraine did not comment on either assault. Meanwhile, drone attacks between Russia and Ukraine persisted. Ukraine launched a barrage of drones across Russian territory overnight Friday, Russia's Defence Ministry said Saturday. Twenty-five drones were reportedly destroyed over Russia's southern Kuban and Astrakhan regions, the western Tula region, and the Moscow-

annexed Crimean peninsula. On Saturday morning, officials said air defences for the first time shot down Ukrainian drones over the North Ossetia region in the North Caucasus, some 900 km (560 miles) east of the front line in Ukraine's partially occupied Zaporizhzhia region. Russia's Ministry of Defence said that one drone had been destroyed, whereas regional Gov. Sergei Menyailo reported three downed drones over the region. Menyailo said that the target was a military airfield. Ukrainian air defence overnight shot down nine out of 13 Russian drones over the central Poltava region, south-eastern Zaporizhzhia and Dnipropetrovsk regions, and the Kharkiv region in the northeast, Ukraine's air force said Saturday. Dnipropetrovsk regional Gov. Serhiy Lysak said the overnight drone attack damaged commercial and residential buildings.

Russia puts former Ukrainian PM on its wanted list

AP ■ MOSCOW

Russia has put former Ukrainian Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko on its wanted list, Russian state media reported, citing the Interior Ministry's database. Russian state news agency Tass said Tymoshenko was listed as wanted on unspecified criminal charges. She reportedly joins Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and his predecessor, Petro Poroshenko, on the same list, which also includes scores of officials and lawmakers from Ukraine and NATO countries. Tymoshenko and her husband, Yuriy Boyko, were listed since at least late February. Among others on the list is Kaja Kallas, the prime minister of Estonia and EU member

Pakistan, China agree to upgrade CPEC

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and Chinese President Xi Jinping in their meeting have affirmed consensus on the upgradation of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and advancing high-quality development of the multi-billion dollar project in the second phase. The two leaders held an in-depth discussion at the historic Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Friday during the five-day official visit of Sharif which began on June 4. The two leaders were accompanied by the ministers and senior officials. This was the first meeting of Sharif with President Xi since assuming office in 2024. According to the state media, the two leaders showed consensus on up-gradation of the CPEC and advancing the development of the mega pro-

ject in the second phase. The CPEC, which connects Gwadar Port in Pakistan's Balochistan with China's Xinjiang province, is the flagship project of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The BRI is seen as an attempt by China to further its influence abroad with infrastructure projects funded by Chinese investments across the world. China has also invested billions in various power projects and road networks in Pakistan under the USD 65 billion CPEC plan, but the implementation of various projects has slowed in recent months. Associated Press of Pakistan reported that Prime Minister Sharif briefed President Xi on Pakistan's policies for economic reform and sustained growth, industrial development, agricultural modernisation and regional connectivity and the critical role played by the CPEC in Pakistan's

development. The prime minister recalled the historic visit of President Xi Jinping to Pakistan in 2015 when the CPEC was formally operationalised, marking a new chapter in the bilateral relationship. He asserted Pakistan's commitment to high-quality development of the CPEC and to foster synergy between the development strategies of the two countries through close coordination. Commending President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative and Global Development Initiative (GDI), the prime minister underscored that as the flagship project of BRI, the CPEC had significantly contributed to Pakistan's socio-economic development. He underlined that the government's agenda for people-centric, socio-economic development resonates with the concept of 'shared prosperity' embraced by China.

'Indian voters proved West wrong about democracy'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

Prominent Indian-American leader Jasdeep Singh Jassee said the recently concluded polls in India have not only highlighted the robust electoral process in the country but also sent a powerful message to the world about the resilience and vibrancy of its democracy. Despite a wave of scepticism from the Western media regarding the integrity of India's democratic processes, the results have decisively dispelled such doubts, Sikhs for America leader Jasdeep Singh Jassee told PTI in an interview. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to take oath for a third consecutive term, a first in over 60 years. Singh, who was in Punjab for two weeks during the general elections, said that the allegations appearing in the west of a compromised Election Commission and malfunctioning voting machines have been proven baseless, underscoring the legitimacy and fairness of the elections in the country. "The people of India, through their votes, have demonstrated that they prioritise the nation's overall development. Indian democracy has emerged more mature and it has strengthened as a result of the latest elections," Singh said. Responding to a question on Punjab, Singh said the elections have further debunked allegations of human rights violations and curbs on freedom. Showing the inclusiveness of India's democratic framework, he said that Amritpal Singh, a radical pro-Khalistan separatist, participated and won the poll from jail. Additionally, the son of Beant Singh, who assassinated Indira Gandhi, also contested and won, Singh said. Batting for the prime minister's leadership for its "fast-track development in India", Singh said, "There is optimism that Modi's third term will bring stability and further economic development. The relationship between the United States and India will continue to improve."



Pope Francis cheers at children during an audience with members of choirs from different countries in the Paul VI Hall at The Vatican on Saturday. AP/PTI

Sikh pilgrims from India arrive in Pakistan for Jor Mela

PTI ■ LAHORE

Over 800 Sikhs from India arrived here on Saturday to take part in Jor Mela, a three-day festival commemorating the death anniversary of the fifth Sikh guru, Guru Arjan Dev Ji. The Jor Mela will be held from June 15 at Gurdwara Dera Sahib Lahore. Evacuee Trust Property Board (ETPB) officer Ghulam Mohayuddin told PTI that Pakistan Sikh Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee president and Punjab Minorities Minister Ramesh Singh Arora and the ETPB senior officers welcomed the 846 visiting pilgrims at the Wagah border. The Sikh pilgrims expressed great joy upon their arrival. "We will have the darshan (blessing to witness) of our



Guru's land. I feel very happy," Gurbachan Singh, who heads the delegation, said and added there is a sense of belonging here. Arora, the first Sikh minister in Pakistan's Punjab province, said all the arrangements for the Sikh pilgrims have been made by the ETPB, which looks after the affairs of the minorities in the country. Special arrangements have been made for the security, transport and medical facilities

of the pilgrims, he said. Soon after their arrival, the pilgrims left for Gurdwara Panja Sahib in Hasanabdol, about 400-odd kms northwest of here. During their 10-day stay, the Indian Sikhs pilgrims would also visit Gurdwara Janam Asthan, Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Guru Nanak; Gurdwara Sacha Sauda, Feroqabad; Gurdwara Kartarpur Sahib, Narowal; and Gurdwara Rohri Sahib, Aminabad.

Macron, Biden hope to move past trade tensions

AP ■ PARIS

President Joe Biden is being feted by French President Emmanuel Macron with a state visit Saturday as the two allies aim to show off their partnership on global security issues and move past trade tensions. Biden and Macron attended ceremonies marking the 80th anniversary of D-Day on Thursday and met separately the following day with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Paris. The leaders both used those engagements used to underscore the urgent need to support Kyiv's fight against Russia's invasion. But Macron and Biden have often chafed at the pace of support for Ukraine, especially as the United States, by far the largest contributor to Kyiv's defense, was forced to pause aid shipments for months while congressional Republicans held up an assistance package. The state visit began with a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe,

including a wreath-laying at France's tomb of the unknown soldier, and a military parade along the Champs-Élysées leading to the Élysée Palace, where the two will hold official meetings and deliver public statements. Later, there is a state dinner at the palace for Biden and his wife, Jill. Biden hosted Macron in December 2022 at the White House for the first state visit of his presidency as the COVID-19 pandemic receded. Jill Biden flew back to Paris aboard a US government plane after spending Friday in Delaware to support their son, Hunter Biden, who is standing trial on federal gun charges. As the president's trip draws to a close, the far right is likely to emerge as one of the biggest winners in Sunday's European Parliament election while Macron's pro-European Union movement is flagging. A top French official said Macron and Biden have a friendly and warm relationship and stressed that the US pres-

ident is spending five days in France, reflecting the importance he attaches to the visit. The official spoke anonymously, in line with customary practices for Macron's office. The official said the US presidential campaign was not a factor in the discussion. Macron hosted then-President Donald Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee this year, for Bastille Day in 2017, and he came to Washington for a state visit in 2018 before their relationship soured. US and French officials said Ukraine would be at the top of Saturday's agenda, but the centerpiece of the weekend event would be the strength of the alliance, fortified at Normandy 80 years ago, but with roars far deeper. "It's probably a good thing for us to remember that we didn't win our independence either without some foreign help or foreign assistance, specifically from France," White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Friday.

Max Bergmann, a former US State Department official who leads Europe research at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, said the US-French relationship is strong despite occasional disagreements. "There's always tension in Franco-American relations because the French try to do stuff," he said. "They're bold, they throw up proposals, and that leads to some friction when we push back." For example, he said, France proposed putting Western trainers on the ground in Ukraine, leading to questions of whether this is "really giving Ukraine a major, tangible benefit" or has the "potential to be escalatory and dangerous." Regarding Macron, Bergmann said, "he's the one that pushes the boundaries and throws up ideas." Kirby said the two leaders would have an announcement Saturday on deepening maritime law enforcement cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. They also were to discuss economic and cli-

mate challenges. While praising the Biden administration's commitment to supporting Ukraine, Macron said earlier this year that Europe must become "capable of defending its interests, with its allies by our side whenever they are willing, and alone if necessary," arguing the continent should rely less on the US for its own defense. He also warned Western powers against showing any signs of weakness to Russia as he repeatedly said that sending Western troops into Ukraine to shore up its defense should not be ruled out. The leaders were also set to discuss their efforts to bring about a cease-fire to the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, as the US and Israel await Hamas' response to a Biden-promoted cease-fire proposal that would allow a surge of humanitarian assistance into the territory. Macron is expected to raise US trade practices that he has often criticized, including the Inflation Reduction Act, which favors American-made climate tech-

nology such as electric vehicles. Macron said the US, like China, has "decided not to respect the rules of global trade" by shoring up protections and subsidies while Europe's industry remains open and is stuck in overregulation. The French official said Europe has to defend European interests, after watching the US do the same with its own, but said Macron hopes to find a mutually acceptable outcome. Gary Hufbauer, nonresident senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, said trade with China is a sticking point between the US and Europe, particularly regarding technology. Biden is also moving toward tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles and batteries, which could affect European cars that include Chinese parts. Overall, Hufbauer said, "Europe wants to maintain much more trade with China than the US wants."



French President Emmanuel Macron, center right, stands with US President Joe Biden, First Lady Jill Biden and Brigitte Macron, right, during a ceremony at the Arc de Triomphe on Saturday in Paris. President Joe Biden is being feted by French President Emmanuel Macron with a state visit Saturday, as the two allies aim to show off their partnership on global security issues and move past trade tensions. AP/PTI

Looking forward to doing exciting work in India: Musk

PTI ■ NEW YORK

American tech billionaire Elon Musk has said he is looking forward to his companies doing "exciting work" in India, as he congratulated Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his historic election victory. Modi will be administered the oath of office on June 9, his third consecutive term as Prime Minister. "Congratulations @narendramodi on your victory in the world's largest democratic elections! Looking forward to my companies doing exciting work in India," Musk, 52, said in a post on X on Friday. Responding to Musk's post, Prime Minister Modi said: "Appreciate your greetings @elonmusk." Modi said the talented Indian youth, the country's demography, predictable policies and stable democratic polity would continue to provide the business environment for all its partners. The congratulatory message came two months after the CEO of the electric carmaker Tesla and microblogging platform X in April postponed his proposed visit to India due to "very heavy Tesla obligations". Musk — who was expected to be in India on April 21 and 22 and scheduled to meet Prime Minister Modi — later wrote on X that he is

TESLA CEO CONGRATULATES MODI ON HIS POLLS WIN



looking forward to coming to India later this year. In June last year, Musk met with Modi during the latter's US visit and stated that he planned to visit India in 2024 while expressing confidence that Tesla would enter the Indian market soon. His proposed visit had raised expectations that he would announce plans for electric car maker Tesla to set up shop in the country, along with his satcom venture Starlink. It was also expected that Musk would announce plans for Tesla to set up its manufacturing unit in India and investments could be to the tune of billions of dollars and the way forward for selling Tesla electric cars in India at the earliest. Not just electric cars, he is also eyeing the Indian market for his satellite internet business Starlink, for which regulatory approvals are awaited. Musk had in the past sought import duty reduction in India for it to be able to sell Tesla cars in the country. Musk's plan to visit India in April came on the heels of the government announcing a new electric vehicle policy, under which import duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla.



