



OPINION 6 INORDINATE DELAY IN NAMING NEW ARMY CHIEF

WORLD 8 NASA CALLS OFF SPACEWALK AFTER SPACESUIT WATER LEAK

MONEY 10 RUPEE SETTLES 3 PAISE HIGHER AT 83.44 AGAINST US DOLLAR

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A LOT OF CREDIT FOR MY WICKETS GOES TO BUMRAH: ARSHDEEP 12 SPORTS

Historic clash over Speaker post

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP-led NDA and Congress-led Opposition failed to reach a consensus on the candidature of Lok Sabha Speaker post with the sides pitching for their members making it a first ever contest for the crucial post in Parliament. The NDA fielded its previous Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for the Speaker's post, while the Opposition forced an election by nominating Congress leader Kodikunnil Suresh as its candidate.

The Opposition's last-minute decision to go for a rare contest came after senior BJP leaders did not agree to its precondition that the INDIA Bloc must be offered the post of Deputy Speaker in lieu of supporting Birla, who is the clear favourites in case of an election. The scheduled day for picking the Speaker is Wednesday and if an election occurs, it will be only the third time in Lok Sabha's history, official sources said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju urged the Congress not to force a contest for the post of Lok Sabha Speaker as the presiding officer does not belong to any party. "I appeal again that they should think about keeping in mind the dignity of the post of Speaker. We have the numbers but still, we are requesting that there should be no election for the post of Speaker because this post does not belong to any party," the



BJP MP Om Birla takes oath as a member of the House during the first session of the 18th Lok Sabha, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh (R) takes oath as a member of the House on Monday

Parliamentary Affairs Minister said. He said the Government had contacted major Opposition parties over the last two days for consensus on the post of the Speaker. "We want the Speaker to be elected unanimously and unopposed, so we contacted and appealed to them. Today, we had a meeting with Congress leaders. We appealed to them for support for the Speaker. They said they will support but they want the post of Deputy Speaker," Rijiju said. Leaders of the INDIA Bloc met on Tuesday night to evolve a strategy for the Speaker's election even as the Congress said the ball is in the Government's court to bring about a consensus on the

Rift surfaces, Mamata faults Congress move

SAUGAR SENGUPTA ■ KOLKATA

Mamata Banerjee is not happy with the Congress "domineering ways," for which her 29-member strong Trinamool Congress may abstain from the Speaker's election, sources said. According to TMC sources, the Bengal Chief Minister is unhappy that the Congress leadership did not consult her on the Opposition candidate for the Speaker's post and "announced the name of K Suresh unilaterally."

Mamata, who spoke at length to senior leaders Sudip Bandopadhyay, Kalyan Banerjee, Abhishek Banerjee, Saugata Roy, and Derek O'Brien via video conferencing, will make the final decision on the issue, sources said, adding, "the TMC has its own opinion and reservations and will not like to be dictated on issues." Abhishek, who met with other senior leaders in Parliament after his talks with Mamata, said, "Unfortunately, we have not been consulted."

issue by offering the Opposition the Deputy Speaker's post according to convention. Sources said earlier in the day a brief interaction involving Congress leader KC Venugopal and DMK's TR Bалу from the Opposition side and Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah and JP Nadda, who is also the BJP president, at Singh's office in Parliament to evolve a consensus ended in acrimony as both sides stuck to their position. Both Opposition leaders walked out, with Venugopal accusing the Government of not following the "convention" of an Opposition candidate for the Deputy Speaker's position and announcing the decision to field a candidate against Birla.

HC stays Kejriwal bail order

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

In a blow to Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the Delhi High Court on Tuesday stayed the trial court order granting him bail in the money-laundering case arising from the alleged excise scam, holding that the trial court failed to appreciate the material placed before it by the Enforcement Directorate and did not apply its mind while deciding the AAP leader's bail plea. The Court passed the order on a plea by the ED seeking stay of the trial court order passed on June 20 granting bail to Kejriwal. A vacation bench of Justice Sudhir Kumar Jain said the ED's contentions assailing the bail order required serious consideration. Kejriwal's plea challenging the Delhi High Court's stay order will come up for hearing on Wednesday in the Supreme Court. "The Vacation Judge while passing the Impugned Order did not appropriately appreciate the material/documents submitted on record and pleas taken by ED and



Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal File photo

averments/grounds as raised in the petition under section 439(2) of the code require serious consideration while dealing with said petition. Accordingly, the present application is allowed and the operation of the Impugned Order is stayed. It is made clear that nothing in this order shall be taken as any opinion or observation on the merits of the petition under section 439 (2) of the Code," the vacation judge said in the order. Justice Jain said voluminous material cannot be considered as totally unjustified and it shows that the trial court has not applied its mind to the material. In the 34-page order on the ED's application seeking a stay on the operation of the bail order, Justice Jain asserted that every court is under an obligation to give sufficient opportunity to the parties to present their respective case and, in the instant case as well, the ED ought to have been given adequate opportunity to advance arguments on Kejriwal's bail application. Reacting to this, the AAP said it disagrees with the Delhi High Court order staying the bail granted to Kejriwal by the trial court and will challenge it in the Supreme Court. "They will approach the apex court," the AAP said.

Sensex hits new all-time high

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex breached its historic 78,000 level for the first time while Nifty settled at a new record high on Tuesday on buying in blue-chip bank stocks and Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 712.44 points or 0.92 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,053.52. During the day, the benchmark soared 823.63 points or 1 per cent to hit a fresh lifetime high of 78,164.71. The Sensex breached the 77,000 mark for the first time on June 10. Detailed report on Page 10

Panel moots outreach plan in NEET/NET row

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging row over alleged irregularities in competitive examinations, like NEET and NET conducted by National Testing Agency (NTA), the recently formed Education Ministry's panel on competitive examination reforms has decided to reach out to parents and students to understand their concerns and challenges about the examination process. The decision was taken by

the seven-member panel headed by former ISRO chief R Radhakrishnan in its first meeting late on Monday evening. The committee has also been tasked with examining the existing security protocols related to the setting of the papers and other processes for different examinations and making recommendations to enhance the robustness of the system. According to sources present in the meeting, the committee took stock of the current situation and



Police personnel detain Samajwadi Party workers protesting over the alleged irregularities in NEET 2024 results, near party chief Akhilesh Yadav's residence, in Lucknow, on Tuesday

challenges faced by the (NTA). National Testing Agency "The panel was apprised of

the current processes and functioning of the agency. The panel also looked into the statistics provided by the NTA about the multiple exams conducted by it and the number of candidates appearing for each exam," a source said. The panel also looked into which exams are conducted in pen-and-paper mode and which are conducted as computer-based tests (CBT), and the nuances of both modes. "The first priority for us is to elicit from the students and parents in the country

their concerns and suggestions. We are going to engage with them as far as possible in person, or through electronic media. And in the next fortnight, we would like to consolidate this," Radhakrishnan briefed the media on Tuesday. "The next priority for us is to quickly build a robust system for starting the tests. We are also looking at the future, especially to develop in this country a robust system, a tamper-proof system," he said.

CM directs for people-friendly Budget

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Tuesday, while reviewing activities of the Planning and Convergence Department, asked the officials to prepare a people-friendly State Budget. The people of the State have lots of hope and aspirations from the new government and it should be reflected in the Budget, said Majhi. The schemes should reach the people at the grassroots in an effective manner and they should benefit from it, said the Chief Minister. He advised that the District Mineral Fund (DMF) be utilised properly and trauma care centres be set up in the mining areas. He especially stressed on trauma care centres in the District Headquarters Hospitals. The CM directed for formation of a taskforce to study and submit proposals to form a North Odisha Development Council and a South Odisha Development Council. He directed the officials to study the manifesto of the BJP and take steps to fulfil it.