Maharashtra, Karnataka, Delhi top UK's investment flows from India: Report

PTI ■ LONDON

Maharashtra followed by Karnataka and Delhi are the top three states of India bringing in foreign direct investment (FDI) into the UK, according to a new joint report produced by the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and the High Commission of India in the UK. "Indian Assets: Charting the Journeys of Indian Companies in the UK", launched in London earlier this week, revealed that companies headquartered in Maharashtra brought in the highest amount of FDI into the UK at 20 per cent in 2023, followed by Karnataka (12 per cent) and Delhi (8.6 per cent). Completing the top 10 tallies are the states of Gujarat (7.1 per cent), Tamil Nadu (6.7 per cent), Telangana (6.5 per cent), Uttar Pradesh (5.9 per cent), Haryana (4.5 per cent), West Bengal (3.14 per cent) and Kerala (3.05 per cent) — making up 78 per cent of the total FDI from India into the UK. "As India and the UK continue to evolve and navigate the complexities of a rapidly changing global landscape, I believe that our businesses reimagining the India-UK corridor will realise our shared vision and aspiration for a secure and sustainable future prosperity," said Vikram Doraiswami, the Indian High Commissioner to the UK, who launched the report in London. The analysis finds the leading sector bringing in FDI from India in terms of the number of companies and employees is IT and software, highlighting the achievements of Indian companies in the UK across sectors such as automotive, electric car batteries, diagnostics and healthcare, and technology. It also spotlights the positive impact Indian companies can have on heritage British brands and how the value of these legacy brands is retained and protected when acquired by Indian companies. "Today, Indian companies with operations in the UK have integrated themselves into the British economy, making their mark in industries in almost all leading sectors. Their ability to adapt, innovate, and forge meaningful partnerships has not only propelled their growth but has also enriched the economy of the UK and its regions, promoting job creation, driving investment, and fostering a culture of diversity and inclusion," said CII Director General Chandrajit Banerjee. Among some of the other findings of the report, new Indian students cumulatively contributed an estimated GBP 4.3 billion to UK universities against the backdrop of a 5 per cent increase in UK student visas last year. It also showcases the robust relationship that Indian companies have across different UK regions, with the West Midlands, London and the north-west being the top recipients of Indian FDI in the UK across the fields of automotive, software and IT services and energy. According to the latest official data from the UK's Department of Business and Trade, total trade in goods and services (exports plus imports) between the UK and India was GBP 39.0 billion in the four quarters to the end of Q4 2023, an increase of 4.8 per cent or GBP 1.8 billion in current prices from the four quarters to the end of Q4 2022.

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

GSTN rolls out form for tobacco manufacturers to report inputs, outputs to tax authorities

The GST Network (GSTN) has rolled out a special form for manufacturers of pan masala and tobacco products to report inputs and outputs procured with tax authorities to check evasion. This new form GST SRM-II came within a month of GSTN rolling out form GST SRM-I for registering machines of such manufacturers. "The second form namely Form GST SRM-II is also available on the portal. Taxpayers dealing in the manufacture of Pan Masala and Tobacco products can now report the details of inputs and outputs procured and consumed for the relevant month," GSTN said in an update to its taxpayers on June 7. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said the newly available Form GST SRM-II requires detailed monthly reporting of inputs and outputs. "This form aims to enhance transparency and

accountability in the manufacturing process of Pan Masala and Tobacco products. Taxpayers must meticulously document their procurement and consumption of inputs to avoid any discrepancies and ensure accurate tax filings," Mohan said. Taxpayers are advised to familiarise themselves with the details and instructions provided in these forms to ensure seamless compliance and avoid any potential penalties, he added. In January, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) announced the introduction of a new registration and monthly return filing procedure to improve GST compliance for manufacturers of pan masala and tobacco products effective April 1. The date was later extended to May 15.



The move to overhaul the registration, record-keeping, and monthly filing of such businesses was aimed at improving GST compliance for manufacturers of pan masala and tobacco products. The GST law was also amended via Finance Bill 2024 to say that manufacturers of pan masala, gutka and similar tobacco products will have to pay a penalty of up to Rs 1 lakh, if they fail to register their packing machinery with GST authorities with effect from April 1. However, this penalty

provision is yet to be notified. The procedure was to be applicable for manufacturers of pan-masala, unmanufactured tobacco (without lime tube) with or without a brand name, 'Hookah' or 'gudaku' tobacco, smoking mixtures for pipes and cigarettes, chewing tobacco (without lime tube), filter khaini, jarda scented tobacco, snuff and branded or unbranded 'Gutka', etc. The manufacturers of such tobacco products were required to furnish the details of packing machines being used for filling and packing of packages in Form GST SRM-I, electronically within 30 days of the notification coming into effect i.e., April 1, 2024. The input and output statement GST SRM-II was to be filed by the 10th of the succeeding month.

Sri Lanka has made strong progress on debt restructuring front: IMF

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's macroeconomic policy reforms have started to "bear fruit" and the country is expected to reach agreements with external commercial creditors soon, the IMF has said ahead of the second review of its USD 2.9 billion bailout programme to the cash-strapped country. Addressing a press conference on Friday, International Monetary Fund (IMF) Communication Department Director Julie Kozack asserted that Sri Lanka has made "sufficiently strong progress on the debt restructuring front". She said that the island nation's programme performance is "strong", with most quantitative and structural conditionality for the second review met or implemented with delay, adding that reforms are still ongoing in some areas. The second review of the IMF's Extended Fund Facility under the USD 2.9 billion bailout of Sri Lanka has been set for June 12. Kozack confirmed that the IMF's Executive Board will meet to discuss the second review and the Article IV Consultation. Under Article IV of the IMF's Articles of Agreement, the global lender holds bilateral discussions with members, typically every year, with a staff team visiting the country, collecting economic and financial information, and discussing with officials the country's economic developments and policies. "In Sri Lanka, we do see macroeconomic policy reform starting to bear fruit," Kozack said, adding that "commendable outcomes" include rapid disinflation, robust reserve accumulation, and initial signs of economic growth while preserving the



financial system's stability. She said that Colombo's next steps on debt restructuring are to conclude negotiations with external commercial creditors and implement agreements in principle with the official creditors. Kozack said Sri Lanka's domestic debt operations have largely been completed, and debt restructuring discussions are continuing. "The authorities have been holding extensive discussions with external official creditors regarding an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the official creditor committee and the final agreements with the Export-Import Bank of China," she said, adding that talks with the China Development Bank are also at an advanced stage. "There is a strong expectation that agreements with external commercial creditors consistent with programme parameters will be reached soon. So, overall, we assess that there has been sufficiently strong progress on the debt restructuring front," she said. In March, the Washington-based IMF said it reached a staff-level agreement with Sri Lanka for the next phase, enabling access to USD 337 million from the nearly USD 3 billion bailout approved in 2023 for the cash-strapped country. Two tranches of USD 330 million each were released in March and December 2023.

Delhi airport operator DIAL awaits BCAS nod for airside transfer of passenger baggage from T1 to T3

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Soon, passengers landing at STerminal 1 of the Delhi airport might not have to carry their checked-in baggage for a connecting flight from Terminal 3 as the airport operator plans to ensure the baggage transfer through the airside. Delhi International Airport Ltd (DIAL) is awaiting approval for the proposal regarding the airside transfer of checked-in baggage of passengers between T1 and T3 from the Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS), according to officials in the know. Similarly, airside baggage



transfer from T3 to T1 for international flight passengers will also be considered, the officials said. At the Indira Gandhi International Airport (IGIA), international flights are operated from T3, while T1 and T2 are for domestic flights. Currently, passengers landing at T1 have to carry their checked-in baggage to T3 for the connecting flight. Once the system of airside transfer of the checked-in baggage is in place, the passengers will not be required to carry them while taking a connecting flight from T3. In the case of an international flight passenger landing at T3 and then taking a domestic

flight from T1, modalities will be worked out, as the baggage has to be cleared by customs. One of the officials quoted can be dropped at T1. T1 and T3 of the Delhi airport are slightly away from each other and passengers travel between the terminals by road. The airport, having a passenger handling capacity of 100 to 105 million, has three terminals — T1, T2 and T3. The expanded T1 is expected to be operational in June. As part of upgrading the airport infrastructure, DIAL, a consortium led by the GMR Group, plans to have an Automated People Mover (APM) or an air train for passengers for seamless transit between the three terminals. Air passenger traffic is on the rise, and airlines are also expanding their fleet as well as networks to meet the rising demand. Strategic Cooperative Partnership' and expressed the resolve to further deepen cooperation across diverse domains ranging from political and security to economic, trade, and people-to-people exchanges. They also exchanged views on regional and global developments including Afghanistan, Palestine and South Asia, including Kashmir. President Xi Jinping also hosted a banquet in honour of the prime minister, where another round of discussion on different matters of mutual interests was held.

Bajaj Housing Finance files papers for ₹7,000 crore IPO

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Bajaj Housing Finance has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise Rs 7,000 crore through an initial public offering (IPO). The proposed IPO comprises a fresh issue of equity shares of up to Rs 4,000 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of equity shares worth Rs 3,000 crore by parent Bajaj Finance, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP). The share sale is being conducted to comply with the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) regulations, which require upper-layer non-banking finance companies to be listed on stock exchanges by September 2025. Proceeds from the fresh issue will be used to augment the company's capital base to meet future capital requirements. Bajaj Housing Finance is a non-deposit-taking housing finance company registered



with the National Housing Bank since September 2015. It offers financial solutions for purchasing and renovating residential and commercial properties. It has been identified and categorised as an "upper layer" NBFC by the RBI in India, and its comprehensive mortgage products include home loans, loans against property, lease rental discounting and developer financing. For the entire financial year 2023-24, the housing lender posted a net profit of Rs 1,731 crore, marking a growth of 38 per cent from Rs 1,258 crore

in FY23. Housing finance companies Aadhar Housing Finance and India Shelter Finance have been recently listed on the stock exchanges. On June 6, the board of Bajaj Finance approved the sale of shares worth Rs 3,000 crore in the initial public offering of Bajaj Housing Finance. Kotak Mahindra Capital Company Ltd, BofA Securities India Ltd, SBI Capital Markets Ltd, Goldman Sachs (India) Securities Private Ltd and JM Financial Ltd are the book-running lead managers that will manage the company's public issue.

CBIC clarifies on display Assembly of mobile phones for levy of 10 per cent import duty

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The CBIC on Friday listed out parts or components, such as touch panel, cover glass, and LED backlight, which constitute the display assembly of a mobile phone and will attract a 10 per cent import duty. It also said components, including the frame, SIM tray, and side keys like power/volume button, when fitted/attached to the display assembly, integrated display assembly can be imported at the concessional 10 per cent customs duty. In a circular, the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) said currently a concessional basic customs duty (BCD) rate of 10 per cent is imposed on display assembly for use in the manufacture of a cellular mobile phone and a nil BCD rate on inputs or parts for use in the manufacture of a display assembly for use in manufacture of a cellular mobile phone. It said certain cases of misdeclaration by importers were intercepted by the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence (DRI) and other field formations and demand notices were issued in certain cases as well. With the industry facing "interpretational challenges" with regard to the display assembly of cellular mobile phones, a committee constituted with officials from both CBIC and MeitY, recommended a principle that may be used to determine the interpretation of display



assembly for extending the concessional BCD rate. If the display assembly is imported with the items/components, including receiver mesh, speaker net, support frame, and antenna pin, which are fabricated, embedded, fitted or attached to the assembly, the whole integrated assembly should also be treated as a display assembly of a cellular mobile phone, attracting a BCD rate of 10 per cent. ICEA Chairman Pankaj Mohindroo said this circular is a big relief to the industry and will avoid unnecessary litigation.

England loses to Iceland in last friendly before Euro 2024; host Germany beats Greece

AP ■ LONDON
England was booed by some of its own fans after losing 1-0 to Iceland on Friday in its last friendly before the European Championship, while host nation Germany recovered from a goal down to beat Greece 2-1.
Jón Dagur Thorsteinsson left defender John Stones standing as he scored for Iceland in the 16th minute to bring back memories of one of England's lowest points of recent years, its 2-1 elimination by Iceland at Euro 2016.
England created few clear-cut chances against Iceland and nearly conceded a second goal when a promising Icelandic counterattack ended with Thorsteinsson slipping as he shot.
"We learned a lot and we know the performance wasn't good enough," England manager Gareth Southgate told broadcaster Channel 4. "Equally we needed the game; there's a lot of players that we're managing their minutes and it was obviously a disjointed and disappointing performance and we didn't show enough character." England, which beat Bosnia-Herzegovina 3-0 on Monday, gets its tournament under way June 16 against Serbia in Group C.
Germany needed substitute Pascal Gross' 89th-minute goal to secure the win over Greece a week before it opens Euro 2024 against Scotland in Munich.



Georgios Masouras gave Greece the lead in the 34th on the rebound after goalkeeper Manuel Neuer failed to hold a shot from Christos Tzolis. Arsenal forward Kai Havertz leveled in the 56th when he shot on the turn and it went in off Manolis Siopis.
After Benjamin Henrichs sent a shot off the bar in the 83rd, Germany finally took the lead when Gross hit a fierce shot from outside the box.
With a flat first-half performance and a late recovery, the win over Greece continues a mixed bag of form for

Germany, which beat France and the Netherlands in friendlies in March but has also lost to Japan, Turkey and Austria within the last 12 months.
Neuer's error for the Greece goal came shortly after Germany coach Julian Nagelsmann confirmed he was cutting Stuttgart goalkeeper Alexander Nübel as he finalized the 26-player squad for the tournament. Barcelona's Marc-Andre ter Stegen and Hoffenheim's Oliver Baumann are the two other goalkeepers in the squad.
Nagelsmann committed in March to

having Neuer as his first-choice goalkeeper for Euro 2024, even though injuries meant the Bayern Munich goalkeeper only played his first game under Nagelsmann for Germany in Monday's 0-0 draw with Ukraine. Also Friday, Poland beat neighbor Ukraine 3-1 with three goals in the opening 30 minutes and Scotland drew 2-2 with Finland after giving up a 2-0 lead.
Romania failed to beat one of Europe's smallest nations, Liechtenstein, in a 0-0 draw. The Czech Republic cruised to a 7-1 win over Malta.

Indian women go down 2-4 to Germany, suffer seventh consecutive loss in FIH Pro League

PTI ■ LONDON
The Indian women's hockey team could not break its sequence of half-a-dozen consecutive losses in the FIH Pro League, losing to Germany 2-4, its seventh consecutive defeat in the tournament here on Saturday.
The Indians squandered a two-goal advantage when Sunelita Toppo and Deepika scored excellent field goals in the opening quarter to give the Harendra Singh-coached side the best chance to break the jinx.
Sunelita (9th) and Deepika (15th) scored superb field goals to give India a huge morale-boosting 2-0 lead but soon saw it being cancelled out by Germany's Viktoria Huse, who converted penalty corners in the 23rd and 32nd minutes to bring her team on level terms. Stinne Kurz (51st) then converted a penalty corner before Jule Bleuel scored a field goal in the 55th minute to pile on more misery on the Indians.
The latest defeat comes after India had lost all their four matches against Belgium and Argentina in Antwerp last month and then succumbed to defeats against Germany (1-3) and Great Britain (2-3) here last weekend.



Stung by half-a-dozen losses over the course of a fortnight, India started much better on Saturday with Lalremsiami leading the way in the initial minutes.
The veteran forward first created some space to drag the ball into the circle and then took a powerful shot at the goal, only for German goalkeeper Julia Sonntag to thwart it in the nick of time.
The Indian midfield then set up a perfect ball for an unmarked Sunelita in the ninth minute as the teenaged midfielder put it across Sonntag to give world No.5 India the lead.
Deepika then gave a proper lesson on how to score on the counter when she deftly snatched the ball in the midfield and ran forward with Vandana Katariya for company.
Vandana drew Sonntag out before relaying the ball to Deepika who tapped it in with ease just two seconds before the end of the first quarter.
However, German penalty-corner specialist Viktoria converted two penalty corners, one each in the second and third quarter, as India's lead evaporated.
Deepika made some good runs into the circle in the second half, but was unable to time her shots for maximum impact.
The last quarter of play was a story of complete domination for German forwards who unleashed a barrage of attacks to overpower the Indian defence.
India will play Great Britain in their last Pro League match on Sunday.

Carlos Alcaraz will play Alexander Zverev in first French Open final for each

AP ■ PARIS
Carlos Alcaraz started poorly and fell behind early in his French Open semifinal against Jannik Sinner. Later, as both dealt with cramps under Friday's afternoon sun, Alcaraz trailed by two sets to one.
By the end of the latest installment in this burgeoning rivalry between two young, talented players, an engaging five-setter that lasted 4 hours, 9 minutes, Alcaraz actually had accumulated fewer total points, 147-145.
That, of course, is not the score that matters. And Alcaraz, who says he takes pleasure from challenges, ultimately persevered, pulling out a 2-6, 6-3, 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 victory over Sinner to get to his first final in Paris. It made the 21-year-old from Spain the youngest man to reach a Grand Slam title match on three surfaces.
"You have to find the joy (while) suffering. That's the key — even more on clay, here at Roland Garros. Long rallies. Four-hour matches. Five sets,"

Alcaraz said. "You have to fight. You have to suffer. But as I told my team many, many times, you have to enjoy suffering."
He won championships at the U.S. Open in 2022 on hard courts and at Wimbledon in 2023 on grass.
Now the No. 3-seeded Alcaraz will face No. 4 Alexander Zverev of Germany on the red clay Sunday. Hours before his 2-6, 6-2, 6-4, 6-2 semifinal victory over No. 7 Casper Ruud of Norway, Zverev's domestic abuse case in Berlin ended, because he reached an out-of-court settlement with his accuser, a former girlfriend.
When a reporter tried to follow up on the topic, Zverev said: "We move on. I never, ever want to hear another question about the subject again. That goes out to everybody."
Ruud started well, but then began to fade, and he was handed some pills by a doctor during a third-set changeover.
Ruud, who said afterward he had a stomach problem, looked listless and stopped chasing some shots, a shell of

the player who leads the tour in match wins this season and has been the runner-up at majors three times - including in 2022 and 2023 in Paris.
Zverev finally broke through at Roland Garros after bowing out in the semifinals each of the past three years. This will be his second Grand Slam final: He blew a two-set lead and lost in five against Dominic Thiem at the U.S. Open in 2020.
"I was not mature enough. I was maybe too much of a kid still," said Zverev, who is now 27. "I didn't know what the occasion means."
This will be the first French Open men's final without Rafael Nadal, Novak Djokovic or Roger Federer since 2004.
Djokovic was the defending champion in Paris, but he withdrew before the quarterfinals after tearing the meniscus in his right knee and had surgery this week. Because he failed to get back to the final, he will drop from atop the ATP rankings, allowing Sinner to rise a spot from No. 2, despite his defeat on Friday.



"Obviously disappointed how it ended, but it's part of my growing and the process," said Sinner, who won the Australian Open in January for his first major trophy.
The 22-year-old Italian showed up in Paris with a lingering hip injury that forced him to sit out the clay-court tournament in

Rome last month. Alcaraz missed that event, too, because of a right forearm issue that he said made him afraid to hit his booming forehands at full force.
Both men experienced physical problems in the third set. Alcaraz's right hand began to cramp. Sinner had his right

forearm and left thigh massaged by a trainer during changeovers.
It brought to mind last year's French Open semifinals, when Alcaraz got off to a terrific start against Djokovic but then dealt with full-body cramps that rendered the remainder of the match anticlimactic.

He and Sinner are seen as the future of men's tennis. The present isn't too shabby, either. Even though this was not necessarily the most aesthetically pleasing of their nine head-to-head meetings - Alcaraz leads 5-4 - and they combined for 102 unforced errors, there were moments of brilliance that generated dueling clap-accompanied chants of each man's first name from the Court Philippe Chatrier crowd.
In the fifth set, with shadows covering more than half the court, Alcaraz moved out front by sliding until he could reach across his body to snap a backhand passing winner for a break point. A forehand winner - one of his 30 in the match - made it 2-0 at the 3½-hour mark, earning a yell of "Vamos!" from his coach, 2003 French Open champion Juan Carlos Ferrero. Soon, it was 3-0, and Alcaraz was on his way. Both players walloped the ball with such force that the ball-off-strings thuds elicited gasps from spectators in the middle of points.

Sinner, his rust-colored shirt a few shades darker than the clay, came out ready at the start of the match, barely ever missing, gliding more than grinding along the baseline, stretching his long limbs to get to nearly everything Alcaraz offered. Alcaraz, his right arm covered by a white sleeve, would deliver a powerful shot to a corner, punctuated with a grunt, and Sinner would somehow get to it, flip it back and draw a mistake.
Sinner led 4-0 and it took Alcaraz 20 minutes of striving to simply place a "1" beside his name on the scoreboard. The second set began inauspiciously for Alcaraz, who fell behind 2-0.
Here's how Alcaraz came through: He came up with a 32-23 edge in winners over the last two sets.
With his strokes, somehow, gaining zest, and the fans, somehow, getting louder, Alcaraz advanced at a tournament he grew up watching on TV at home in Spain as his countryman Nadal piled up a record 14 titles.



Bose, Ranawade, Lalchungnunga not in India's 23-member squad for away match against Qatar

PTI ■ KOLKATA
Indian football head coach Igor Stimac on Saturday named a 23-member squad without the defensive trio of Mohun Bagan veteran Subhasish Bose, Mumbai FC's Amey Ranawade and Lalchungnunga of East Bengal for its away World Cup Qualifier against Qatar on Tuesday.
This will be India's first match after the retirement of Sunil Chhetri, who made his last international appearance in a frustrating goalless draw against Kuwait in their second-round World Cup Qualifier at Salt Lake Stadium on Thursday.
Stimac chose to give Jay Gupta the debut as both Bose and Ranawade started on the bench and did not get any minutes in their match against Kuwait.
Lalchungnunga, however, was not named in the Indian team list against Kuwait.
India have five points and are behind table-toppers Qatar who have 13 in the Group A standings. Afghanistan and Kuwait have five and three points, occupying the third and fourth places respectively.
While Qatar have sealed their third-round berth, the other three teams, including India

and bottom-placed Kuwait, have a chance to make the cut. Kuwait will face Afghanistan at home in their concluding second-round clash.
India must win against the two-time Asian champions Qatar to make their maiden appearance in the third round of Asia's top-18 teams. A point will be enough for the Blue Tigers if the Afghanistan versus Kuwait tie also ends in a draw.
However, a defeat in Qatar will end India's hopes of progressing, irrespective of the other result. The Blue Tigers will travel to Doha from Kolkata on Saturday evening.
INDIA SQUAD
Goalkeepers: Gurpreet Singh Sandhu, Amrinder Singh, Vishal Kaithi.
Defenders: Anwar Ali, Jay Gupta, Mehtab Singh, Narender, Nikhil Poojary, Rahul Bheke.
Midfielders: Anirudh Thapa, Brandon Fernandes, Edmund Lalrindika, Jeakson Singh Thounaojam, Lallianzuala Chhangte, Liston Colaco, Mahesh Singh Naorem, Nandhakumar Sekar, Sahal Abdul Samad, Suresh Singh Wangjam.
Forwards: Manvir Singh, Rahim Ali, Vikram Partap Singh, David Lalhlansanga.

F1 leader Max Verstappen hit by smoky battery problem in Canadian Grand Prix practice

AP ■ MONTREAL
Formula 1 points leader Max Verstappen left the track early with his Red Bull machine smoking, while Aston Martin's Fernando Alonso had the fastest lap Friday in the second free practice at the Canadian Grand Prix.
After Circuit Gilles Villeneuve was hit by heavy rain, lightning and hail before the first practice session, Verstappen returned to the garage four laps into the second session after a run on dry tires. Red Bull said the smoke was caused by a battery issue.
"It's not ideal, I would have liked to drive more laps," Verstappen said. "It's definitely not how I would have liked to get on in FP2 but I think it's

more important to figure out what actually happened and what kind of implications that will have for this weekend and the rest of the year."
Alonso had a fast lap of 1 minute, 15.810 seconds. Mercedes driver George Russell was second at 1:16.273, and Aston Martin's Lance Stroll, the lone Canadian in field, followed at 1:16.464.
"It was a tricky Friday for everyone," Alonso said. "But it could be like this for qualifying and the race, so it's still very useful information. The right decision can gain you five seconds, wrong decision and you're out of the race."
Earlier, McLaren's Lando Norris had a lap at 1:24.435 after the downpour delayed the first practice. Ferrari's Carlos



Sainz was second, followed by teammate Charles Leclerc, Lightning, heavy rain and hail rolled through a little more than an hour before the practice start time. Sauber driver Valtteri Bottas attempted to form a snowball out of the large pieces of hail that filled the paddock.

"Today was definitely an odd one," seven-time season champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes said. "It was literally summer this morning, then it rained hailstone. I can't even remember the last time I saw hailstone but they were huge. Then sunny again, really hot and humid, and then raining

again." Event organizers asked spectators to leave the grandstands amid the inclement weather while police shut down the bridges accessing Notre Dame Island. The storm subsided roughly 15 minutes before the expected start time and the site was reopened to fans. The drivers didn't hit the wet track until 22 minutes into the session as groundcrews worked to clear the water, but conditions remained less than ideal.
Sauber driver Zhou Guanyu triggered a red flag five minutes later when he aquaplaned and clipped the wall at Turn 5 before grinding to a halt. Several other drivers, including Bottas and Stroll, slid off course and into the grass during the session.

Anshu Malik settles for silver in Budapest

PTI ■ BUDAPEST
Indian woman wrestler Anshu Malik could not match the skills of her 21-year-old Chinese rival Kexin Hong in the final, bowing out tamely to settle for a silver in the 57kg category of the Budapest Ranking Series here.
Competing against the No.1 ranked Chinese, Anshu lost 1-12 on technical superiority against the Hangzhou Asian Games bronze medalist in the 53kg category.
India's Antim Panghal had earlier fought hard to settle for a silver in the 53kg category, while star wrestler Vinesh Phogat lost to Jiang Zhu of China 0-5 in the quarterfinals in the 50kg category.
Anshu started with an incredible bout against Anastasia Nichita of Moldova, winning 6-5 on points to secure a place in the semifinal. With Nichita leading 5-4 and just 19 seconds remaining on the clock, Anshu scored a takedown on the edge to claim a 6-5 lead to win the close contest.
She then overcame the challenge of world champion Zhang Qi 2-1 on point to secure a title showdown with another Chinese.
But Hong proved far too superior for the Indian, taking a 4-1 lead in the opening round before asserting her class in the second round and taking an unassailable lead with 11 seconds still remaining on the clock.
India's only male wrestler to qualify for the Paris Olympics, Aman Sehrawat had earlier won a silver on the opening day losing 1-11 on technical superiority to Japan's Rei Higuchi.

Praggnanandhaa beats Nakamura; Carlsen wins Norway Chess

PTI ■ STAVANGER (NORWAY)
Indian Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa ended his campaign on a positive note by defeating American Hikaru Nakamura in the finale to sign off third even as world number one Magnus Carlsen won the Norway Chess tournament here.
Carlsen walked away with prize money of 7,00,000 NOK (Around USD 65,000 reserved for the winner) for ending with 17.5 points in the unique tournament that ensured that each round had a winner either through Classical time control or Armageddon if the game ended in a draw.
Nakamura finished second on 15.5 points despite losing to Praggnanandhaa, who concluded third on 14.5 points.
Praggnanandhaa can be happy with the fact that he defeated the top three ranked players in the world in one of



the strongest ever tournaments.
He had beaten Carlsen and Caruana under Classical time control earlier in the tournament and his win against Nakamura ensured that he became the first player ever to beat the top three.
The fourth place went to Alireza Firouzja (13.5 points) who accounted for reigning world champion Ding Liren of China. The Iranian turned Frenchman also won under the Armageddon, leaving Liren at the

bottom of the standings behind Caruana who finished on 10 points for the fifth place in the six-players double round-robin tournament.
In the Women's section, Wenjun Ju had no trouble securing the top spot at the expense of compatriot Tingjie Lei. The Chinese won with 19 points in all coming from three wins under Classical time control.
Anna Muzychuk finished second on 16 points, 1.5 points ahead of Lei who in turn was two points clear of R Vaishali.
Koneru Humpy on 10 points was a distant fifth ahead of veteran Pia Cramling who tallied eight points in all. The final round was not devoid of excitement. Carlsen delivers on demand and he did just that yet again against Fabiano Caruana.
After a regulation draw in the Ruy Lopez as white Carlsen reserved his energy for the final Armageddon and his Queen pawn opening ensured a

tangible advantage as the game progressed.
The Norwegian won in the Queen and pawns endgame after 52 moves when he passed pawn in the centre was about to become a new Queen.
Praggnanandhaa took his chances in the middle game arising out of a London system and did not regret as Nakamura was on the backfoot right from the word go. Unleashing a king side attack the Indian romped home in just 31 moves.
Results final round men: Magnus Carlsen (Nor, 17.5) beat Fabiano Caruana (Usa, 11.5) 1.5-1; R Praggnanandhaa (Ind, 14.5) beat Hikaru Nakamura (Usa, 15.5) 1.5-1; Firouzja Alireza (Fra, 13.5) beat Ding Liren (Chn, 7) 1.5-1.
Women: Wenjun Ju (Chn, 19) beat Tingjie Lei (Chn, 14.5) 3-0; Anna Muzychuk (Ukr, 16) beat Koneru Humpy (Ind, 10) 1.

bottom of the standings behind Caruana who finished on 10 points for the fifth place in the six-players double round-robin tournament.
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SPOTLIGHT ON NY PITCH AS STEADY INDIA TAKE ON WOUNDED PAKISTAN

PTI ■ NEW YORK
Confident and well-adjusted India would look to capitalise on an unpredictable Pakistan's vulnerable state and lack of familiarity with the tricky conditions here when the traditional rivals lock horns in their eagerly-awaited T20 World Cup clash on Sunday. The marquee game, which is expected to draw the biggest crowd of the tournament so far, will be held at the newly constructed 34,000-seater Nassau County International Cricket Stadium at the Eisenhower Park on the outskirts of the city. Heading into this high-profile contest, the 22-yard pitch remains a major talking point, having already faced significant criticism for its unpredictability, which the ICC has officially acknowledged. In the six innings of the three matches hosted at the stadium so far, teams have surpassed the 100-run mark only twice. Some former players have wondered aloud whether the low-scoring conditions would be of any help in selling cricket to the American market

through the showpiece. The four drop-in pitches at the venue, laid in April under the supervision of Adelaide Oval groundsman Damian Hough, are yet to settle down properly. The uneven bounce of the surface has also raised safety concerns for the batters, especially after Indian skipper Rohit Sharma was hit on his shoulder, forcing him to stop batting during the tournament-opener against Ireland on June 5. "I don't know what to expect from the pitch to be honest. We will prepare as if the conditions are going to be like this (for Pakistan game). This is going to be a kind of game where all XI of us will need to contribute," Rohit had said after the game against Ireland. A day after India's game, the ICC had to release a statement, addressing the growing concerns surrounding the pitches prepared for the New York-leg of this T20 World Cup. "The ICC recognise that the pitches used so far at the Nassau County International Cricket Stadium have not played as consistently as we would have all wanted," the statement read.

The Pakistan team, however, is yet to acclimatise to the conditions at Nassau Stadium. They arrived in New York on Thursday night following their shocking defeat to tournament debutants USA and took the next day off. As a result, Babar Azam and his squad have had limited time to adjust to these challenging conditions, which could be a disadvantage heading into this crucial encounter. And a defeat against India could significantly complicate their qualification prospects. Against Ireland, the Indian think-tank left out left-arm wrist-spinner Kuldeep Yadav from the playing XI and opted for an extra specialist fast bowler. On Sunday, the strategy is expected to remain the same, particularly as the match is expected to be played on an unused centre turf. South Africa and Netherlands are playing a game at the Nassau stadium on June 8 but on a different track. However, given Kuldeep's recent form and his favourable match-ups against Pakistani batters, especially Babar, the team management might



consider including him. If so, one out of Axar Patel or Ravindra Jadeja may have to sit out. The batting is more or less settled with Rohit and Virat Kohli expected to continue as

openers and Rishabh Pant taking the No.3 slot. Pakistan, on the other hand, would be hoping to get their act together after the opening shock.

Their legendary unpredictability was on full display against the USA, who pipped them in the Super Over for a memorable win. Babar blamed the loss

primarily on bowlers but what he cannot afford to overlook is the underwhelming performance of the team's batters, including him. The captain consumed 43 deliveries for his 44, which is nowhere close to being a decent strike rate in the shortest format. He would be hoping to do better. And with conditions helpful for seamers as pointed out by India pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah after the Ireland game, it won't be a surprise if the lethal version of Pakistan's bowling attack led by Shaheen Afridi decides to show up on Sunday and put the team's campaign back on track. **STRINGENT SECURITY MEASURES:** Following an ISIS terror threat received at the start of the tournament, stringent security measures have been enforced by local authorities to ensure the safe conduct of this high-profile contest. Nassau County Police Commissioner Patrick Ryder, in recent media interactions, emphasised on the extensive arrangements, likening them to presidential-level security. "The scale and magnitude of the security for this India-

Pakistan match will be more compared to when we hosted the USA President Barack Obama some years ago," Ryder said. He also confirmed the involvement of officers from Nassau County Police, Suffolk County, New York State, as well as agencies including the FBI, Homeland Security Investigations, and US Customs and Border Protection in the comprehensive security arrangements for the game. **SQUADS:** **India:** Rohit Sharma (c), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj. **Pakistan:** Babar Azam (c), Abrar Ahmed, Azam Khan, Fakhr Zaman, Haris Rauf, Iftikhar Ahmed, Imad Wasim, Mohammad Abbas Afridi, Mohammad Amir, Mohammad Rizwan, Naseem Shah, Saim Ayub, Shadab Khan, Shaheen Shah Afridi, Usman Khan

WI in search of batting mojo vs Uganda



PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)
Co-hosts West Indies will look to shake off their batting rustiness and come in their element when they face Uganda in a Group C T20 World Cup clash here. The pre-tournament favourites and two-time former champions suffered a scare chasing a modest 137 before they scraped to five-wicket win over minnows Papua New Guinea in their opening match. On a difficult pitch that required patience and application, West Indies batters kept playing recklessly and found themselves half the side down for 97 with just four overs remaining. It was then left to Roston Chase (42 not out) and Andre Russell (15 not out) to safely take them home and avoid an embarrassment. Against a team who are coming on the back of morale boosting win over Papua New Guinea, West Indies will have to exercise some caution especially with the bat. Nicholas Pooran has been their most standout batter in the recent past and the wicketkeeper-batter will have responsibility to stay at the crease till the end. On conditions that have assisted the bowlers, pacer Alzarri Joseph and left-arm spinner Akeal Hosein who were impressive in the previous match will look to give early breakthroughs.

Uganda have happy memories of bowling out Papua New Guinea for 77 at this venue but their batting will be in the spotlight as they struggled in the chase before securing a tense three-wicket win in the penultimate over. **TEAMS (FROM)** **West Indies:** Rovman Powell (c), Alzarri Joseph, Johnson Charles, Roston Chase, Shimron Hetmyer, Jason Holder, Shai Hope, Akeal Hosein, Shamar Joseph, Brandon King, Gudakesh Motie, Nicholas Pooran, Andre Russell, Sherfane Rutherford, Romario Shepherd. **Uganda:** Brian Masaba (c), Simon Ssesazi, Roger Mukasa, Cosmas Kyewuta, Dinesh Nakrani, Fred Achelam, Kenneth Waiswa, Alpesh Ramjani, Frank Nsubuga, Henry Ssenyondo, Bilal Hassun, Robinson Obuya, Riazat Ali Shah, Juma Miyaji, Ronak Patel. **Match starts:** 6am IST.

The result mean that Scotland now have the opportunity to go up to five points which might complicate the Super Eight qualifying scenarios for tournament heavyweights England and Australia who lock horns later on Saturday. Only top two teams make the Super Eight. Australia and Namibia have two points each sitting behind Scotland, while England are second from the bottom with one point from one match. While skipper Richie Berrington has been in form leading their chase with an unbeaten fifty, he would hope that their top-three George Munsey, Michael Jones and Brandon McMullen start to fire. Oman have lost both their matches putting up ordinary shows with the bat and it would be too much of an ask for them to turn things around. **TEAMS (FROM)** **Oman:** Aqib Ilyas (c), Zeeshan Maqsood, Kashyap Prajapati, Pratik Athavale, Ayaan Khan, Shoaib Khan, Mohammad Nadeem, Naseem Khushi, Mehran Khan, Bilal Khan, Rafiullah, Kaleemullah, Fayyaz Butt, Shakeel Ahmad, Khalid Kail. **Scotland:** Richie Berrington (c), Matthew Cross, Brad Currie, Chris Greaves, Oli Hairs, Jack Jarvis, Michael Jones, Michael Leask, Brandon McMullen, George Munsey, Safyaan Sharif, Chris Sole, Charlie Tear, Mark Watt, Brad Wheel

Spirited Afghans clip Kiwi wings, secure 84 runs upset win in T20 World Cup

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)
A determined Afghanistan rode on splendid spells from their skipper Rashid Khan and left-arm pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi to stun an under-prepared New Zealand by 84 runs and make a strong case for a Super Eight berth in the T20 World Cup here. Chasing a tricky 160 at the Providence Stadium here, 2021 runners-up New Zealand were shot out for a lowly 75 in an innings that lasted a mere 15.2 overs with only Glenn Phillips (18) and Matt Henry (12) managing double-digit scores. The decision to bowl after winning the toss backfired on the Black Caps as the Afghans relied on openers Rahmanullah Gurbaz's 56-ball 84 and Ibrahim Zadran's 44 off 41 to post a reasonably good total of 159/6 in the low-scoring tournament. Gurbaz was expectedly adjudged player of the match for his knock. The triumph was a reminder of

Afghanistan's first big upset win in 2016 when they defeated West Indies by six runs in Nagpur after restricting the eventual winners to 117/8 in their defence of 123/7. Farooqi, who snared five wickets for nine runs against Uganda, returned figures of 17/4 off his 3.2 overs, including the match-sealing dismissal. Rashid was also lethal as he collected the prized scalp of Kane Williamson (9 off 13) with his first ball. He finished overall figures of 17/4 off his four overs. It took Afghanistan to four points from two matches, having earlier beaten Uganda by 125 runs. The West Indies and Uganda occupy the next two spots, while Papua New Guinea and New Zealand are the last two teams who haven't opened their accounts. Afghanistan next face PNG on Friday, while NZ will be up against the co-hosts West Indies on Thursday. "One of the greatest performances from us in T20I



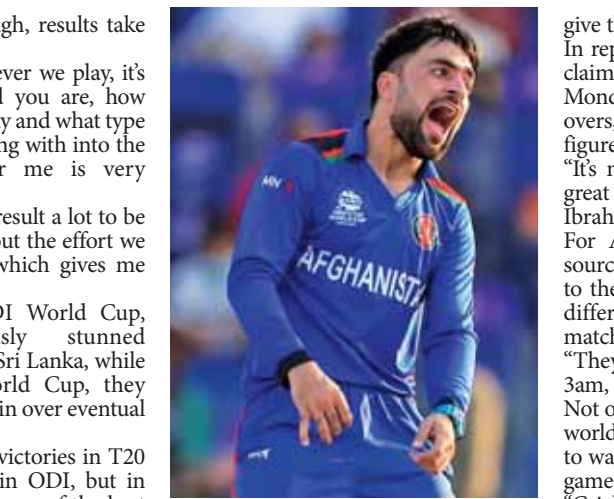
cricket against a big team," said Afghan skipper Rashid Khan terming it a "great team effort." "The way Ibrahim and Gurbaz started again... The wicket was not easy. They did not throw away their wickets. "Great win for Afghanistan and it is a privilege to be leading this side and winning against NZ." Williamson acknowledged that Afghans "outplayed them." "To get a total like that on a fiddly surface, they kept

Farooqi followed it up with the wicket of the dangerous Devon Conway in his next over as the Kiwi wicketkeeper-batter chipped a catch to short extra cover. He ended his dream spell of 3-0-17-3 taking the wicket of Daryl Mitchell who edged a back-of-a-length delivery that angled in to have New Zealand reeling at 30/3 inside five overs. The skipper, who also took 4/17, then weaved his magic after the power-play further pegging New Zealand back when he struck off his first delivery, dismissing his counterpart Williamson for 9 with a Gulbadin Naib taking a smart catch at slip. The NZ top four batting card at that moment read a sorry 0, 8, 9, 5 by Allen, Conway, Williamson and Mitchell in that order. Rashid cleaned up Mark Chapman (4) with a delivery that kept a little low and crashed into the stumps. Half the Kiwi side was back in the dugout for 43 in nine overs.

Focussed on our own skills rather than opposition: Rashid Khan

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)
Rashid Khan always wanted his teammates to have faith in their own abilities instead of fretting over their opposition's strengths and he was ecstatic that it's exactly what they did during Afghanistan's memorable 84-run victory over New Zealand in the T20 World Cup game here. Defending 159, Afghanistan shot out New Zealand for 75 with left-arm seamer Fazalhaq Farooqi and the skipper himself decimating the opposition with four wickets apiece. "Now, we need to beat the teams with our own skills rather than think about the opposition and that's the only thing I have been telling the guys like just make sure we look into our skills," Rashid said during the post-match presentation ceremony. For Rashid, it is the effort that matters more than the results as he believes that

if a team is good enough, results take care of itself. "It doesn't matter whoever we play, it's more about how good you are, how good you're going to play and what type of energy you are coming with into the ground and that for me is very important. "I don't care about the result a lot to be honest. I care more about the effort we put, that's something which gives me lots of pleasure." In the last year's ODI World Cup, Afghanistan famously stunned England, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, while in the 2016 T20 World Cup, they secured a memorable win over eventual champions West Indies. "We haven't had those victories in T20 World Cups. We had in ODI, but in T20, I feel like this was one of the best performance from the guys," said the skipper who starred in his masterful bowling act of 4/17.



Rahmanullah Gurbaz blasted 80 from 56 deliveries while fellow opener Ibrahim Zadran added 44 from 41 to

give them a flying start. In reply, left-arm seamer Farooqi, who claimed five wickets against Uganda on Monday, grabbed 4/17 from just 3.2 overs, matching his skipper's bowling figures. "It's not just about a single guy...It's a great team effort, the way Gurbaz and Ibrahim started the innings. For Afghans, cricket is their biggest source of joy and Rashid was thankful to the fans, who don't care about time difference when the national team's match is aired live. "They don't miss our games. We play at 3am, 4am or 1am, they're always up. Not only in Afghanistan, all around the world, wherever they are, they're going to watch the game. They don't miss the game. "Cricket is a biggest source of happiness back home. And I'm very sure this will give them so much to enjoy, to celebrate this victory," he said.

Simulation on uneven tracks: Rohit ignores blow and trains hard along with Kohli

PTI ■ NEW YORK
Rohit Sharma was struck on the thumb by a throwdown but didn't seem perturbed as Indian batters put in additional hours at the nets to counter the uneven bounce that might help Pakistan's pace attack during their marquee T20 World Cup clash here on Sunday. Rohit, while facing left-arm throwdown specialist Nuwan Senewiratne, got hit on his left thumb by a delivery that lifted from the back of a good length area. The Indian skipper looked in discomfort but shrugged it off as he continued to bat on. Rohit was then seen moving to the other end of the pitch to face the throwdowns. The drop-in tracks at the Nassau County cricket ground have copped a lot of flak for the uneven bounce as balls are flying thick and fast from length due to wide cracks which are being rolled to

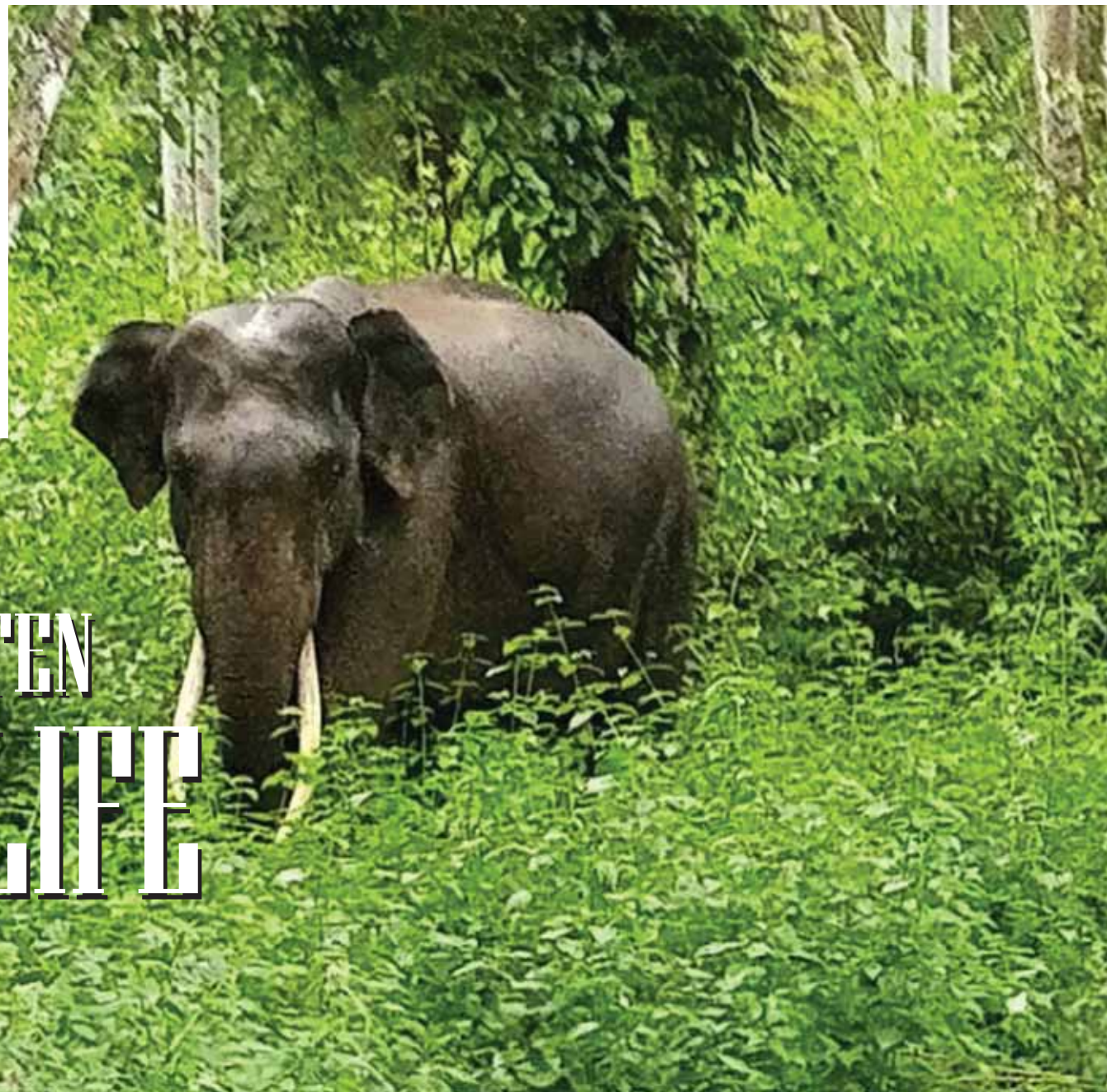
create an even-bounce strip. The Indian bowlers had a field day bowling out Ireland for 96 but Rohit and the senior pros know that against Shaheen Shah Afridi, Mohammed Amir, Haris Rauf and Naseem Shah, the challenge will be very different. And hence, the coaching staff made three of the six drop-in practice strips at the Cantiague Park in Long Islands into abrasive ones with cracks to ensure proper match-simulation for top-order batters. The Indian team's determination to dominate on tracks with dual bounce was evident if one cites an example of South African nets in the morning session on same tracks. While Kagiso Rabada and Anrich Nortje sent down their thunderbolts, none of the top Proteas batters wanted to risk getting injured ahead of the game against the Netherlands. In contrast, their Indian counterparts embraced the testing conditions, using them to prepare



for the upcoming challenge of facing the Pakistani attack on tracks where teams haven't crossed the 100-run mark in four out of six innings. There were no half-measures for the Indian skipper, Virat Kohli and others during a three-hour afternoon session where they faced Jasprit Bumrah, Arshdeep Singh, Khaleel Ahmed and Mohammed Siraj. Kohli, Pant and Suryakumar Yadav were the first Indian batters to hit the nets. They faced the likes of Arshdeep, Bumrah, Siraj, Khaleel along with the throwdown specialists who were hitting the hard length on a consistent basis. For the batters, the focus was on negotiating the uneven bounce which was very much evident on those practice pitches. **KULDEEP'S MATCH-UP AGAINST PAKISTAN:** Left-arm wrist spinner Kuldeep Yadav has a fantastic match-up against Pakistani batters as one has seen in 50-over games but whether

India would want to throw him in the middle in place of an Axar Patel remains to be seen. If one looked at Babar Azam, his strike-rate against orthodox left-arm spinners is only a shade over 112 and hence Axar's dart-like deliveries on leg-middle could be very effective. Kuldeep, who was surprisingly not picked in the playing XI in India's tournament opener against Ireland, had a long workout at the nets along with other spinners like Axar, Ravindra Jadeja and Yuzvendra Chahal. Against spinners, the batters were seen playing quite a few cross-batted shots like sweeps and reverse-sweeps. As the nets session drew to a close, Jadeja and Shivam Dube took their turns batting, with Kohli joining them for his second stint of the day. The practice concluded with a team bonding session, as players relaxed and enjoyed a game of football, fostering a lighter atmosphere.

"If you can reach out and touch and love and be with wildlife, you will forever be changed, and you will want to make the world a better place."
— Terri Irwin



INVASIVE SPECIES THREATEN WAYANAD WILDLIFE SANCTUARY

Senna spectabilis planted with good intentions has become an ecological nightmare, swiftly overtaking large areas of the sanctuary. Its unchecked growth not only threatens biodiversity but also triggers a chain of ecological and economic repercussions, affecting both wildlife and local communities

Approximately one-fifth of the Earth's surface is threatened by invasive species. These biotic invaders, benefiting from rapid reproduction and a lack of natural predators, outcompete native species for vital resources like food, water, and habitat, posing a significant threat to biodiversity and ecosystem stability.

The Wayanad Wildlife Sanctuary (WWS), nestled in the heart of the Nilgiri Biosphere Reserve (NBR), is a biodiversity hotspot, brimming with a rich variety of flora and fauna. The sanctuary serves as a habitat for a substantial population of Asian elephants, along with over 3,700 documented species of plants and animals. Spanning an area of 344.44 km², the sanctuary is comprised of four distinct ranges: Sulthan Batherly, Muthanga, Kurichiat, and Tholpetty. Each range, with its distinct characteristics, adds to the rich tapestry of the WWS, making it a vital and vibrant hub of ecological diversity. However, this ecological paradise is under severe threat from several invasive species, including *Senna spectabilis*, *Lantana camara*, and *Acacia* species. This is particularly noticeable in the case of *Senna spectabilis*, which has proliferated aggressively throughout the WWS and beyond, affecting the NBR and the corresponding ecological continuum of three southern Indian states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and Karnataka. A decision made in good faith by the forest department in 1986 to plant *Senna spectabilis*, an ornamental tree with striking yellow flowers, has morphed into an ecological disaster. Little did one know, that this tropical American tree had a notorious history of invading continents, including parts of Asia, Africa, and Australia. By the time the mistake was realized, *Senna* had stealthily spread into many parts of the sanctuary. It expanded from covering less than 16 km² in 2013-2014 to 89 km² in 2019 and now stands at a staggering 123.86 km². Considering the total area of the sanctuary is 344.44 km², *Senna* has already engulfed 35% of it. If this trend is not curbed, the entire sanctuary could be swamped within a decade, turning it into a dense *Senna* forest.

A 2021 study has revealed that the Asian elephant, a significant inhabitant of the sanctuary, is aiding the spread of the invasive *Senna spectabilis*. The elephant's dung provides a fertile environment for the *Senna* seeds to sprout, with a single pile of dung found to contain



BKP SINHA



ARVIND K JHA

approximately 2000 seeds. The study also found other mammals, such as the chital and the Indian crested porcupine, contributing to the spread of *Senna*. The researchers observed that the fruiting period of *Senna* trees in the summer coincides with a high concentration of elephants in Wayanad due to their seasonal migration. This synchronicity could potentially expedite the plant's dispersal across the landscape, particularly in micro-habitats commonly inhabited by elephants.

A single *Senna* pod harbours over a hundred seeds, and a medium-sized tree can yield at least one lakh seeds. The invasive nature of the *Senna* species has had a significant impact on the local ecosystem. It has displaced native vegetation by monopolizing the area and inhibiting the growth of species like grass, bamboo and several other minor forest produce.

The *Senna* tree employs a unique method of colonizing its surroundings. It releases specific substances, known as allelochemicals, either directly onto the target plants or indirectly into the surrounding soil. These allelochemicals interfere with the normal growth processes of other plants, providing the *Senna* tree with a competitive advantage. The dominance of the *Senna* tree has significant implications for the livelihoods of rural and tribal people who rely on non-timber forest produce, like amla or gooseberry, for sustenance. Many edible items like berries, mushrooms, and wild tubers, which were once a significant part of the tribal diet, are gradually disappearing from the forest.

The bitter leaves and irritating bark of *Senna* do not find favour with herbivores resulting in a decline in their numbers in the area. This has had a cascading effect on the region's tiger population, which has decreased from 120 in 2018 to 84 in 2023. The scarcity of prey in the *Senna*-dominated areas is believed to be driving tigers to migrate in search of richer hunting grounds. Similarly, elephants are moving into areas outside the forests in their quest for food and water. Unfortunately, this has led to increased human-elephant conflicts, resulting in a backlash against the preservation efforts of elephants. The ecological disruption has had an unexpected benefit for local communities. With fewer wildlife incursions, settlements near the jungle have seen a significant drop in crop damage and cattle lifting incidents. The data from the past three years shows a downward trend in compensation claims



by farmers for crop raids. In the fiscal year 2021-22, there were 734 cases of crop damage reported in the border agrarian hamlets of WWS. This figure fell to 475 in 2022-23, and in 2023-24, the number has further decreased to just 93 cases. Similarly, cattle lifting cases have also seen a decline, from 83 cases in 2021-22 to a mere 19 in 2023-24. While the decrease in human-wildlife conflict might be viewed as a positive development by those seeking to address this issue, the underlying causes warrant serious concern. Locals like Mr. Stanley Augustine, a member of the Biodiversity Management Committee of Poothadi village, find these changes deeply troubling, particularly from the standpoint of the rural economy. The area is witnessing a worrying decline in agricultural productivity and an increasing trend of farmers abandoning their paddy fields. The forests too are under mounting pressure. The real challenge, therefore, lies in re-establishing equilibrium in the WWS while simultaneously securing the future of the human communities in the area. In response to these challenges, the Forest Department has launched an initiative known as the 'Senna Eradication and Forest Regeneration

Project'. The project, supported by the National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development, has a budget of Rs 5.31 crore. The initiative is currently being implemented in the Kurichiat and Muthanga forest ranges, to eradicate *Senna* from 1,672 hectares. To further support this initiative, the sanctuary authorities are exploring partnerships with the newsprint industry, taking inspiration from Tamil Nadu. The state government there has allowed the Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Papers Ltd (TNPL) to extract invasive trees like Wattles and *Senna* for paper production. In return, TNPL compensates the Forest Department and employs various extraction techniques, attempting to turn an ecological challenge into an opportunity for resource utilization. In some areas, invasive plants, including *Senna*, are being repurposed to manufacture furniture. *Senna*, in particular, is valued as a timber source for making lightweight furniture and other wooden products. There is hope that policy changes could permit the extraction of *Senna* from forest areas and its subsequent sale outside. Such changes could potentially motivate the local community to actively participate in clearing the forest of this invasive plant.

The process of removing the *Senna* tree, however, is fraught with challenges.

Traditional methods such as uprooting, girdling, and herbicide application for eliminating *Senna* from the area are labour-intensive, costly, and environmentally damaging. Uprooting large *Senna* trees could disturb the soil, leading to erosion, especially in hilly areas that receive high rainfall. Techniques like girdling and felling can inadvertently harm non-target species. Moreover, the use of herbicides may contaminate water sources and negatively impact the area's biodiversity. Additionally, the resilience of the *Senna* tree is evident in its ability to regenerate from lateral roots, which complicates its eradication. Given these challenges, it is clear that innovative and sustainable strategies are needed to manage and ultimately remove the *Senna* species while simultaneously assisting the re-establishment of local species.

As we forge ahead, conservation measures must be holistic, encompassing not only the immediate environs of the sanctuary but also the larger watersheds and catchment areas that feed into the rivers. This holistic approach is particularly significant for Wayanad, the source of the Kabini River. The health of this river is essential for sustaining the lives and livelihoods of communities across Kerala, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu. Notably, initiatives are in progress to increase the flow of the Kabini River—a major tributary of the Kaveri River—to address the issue of water scarcity in Bengaluru.

The situation in Wayanad is a stark reminder of the domino effect triggered by the introduction of invasive species. The ecological and economic ramifications are far-reaching, impacting not just the wildlife within the sanctuary but also the lives and livelihoods of communities dwelling in its vicinity and beyond. The fight to save Wayanad is a race against time. If immediate and decisive action is not taken, the future of this biodiversity hotspot and the well-being of the millions who depend on it hang in the balance. Wayanad's plight serves as a cautionary tale, urging us to prioritize rigorous scientific evaluation before introducing any new species in an area and to act swiftly and collaboratively in the face of ecological threats posed by invasive species.

(The writers are Former Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, UP and Maharashtra; views expressed are personal)

“A SINGLE SENNA POD HARBOURS OVER A HUNDRED SEEDS, AND A MEDIUM-SIZED TREE CAN YIELD AT LEAST ONE LAKH SEEDS. THE INVASIVE NATURE OF THE SENNA SPECIES HAS HAD A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT ON THE LOCAL ECOSYSTEM. IT HAS DISPLACED NATIVE VEGETATION BY MONOPOLIZING THE AREA AND INHIBITING THE GROWTH OF SPECIES LIKE GRASS, BAMBOO AND SEVERAL OTHER MINOR FOREST PRODUCE”



DISCOVER THE DESERT SERENGETI AND ENCHANTING ISLAND OF BUTTERFLIES

Sharjah creates a 'la African Safari' in the Desert and its commitment to nature shines at Al Noor Island, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

Sharjah, a jewel in the crown of the United Arab Emirates, boasts a captivating terrain that marries the charm of golden deserts with the allure of pristine coastlines along the Arabian Gulf. The landscape is punctuated by rolling sand dunes, tranquil oases, and rugged mountains that rise in the eastern region, creating a picturesque backdrop to its vibrant cityscape. Sharjah's climate is characterized by its arid nature, with hot summers that see temperatures soar, and mild, pleasant winters that offer a refreshing respite. The gentle coastal breeze, coupled with the serene desert air, weaves a unique atmospheric tapestry, making Sharjah a place of both stark beauty and subtle elegance. However, it lacks the lush green vegetation and abundance found in tropical climates. Yet, this absence is masterfully compensated by human ingenuity, as nature is carefully crafted and enhanced through thoughtful intervention.

Sharjah has been a beacon of cultural heritage in the region. However, not many people know its commitment towards nature. In fact, it has one of the rarest treats around the world to showcase which has never tried elsewhere on the large scale. Sharjah's commitment to preserving nature and promoting biodiversity is exemplified through its innovative projects, notably creating Serengeti and Sawana in the heart of the desert and organising the African Safari in the desert. As if that was not enough it also has a full-on nature conservation project at in Al Noor Island which hosts thousands of species of plants and birds and has a unique Butterfly House. These initiatives reflect Sharjah's dedication to balancing development with sustainability and fostering a deep respect for the natural world.

A 'LA AFRICAN SAFARI' IN THE DESERT

Sharjah's African Safari, set against the backdrop of the Arabian Desert, is a testament to the emirate's vision of creating unique and sustainable tourism experiences. This ambitious project recreates the diverse ecosystems of Africa, providing a sanctuary for a wide range of species in an environment that mirrors their natural habitats. The African Safari in Sharjah is not just a tourist attraction; it is a conservation effort aimed at protecting endangered



species and educating the public about wildlife and ecosystems. The park hosts animals such as giraffes, zebras, elephants and various species of antelope, living in conditions that closely resemble their native habitats. This approach ensures that the animals can exhibit natural behaviours, contributing to their well-being and offering visitors an authentic experience. Sharjah's African Safari employs sustainable practices to minimise its environmental footprint. This includes the use of renewable energy sources, water conservation techniques, and eco-friendly infrastructure. The park also engages in breeding programs for

endangered species, playing a crucial role in global conservation efforts. By fostering a connection between visitors and wildlife, the safari park encourages a greater appreciation for the natural world and the importance of its preservation.

AL NOOR ISLAND: WHERE SERENITY AND ART COME TOGETHER

Nestled in the heart of Khalid Lagoon, Al Noor Island is a testament to Sharjah's vision of blending nature, art, and culture. Since its opening in 2015, this picturesque island has become a beloved destination for both locals and

tourists, offering a serene escape and a feast for the senses. Al Noor Island is more than just a park; it is an embodiment of Sharjah's commitment to enhancing the quality of life through innovative public spaces that foster a connection with nature and the arts. Al Noor Island spans 45,470 square meters and is adorned with a rich variety of flora, creating a verdant oasis in the middle of the city. The island's landscaping features over 70,000 plants and trees from around the world, carefully curated to thrive in the local climate. This lush greenery provides a habitat for diverse wildlife, including numerous bird species that find sanctuary on the island. The meticulously maintained gardens offer visitors a tranquil environment to unwind and connect with nature.

The Butterfly House

One of the island's crown jewels is the Butterfly House, an architectural marvel that houses over 500 exotic butterflies. The structure itself, designed with intricate latticework inspired by Islamic art, is a sight to behold. Inside, the climate-controlled environment mimics tropical conditions, allowing butterflies to flourish year-round. Visitors can walk among the butterflies, witnessing their delicate beauty up close and learning about their life cycles and ecological importance. The Butterfly House is not only a visual delight but also an educational experience, emphasizing the significance of conservation.

Art Installations and Sculptures

Al Noor Island is dotted with stunning art installations and sculptures, seamlessly integrating art with nature. These pieces,

created by renowned artists from around the world, add a layer of cultural richness to the island. Notable installations include the "OVO" art sculpture, a glowing egg-shaped structure that symbolizes rebirth and renewal, and the "Torus" sculpture by David Harber, which captures the interplay of light and shadow.

The island caters to visitors of all ages with its well-designed children's playground and exercise facilities. The playground is equipped with safe, modern equipment that encourages imaginative play, while the exercise stations offer adults a chance to stay active in a scenic setting.

Night Illumination

As the sun sets, Al Noor Island transforms into a magical landscape illuminated by artistic lighting. The island's pathways and installations glow with soft, colourful lights, creating an enchanting atmosphere. This nighttime transformation offers a unique experience, making evening visits to the island particularly memorable. Al Noor Island exemplifies Sharjah's dedication to sustainability and environmental preservation. The island employs eco-friendly practices, such as using solar energy for lighting and maintaining a commitment to water conservation. These efforts ensure that the island remains a green and sustainable haven for future generations.

Al Noor Island also plays a vital role in community engagement and education. It regularly hosts workshops, guided tours, and cultural events that promote environmental awareness and appreciation for the arts. These programs aim to foster a sense of responsibility and connection to the natural world among visitors.

Al Noor Island as its African safari is a shining example of Sharjah's innovative approach to nature conservation with cultural enrichment. This serene oasis offers a retreat from the hustle and bustle of city life, inviting visitors to explore its lush landscapes, admire its art installations, and engage with its diverse flora and fauna. Through Al Noor Island, Sharjah demonstrates its commitment to creating spaces that nurture the soul, inspire the mind, and promote a sustainable future. Whether you're a nature lover, art enthusiast, or simply seeking peace and tranquillity, Al Noor Island is a destination that promises to captivate and inspire.

Bookmark these boutique destinations for a summer getaway

BY RUPALI DEAN

STERLING PARK, KALIMPONG

Where? Ringkingpong Rd, Kalimpong, Khasmahal, Kalimpong, West Bengal. Nestled in the scenic mid-range of the Himalayas, at a lofty 4,100 feet above sea level lies Kalimpong—a perfect fusion of serene mountain vistas and vibrant cultural encounters, offering an enchanting getaway for those in search of an unforgettable holiday experience. This cultural hub, blending influences from Indian, Chinese, Nepalese, and Tibetan traditions, provides a captivating and immersive retreat.

Perched atop a hill with a panoramic view of the snow-capped Himalayan peaks, Sterling Park Kalimpong resides in a historic edifice once owned by the Maharaja of Dinajpur, allowing guests a peek into a majestic bygone era. The vistas of Mt Kanchenjunga and other majestic peaks like Pandim and Narsingh, alongside the historic Jelep-la and Nathu-la Passes, resonate with old tales of the Silk Trade Route winding through Lhasa to Tibet. This mountain retreat, situated away from the urban hustle of downtown Kalimpong, exudes an aura of old-world charm with its colonial-era architecture adorned with intricate woodwork, vintage furnishings, and spacious verandahs, transporting guests



back to a nostalgic age. The lavishly appointed rooms and suites boast breath-taking views of the majestic Himalayas, creating a perfect sanctuary for relaxation. Guests can unwind on the cosy patio, indulge in the finest Darjeeling tea, or revel in the tranquility of the lush courtyard surroundings. The signature restaurant, Kokomendo, beckons visitors with a diverse array of Indian, Continental, Chinese, Nepalese, and Tibetan delicacies. Together with Sterling Park Kalimpong, Darjeeling, and Gangtok Orange Village, they form a delightful mountain circuit in the Eastern Himalayan foothills, promising an

unforgettable journey for nature and culture enthusiasts alike.

BAREFOOT BUNGALOW, CHAMBA

Where? Buranskhanda, Chamba-Mussoorie Road, Buranskhanda, Dehradun, Uttarakhand. Set amidst the enchanting Himalayan landscape, Barefoot Bungalow, a luxurious 3-bedroom homestay in Buranskhanda, offers a sublime escape from the routine of daily life. Located just 25 kilometres from the renowned hill station of Mussoorie, this serene refuge captures the essence of tranquillity and natural beauty in the Garhwal Himalayas.

At the heart of Barefoot Bungalow lies a deep commitment to hospitality, where a dedicated team of professionals ensures that guests are pampered and well looked after. This pet-friendly haven features a personal butler and a talented in-house chef named Arjun, who delights guests with delicious home-cooked meals. The cosy wooden interiors create a warm hill station ambiance, perfect for creating memorable evenings by the bonfire, accompanied by live music performances or the inviting glow of an indoor fireplace. Guests at Barefoot Bungalow can indulge in a culinary delight at the glasshouse restaurant, where they

can watch their meals being freshly prepared in a live kitchen setting.

The expansive 14,000-square-foot private garden, embellished with ponds and meticulously landscaped, provides a lush sanctuary for relaxation and reflection. And to top it all off, sweeping views of the majestic snow-capped Himalayan range serve as a breath-taking backdrop to this picturesque retreat.

ONENESS, RISHIKESH

Where? Rishikesh, Badrinath Highway, Byasi, Uttarakhand. Cocooned within a Lower Shivalik mountain valley, 30 kilometres away from Rishikesh, this resort is

a harmonious blend of river, flora, and fauna, inviting guests to embark on a mesmerizing journey where nature's wild beauty takes centre stage and showcases a diverse array of Sal, Haldu, Figs, and Mulberry trees, forming a biodiverse sanctuary. This lively mountain retreat encourages visitors to immerse themselves in the wilderness, surrounded by monkeys, langurs, wild cats, the elusive Black Bear, and the captivating Scarlet Minivet. Its commitment to ecology shines through in the careful planting of 30,000 saplings of over 50 medicinal plants, fostering a flourishing ecosystem that embodies the ethos of the resort.

As the Ganges flows below, resonating with the sacred energy of Devprayag, spirituality becomes intricately woven into the fabric of Oneness. Guests can luxuriate in unparalleled comfort within the Luxury Cottages, each intricately designed to provide a unique and immersive stay. From the spacious and finely appointed rooms to the breath-taking views of the gardens and mountains, every aspect has been thoughtfully curated to offer an unforgettable escape. Beyond being just a resort, on offer is an immersive journey.

Engage in a variety of inclusive activities, ranging from leisurely beach moments to captivating stargazing sessions. For our younger guests, an array of kid's activities awaits. Furthermore, optional activities such as Fun Family Float and Memory Plantation present distinctive and memorable experiences. Go for an adventure intertwined with the allure of unspoiled wilderness. Your expedition commences with experienced guides guiding you through a brief hike, unveiling the untouched beauty of the Lower Shivalik mountains. The path then seamlessly transitions to a unique river crossing experience via a raft, adding a touch of thrill to your sojourn.

(Awarded the 'Best food writer in the country' by the Indian culinary forum, WACS and the Ministry of Tourism, Rupali Dean writes on food and travel)

GAJRAJ RAO, the Newgen method actor, redefines the cinematic experience by performing even non-descript roles with élan. This journey explores the nuances of his method acting, writes **GYANESHWAR DAYAL**

THE METHOD HIS MADNESS

Gajraj Rao, a name that resonates with authenticity and a deep understanding of character portrayal, has carved a niche for himself in the Indian film industry through a blend of meticulous method acting and a rich repertoire of roles. Rao's journey from the sidelines to the spotlight is a testament to his dedication, perseverance, and exceptional talent. Gajraj Rao's foray into acting was marked by a series of small but significant roles that gradually built his reputation as a reliable character actor. Born in Dungarpur, Rajasthan, Rao's initial years in the industry were filled with struggles and uncredited roles. His career began in the late 1990s, with minor roles in films and television. However, his ability to imbue even the smallest roles with depth and realism did not go unnoticed. Rao's breakthrough came with the 2018 film *Badhaai Ho*, where he played Jeetender Kaushik, a middle-aged man who discovers his wife's unexpected pregnancy. The film's success catapulted Rao into the limelight, earning him critical acclaim and several awards. His portrayal of Jeetender Kaushik was lauded for its warmth, subtlety, and humor, marking a significant shift in the perception of middle-aged characters in Indian cinema.

What sets Gajraj Rao apart is his approach to method acting. Rao's dedication to his craft involves deep immersion into his characters. He often spends extensive time understanding the background, motivations, and nuances of the roles he portrays. This approach allows him to deliver performances that are both authentic and relatable. Method acting, a technique pioneered by Konstantin Stanislavski and later popularized by Lee Strasberg, emphasizes the psychological and emotional aspects of character development. Rao's use

of this technique involves drawing from his own experiences and emotions to bring a character to life. His preparation often includes detailed research, observing people with similar backgrounds to his characters, and even adopting their mannerisms and speech patterns. Rao's impact on modern Indian cinema extends beyond his performances. He represents a shift towards more realistic and nuanced storytelling in Bollywood. Films like *Shubh Mangal Zyada Saavdhan* and *Lootcase* further showcase his versatility, moving away from stereotypical depictions to more layered and authentic characters. In contemporary cinema, method actors like Gajraj Rao are redefining the narrative. They are moving away from the star-centric approach to one that values story and character depth. This trend is visible in the rise of content-driven films and web series that focus on everyday stories and real-life issues. And the time is ripe for such experiments. "Twenty years back I, Pankaj Tripathi, Nawazuddin Siddiqui and many others could not imagine of getting a significant role. Hindi cinema is more democratic and character

driven and gives chance to everyone," says Rao. Method actors today are increasingly collaborating with directors and writers to develop well-rounded characters. They are involved in the creative process from the early stages, contributing to script development and character arcs. This collaborative approach results in performances that are not just believable but also deeply engaging. While method acting is rewarding, it is also challenging. The emotional toll of deeply immersing oneself in a character can be significant. For Rao, balancing the intense preparation required for his roles with his personal life is a constant challenge. However, his passion for acting and his commitment to his craft continue to drive him forward. "I have theatre background where script is very important which all of us cherish. Then we prepare for the role meticulously. What viewers see on the screen is culmination of that preparation." Looking ahead, Gajraj Rao's journey seems poised for further success. With the increasing popularity of OTT platforms and a growing

audience for nuanced storytelling, actors like Rao are likely to find even more opportunities to showcase their talent. His upcoming projects are eagerly awaited by fans and critics alike, who expect nothing short of brilliance from this seasoned actor. Gajraj Rao's journey as an actor is an inspiring tale of perseverance, talent, and the power of method acting. His contributions to Indian cinema have paved the way for more realistic and relatable storytelling. As he continues to explore new horizons, Rao remains a beacon of authenticity and excellence in the world of acting, embodying the transformative power of method acting in modern cinema. In the film *Maidaan*, Gajraj Rao excels in his role by bringing a nuanced depth and authenticity that enhances the movie's historical and emotional landscape. The film, directed by Amit Ravindernath Sharma, chronicles the golden era of Indian football from 1952 to 1962, focusing on the life of Syed Abdul Rahim, the coach who led the Indian team to remarkable victories. Rao portrays a pivotal character whose support and conflict with the protagonist add layers to the narrative, showcasing his ability to seamlessly blend into the historical setting while delivering a performance that is both compelling and resonant. His meticulous approach to embodying his character contributes significantly to the film's overall impact, making *Maidaan* a captivating tribute to a lesser-known yet glorious chapter of Indian sports history.

WHAT SETS GAJRAJ RAO APART IS HIS APPROACH TO METHOD ACTING. RAO'S DEDICATION TO HIS CRAFT INVOLVES DEEP IMMERSION INTO HIS CHARACTERS. HE OFTEN SPENDS EXTENSIVE TIME UNDERSTANDING THE BACKGROUND, MOTIVATIONS, AND NUANCES OF THE ROLES HE PORTRAYS. THIS APPROACH ALLOWS HIM TO DELIVER PERFORMANCES THAT ARE BOTH AUTHENTIC AND RELATABLE



Photo: Pankaj Kumar/Pioneer

Reflections on Acting, Challenges and Audience Influence

MAHESH THAKUR shares insights into his illustrious acting career, spanning television and cinema. From memorable roles to industry evolution, he reflects on the challenges and successes that have shaped him as an artist. In a conversation with **SAKSHI PRIYA**, he also opens up about his recent show *Aangan Aapno Kaa*, shedding light on his experience playing a father's role in this heartwarming project

What motivates you to continue acting and how do you view the role of the audience in your career?

I get the audience's love and reaction. Being an actor means experiencing the audience's reactions, which keep me going. They encourage me to do better. I would say it is the audience that inspires me to act.

Among the numerous characters you've portrayed, which role has been the most memorable for you and why?

I think a role that is very different from my personality would be Tej Singh Oberoi from *Ishqbaaz*. That character is nothing like me and I had to create a persona that was really nasty, cunning and thought differently. It's a really interesting character that I played, so I would definitely give credit to that role. Generally, the roles I play are similar to my personality and I feel that's not very challenging but the role in *Ishqbaaz* was challenging. Playing the honorable Prime Minister Narendra Modi was also challenging because it is difficult to embody a character who is very much in the public eye. Another challenging role was playing Sadhu Vaswani. All these characters are memorable because they are different from who I am.

You've often played positive characters. Did you relish the opportunity to portray a villain in *Ishqbaaz*, and how did you approach that transformation?

First of all, in television, we have very different ways of working. The episodes and scripts come on set, so we don't have time to

do much homework. My basic approach in the initial days when I worked on any television character, which is very different from the rest, is to do a lot of reading. I read one to six episodes, and once I am done with reading, I try to get into the character and experiment with different voice modulations in my own space. I try taking pauses when delivering dialogues and ensure that I don't repeat certain expressions. In *Ishqbaaz*, my character was so negative that I didn't want my kids to watch it, as they were very young at that time.

What have been some of the biggest challenges and successes in your acting career and how have they shaped you as an artist?

One of the biggest challenges in my acting career was transitioning to television. When I started doing daily soaps, I realised that you put in just as much hard work as you do in films but it's for one telecast. After that, it's gone and often forgotten. As actors, we used to be very particular about giving a fantastic shot, striving for perfection. However, in television, you don't have much time. You get only a few minutes and maybe 4 to 5 takes to get the shot right. No matter how perfect a shot I gave, there was always room for improvement, but in television, it often goes unnoticed because it airs only once and then it's long gone. This was a learning experience for me, helping me understand that, at the end of the day, actors are a product of the writing and direction. It's not just about the actor. Many actors in the

industry think it's all about them, believing that their performance alone makes a movie or show a hit. But that's not true. It's teamwork that makes a project successful. TV has taught me humility as an actor. It made me realise that while an actor might attract the audience for the initial viewing, it's the combined effort of the entire team that makes a lasting impact.

You've seen the television industry evolve over the years. How do you think it has changed, and what are your thoughts on the current trends in TV shows and content?

Yes, definitely. The sensibility has changed. Audiences are now more open to rich subjects and they have a say in what they want to see. You can't disregard the audience today. You have to be very careful. People always try to bifurcate between whether a film is for villagers, town people or two-tier towns. I think that divide is disappearing. We have to ensure that the content generated is not just to cater to one segment, as the divide is reducing between these three categories, thanks to the internet. Everyone now has access to all sorts of content. So, as a content creator, you have to keep everyone in mind, not just a single type of audience.

Looking back on your time working with Sridevi, is there a specific scene or moment from *Malini Iyer* that stands out in your memory?

Sridevi Ma'am was and will always be a legend because she was one of the first heroines where movies were made if she said yes to a project, like



Chandni, Lamhe, and all these beautiful films she was a part of. No matter how much I say about her or praise her, it will always be less.

Recently, you are working on a project, *Aangan Aapno Kaa*. How has your experience been playing the father's role in this project?

I am playing the character of a dad, and it's great. As I said, you need a good team of actors, and we have a very good team here,

especially my daughter, with whom I am very close and interact with often. There are always lots of hugging scenes, giving love, and treating them like babies, so we have to get into a very comfortable zone. Even on the set, they call me Papa instead of Mahesh Ji, and I am good with that. They are very sweet co-actors.

What was your experience like working on *Dil, Dosti Dilemma*, especially considering the

fantastic team of women involved, from the director to the producer?

Dil, Dosti Dilemma was great fun because we had a fantastic team filled with women, from the director to the producer. It was nice seeing all the women coming into action and working so brilliantly as a team. I enjoyed my time in *Dil, Dosti Dilemma*, and it was shot beautifully. The story was one of the simplest out there on the streaming platform. You can watch it and have a great time with your loved ones. It was an extremely sweet story, and I just loved working on the project.

How do you approach acting in different mediums like films, television and web series? Do you have a preference among these mediums?

An actor is always an actor; they should not choose any medium. The only difference between TV and film is not that much. The major difference between working in front of the camera and on stage is significant. When you go on stage, there is a difference in working in front of the camera. In front of the camera, you have to take care of lights, know which dialogue to say and when and work with the cameraman, co-actors and director, so there are lots of things happening in one shot. It's pretty complicated for a person who starts straight in TV and film because lots are happening on sets. When you do a stage, it's all about you. You forget your line, you're supposed to carry on; you are not supposed to stand blank on the stage because you have a live audience watching you. So, that's more challenging,

I feel, for actors working on stage because it's all about dialogue delivery, trying to work on body language, so much is happening on stage that it's more of a challenge rather than working in the medium of TV and film. Acting on TV and film is also challenging but not as challenging as the stage. Also, if you're good on stage, it doesn't mean you can be good in front of the TV and camera because you have to control your expression and not go too loud because TV is a subtle medium. One thing I learned about the theatre is that in theatre, you have to pronounce your words; you cannot speak loudly. The last person sitting on the back bench in the auditorium should be able to listen to you. It's not about raising your voice; it's literally pronunciation which goes right up to the end.

Many actors look up to your career. What piece of advice would you give to someone just starting out in television acting?

To all the new actors, hang in there. Hanging in doesn't mean losing your patience, balance or giving up. This is one of the most difficult professions you could choose. If you have multiple choices, I would say let acting be the last one you go for. But if you are going for it, then be resilient. You have to be there because you never know when the right break will happen for you and when things will start working in your favor. Don't give up. If you are an actor, you should think about it as always being an actor; otherwise, you will never get anywhere. So, choose your profession wisely.



YOUR WEEK AHEAD

MADHU KOTIYA



ARIES March 21-April 19

This week promises a blend of prosperity and challenge. Financial gains are anticipated from multiple avenues, boosting your earnings. However, a busy schedule and possible travel for work might lead to stress. Expect a twist of sudden changes as the week progresses. Embracing a mindset of detachment from unproductive ties can enrich your life, leading to greater depth and fulfillment. Towards the week's close, you might find yourself driven by a strong urge to acquire wealth and possessions, although these might not hold substantial value. Caution is advised against starting new projects now, as impulsive actions could lead to setbacks. Staying optimistic will be a challenge, but maintaining a positive outlook is crucial to navigate through any negativity.

Lucky number 10 | **Lucky colour** White
Lucky day Monday



LEO July 23-Aug 22

This period heralds a time of divine favor and blessings, making you the focal point of your own narrative filled with joy, marvel, and revitalization. You will find harmony across your mental, spiritual, and physical states. Expect your standing to be positively influenced during this time. A surge of bravery, optimism, and creativity will infuse your days, and you'll find relief in concluding longstanding matters. You are on the brink of embracing new perspectives and opportunities that promise a brighter future. Anticipate changes that might include new routines, dietary plans, employment, or even acquiring a new vehicle. Embrace the possibility of novel experiences and ventures. The conclusion of the week promises familial happiness and the potential for significant commitments or collaborations, fostering a sense of fulfillment on both emotional and spiritual fronts.

Lucky number 6 | **Lucky colour** Black
Lucky day Sunday



SAGITTARIUS Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, delve into the profound realm of inner resilience. Rather than succumbing to the sway of emotions, you are invited to cultivate a grounded spirit and composed demeanor. This strength stems from the depth of your character and empowers you to navigate through complexities with a clear heart, stripping away any deceptions. During this period, you may find inspiration and guidance from a wise individual, often a woman known for her deep understanding and sharp intuition. Consider embracing her insights or emulating her approach as you chart your path forward. Additionally, this is an opportune moment for spiritual awakening. Engage in mindfulness practices such as meditation or yoga, and reconnect with your spiritual beliefs. Let go of mere fantasies and fleeting dreams; the journey ahead calls for your undivided focus and authentic presence.

Lucky number 17 | **Lucky colour** Off White
Lucky day Monday



TAURUS April 20-May 20

This week presents an excellent opportunity to harness your inherent creativity to generate income. You possess a unique strength bestowed upon you, allowing you to turn your visions into reality. Positive developments are expected from the decisions you make. Your diverse abilities to articulate every thought clearly will leave a lasting impression on those around you, signaling a prosperous period ahead. Mid-week, you may encounter some temporary constraints causing delays in your activities. However, your perseverance and resolve will guide you through, keeping you on track toward your objectives. Expect some encouraging news from abroad. By the end of this week, you will find both financial stability and emotional satisfaction.

Lucky number 3 | **Lucky colour** Red
Lucky day Wednesday



VIRGO Aug 23-Sep 22

This week, you'll find yourself making firm decisions regarding both your home life and career. Your resilient nature will empower you to tackle life's hurdles with bravery. You may encounter disagreements and personality clashes, which will require a thoughtful approach to resolve. It's a time for reevaluating outdated beliefs and customs, inviting transformation in various areas such as work, living arrangements, and personal relationships. You might face some health challenges or overwhelming stress. Feeling a pull towards deepening your inner life will be significant during these trying moments. As the week progresses, a shift towards positivity will occur. You'll start feeling more at ease, healthier, and financially stable, leading to an overall sense of satisfaction and a desire for a more comfortable lifestyle. Your compassionate nature will drive you to support those in need.

Lucky number 9 | **Lucky colour** Indigo
Lucky day Friday



CAPRICORN Dec 22-Jan 19

This week promises to be a whirlwind of activity, touching on every facet of your life. It kicks off with a focus on home-related matters. For those unattached, significant commitments loom on the horizon. As the week progresses, expect some travel opportunities to arise. Your professional life will consume much of your time as you strive for excellence in your craft, working tirelessly toward your aspirations. Additionally, a joyful family event, possibly welcoming a new member, may occur. By the week's end, the fruits of your labor will become apparent, with a notable improvement in your financial situation. Job seekers can anticipate receiving a promising offer from a prestigious company. It's a period to savor success and feel content.

Lucky number 1 | **Lucky colour** Jade Green
Lucky day Tuesday



GEMINI May 21-June 20

This week promises abundant reasons for joy. Life feels vibrant, and your journey is brightly lit by optimism. An uplifting energy seems to accompany you in all your endeavors, attracting others with your ability to spotlight the positive aspects of life and bring warmth to those around you. Midweek may bring a few challenges that could shake your composure, but rest assured, these are merely fleeting shadows. Soon, you will experience a renewed sense of fulfillment as if a benevolent force is aligning things in your favor. You'll likely notice significant advancements in your endeavors, marveling at the extent of your efforts towards achieving your goals. Expect improved outcomes in ongoing projects and a surge in recognition, possibly leading to opportunities that expand your horizons.

Lucky number 5 | **Lucky colour** Green
Lucky day Tuesday



LIBRA Sep 23-Oct 22

This week brims with opportunity and creativity. Your enthusiasm will surge, compelling you to embrace challenges with confidence. An inspiring thought or vision may captivate you, indicating you're on a successful trajectory, adept at managing both personal and professional obligations. Midweek brings moments of joy with family gatherings and celebrations, enhancing your emotional well-being. Significant achievements such as home renovations, celebratory events in honor of familial accomplishments, or exciting career developments like new roles or projects will contribute to your contentment. You'll find the environment charged with positive energy, making every moment enjoyable. By week's end, your resolve and strength serve as a beacon of inspiration, reflecting your successful endeavors.

Lucky number 11 | **Lucky colour** Yellow
Lucky day Wednesday



AQUARIUS Jan 20-Feb 18

This week, you will find yourself embracing life with grand enthusiasm and a sense of accomplishment. Expect to see substantial progress in your professional endeavors, accompanied by significant financial rewards that you might indulge in generously. Family demands will be met with your usual kindness and generosity, adding to your joy. Your partner may have some additional expectations during this period, yet you'll address these with openness and affection. Happiness within the household will be palpable, particularly through achievements or milestones reached by younger family members. However, some of you may experience a need for extra attention to your health, as emotional fluctuations or physical concerns could briefly disrupt your equilibrium. Remember to prioritize your well-being amidst the bustling activity.

Lucky number 14 | **Lucky colour** Mustard
Lucky day Friday



CANCER June 21-July 22

This period marks a crucial phase where your efforts lay the foundation for future outcomes. Progress might unfold gradually, yet your perseverance will ensure significant achievements. Harness your inner strength to tackle necessary tasks effectively, earning recognition and appreciation for your diligence. Your diverse skills will come to the forefront, drawing admiration for your resilience and drive. Your role as an inspirational force will uplift those around you. Effective communication will enhance your rapport with both peers and leaders, fostering a harmonious work environment. As the week concludes, a fresh wave of innovative thinking will enhance your projects, boosting your productivity in your professional pursuits. Additionally, you will experience a vibrant zest for life, enhancing both your personal joy and interpersonal connections. Embrace this time to relish and enrich your experiences.

Lucky number 12 | **Lucky colour** Lavender
Lucky day Thursday



SCORPIO Oct 23-Nov 21

Despite your consistent efforts across various fronts to secure a job, it seems that success remains elusive for now. Your dedication and drive are evident, but it appears financial gains might be challenging to come by this week. However, do not lose hope. As the days pass, promising opportunities are expected to emerge, potentially leading to significant achievements. You'll find support from influential figures in your life, such as family elders, who are eager to see you succeed. Remember, patience will be your greatest ally during this period. Maintaining a solid foundation in your endeavors will eventually lead to favorable outcomes. Stand firm as you approach the final steps towards your goal, for success is on the horizon, promising long-lasting benefits and broader opportunities.

Lucky number 16 | **Lucky colour** Purple
Lucky day Saturday



PISCES Feb 19-March 20

This week promises an increase in material well-being, inviting a deeper search for inner peace. You may find yourself drawn to reflective practices like yoga and meditation. Expect to devote time to hosting meaningful ceremonies that uplift the spirit. However, the week may also present challenges in your personal relationships, possibly causing friction or misunderstandings with a close partner. Such moments could lead to feelings of dissatisfaction and a sense of being emotionally drained. It's crucial now to clarify your aspirations and focus on the positive aspects of your circumstances. Viewing situations from a more optimistic perspective can prevent feelings of sadness and help you navigate through negativity with courage and resolve. Stay determined and use this period to strengthen rather than lose spirit.

Lucky number 15 | **Lucky colour** Brown
Lucky day Thursday

Madhu Kotiya is a tarot card reader, spiritual healer, and Founder, MShezaim Institute of Tarot and Divination. Contact details: madhu@indiatarot.com, www.indiatarot.com, M: 9873283331



ASTROTURF
BHARAT BHUSHAN PADMADEO

Can we reshape our destiny?

We begin life with high hopes and aspirations, bubbling with energy, and carrying a mind-set that would know no limits, as if nothing is beyond reach. Like a free bird, free from any geographical limitations, unhindered, we all wish to make it to our dream destination. But when faced with hard realities of life, and not being able to make it to the desired destination, we realise that life does not necessarily move to our asking. We then come under pressure and often resign to fate. But a few among us, unfazed by such challenges, make history. The question now is: Were those who created history so destined? Or that they could make it because they sincerely worked towards that end? Well, it is difficult to digest that history can be created by choice. But then focused efforts by choice and discrimination could lead to making history. Provided, such an endeavour ends up serving a meaningful purpose for the society at large. Let us first examine how our destiny is formed. It needs to be appreciated here that human beings enjoy the

exclusive privilege to guide their action by choice and discrimination. That however, is something like a double edged sword, as it carries equal probability of use and misuse. And there is nothing like a free lunch in life. We shall have to bear with the consequences of the choices made. We, thus, get trapped into a circuitous web of cause-effect chain. Following this very script, every happening is the culmination of doings in the past. And how we negotiate with the callings of the present, sets the ground on which future stands. This is the premise on which the concept of destiny works. If we look at this scheme of things on its face value, it would mean that our life is fated. Naturally arises the question: How can we escape the consequences of our own doing? If, however, we look deep into the founding principle on which the concept of destiny stands, it will come out that we are not helplessly fated beyond the scope of reprieve. The choice option itself enjoins upon us with the freedom to make conscientious choice intended to not simply overcome the carryover effect



of past doing. Also raise our awareness level through fresh educative inputs, which in turn, may help reshape the course of destiny afresh. The paradox, however, is that

seldom are people found ever using this option. But those few who used their choice option in this very spirit, were the ones who could make history. For, even in the event of failure, they

did not lose their nerve. They rather maintained calm and poise, geared up afresh, reaffirmed their resolve, and then made a fresh bid in right earnest towards the designated task. But not without identifying their inadequacies, which they acknowledged and then strived to overcome. They then, explored beyond the known, and equipped themselves adequately to strike upon even uncharted territory. So said swami Vevekanand: "The history of the world is the history of few men who had faith in themselves. Faith calls out divinity within you; you can do everything. You fail only when you do not strive sufficiently to manifest infinite power within." Truth remains that in so far as a being's making is concerned, potentially we carry immense mind-power, which if unfolded in full, would know no limits. The irony, however, is that being bound by cause-effect chain, we carry a very strong legacy from the past, which includes previous birth. That preconditions our mind one way or the other, depending on what short of individual specific experiences one would have had. The

imprints of these experiences that mind carries from the past, defines the unique character of a being. And that finds reflection by way of our inherent mental propensities – desire trends, likes & dislikes, prejudices and obsessions, habit & attitudes, and even virtues & attributes. That clouds our vision. Consequently, we fail to access full landscape of our mind. So, in effect, our mind-power gets compromised. It needs to be appreciated here that the choice option available with us very much enjoins upon us with the privilege to self-reflect and identify our inborn fault-lines. If we acknowledge them, and then consciously work upon to free our mind from all such limitations, the best in us will emerge. This is what swamiji's above quoted statement implies. Even astrology can prove handy in identifying our inborn traits and with a fair amount of precision. *The issue continues...* The writer is an astrologer, vastu consultant and spiritual counsellor. Connect with him at Tel: 91-11-9818037273/9871037272 Email: bharatbhushanpadmadeo@gmail.com