Modi's 100 smart cities plan incubator of new India

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Smart Cities Mission developed during the two tenures of Narendra Modi Government boasts of 'nurturing' over 100 smart cities across the country with ultra modern and sophisticated Integrated Command and Control Centres (ICCC), mobility solutions and transportation based on artificial intelligence, installation of CCTV cameras, streetlights, and many more worth whopping ₹1,43,778 crore. Notably, Modi's three flagship programmes — the Smart Cities Mission, the Atal Mission for Rejuvenation and Urban Transformation (AMRUT), and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana — Urban (PMAY-U) that transformed urban infrastructure and improved the quality of life for millions of

residents across India, completed nine year on Tuesday. Some of cities tagged as Smart Cities are Indore, New Delhi, Surat, Ahmedabad, Bhagalpur, Patna, Mumbai, Pakinada, Amaravati, Muzaffarpur, Bihar Sharif, Naya Raipur, Karnal, Shivamogga, Satna, Haldia, Ghaziabad, Aligarh, Saharanpur, Rampur, Bareilly among others. According to the Ministry of Urban Affairs' data, a total 7,160 projects worth ₹1,43,778 crore has been completed and another 854 projects worth ₹20,392 crore are in advanced stages of completion under the Smart Cities Mission (SCM) projects which completed nine year on Tuesday. The data shows the Centre has released ₹46,387 crore to 100 cities to develop as smart cities mission and 93 per cent of released funds have



been utilised. The data shows 51 cities have successfully developed 200 projects with Public-Private Partnership (PPP) worth around ₹10,000 crore. The data shows all 100 smart cities have operationalised ICCC, leveraging Artificial Intelligence, Internet of Things, and data analytics to enhance city operations

such as transport management, water supply, and solid waste management. Under the public safety and security, over 76,000 CCTV surveillance cameras have been installed across 100 cities, bolstering city-wide crime monitoring efforts. More than 50 lakhs solar/LED streetlights have been installed under the project and over 89,000 kms of underground electricity cabling constructed. Besides, 9,754 number of WiFi hotspot locations created. Under the scheme, 12,300 kms roads have been developed as smart roads and 2500+ kms of cycle tracks was constructed, alongside the Intelligent Transport Management System (ITMS), to streamlined traffic operations and journey times in smart cities.

PM to visit Russia

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is likely to visit Russia for a day on July 8 to hold wide ranging parleys with Russian President Vladimir Putin. It will be his first visit there in nearly five years, it was learnt here on Tuesday. Modi last visited Russia in 2019 when he attended an economic conclave in the Far East city of Vladivostok. Though there is no confirmation from the Indian side on Modi's possible visit, a Kremlin official in Moscow said active preparations are underway for the trip. "I can confirm that we are



File Photo

preparing for a visit by the PM of India. We cannot (say) the dates as yet, because the dates are announced by the parties in agreement," Yuri Ushakov, an assistant to the Russian President, said.

Rainfall to increase in State from today

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The southwest monsoon has become active and a cyclonic circulation is likely to be formed over Bay of Bengal on Wednesday.

Intensity of rains may increase in several parts of the State under its impact from the day, said the Regional Office of the India Meteorological Department (IMD) here on Tuesday.

The IMD issued a Yellow warning for heavy rainfall activities in several districts of the State. Heavy to very heavy rain is likely to occur at several parts of the State from June 26 to June 30. Thunderstorm with lightning accompanied by gusty surface wind speed reaching 30-40 kmph may occur at the coastal, south and interior parts of northern Odisha.

Monsoon has already covered almost all parts of the State. While six districts have witnessed normal rainfall, 24 districts have experienced less-than-normal rains so far, the weather office said. "Several parts of Odisha will experience heavy rainfall from June 26. Heavy to very heavy rains are likely to occur in some parts of the State during the period," said IMD Regional Director Manorama Mohanty.

Widows' Day celebrated in Rourkela

AUROBINDA DAS ■ ROURKELA

The International Widows' Day was celebrated with great fervour at the Subhas Chandra Bose Park here on June 23. The event was organised under the auspices of the Community Welfare Society (CWS) of Rourkela, which has been actively working with 39 SHGs of widows from the city's slums. Over 500 widows participated in it, proving their unity and collective strength. Chief speaker Sradha Sarangi spoke about the day's this year's theme "Advocating for accelerated gender equality and strengthened land and property rights". She emphasised the need for widows and women to support each other and claim their rights. "We become powerful when we realise that we can stand

for our rights. As citizens of this country, we have rights. Let us realise it and claim it," she urged. Chief guest Prava Suchita Ekka, guest of honour Monalisha Behera and Fr Bennichan K Peter, secretary of CWS, spoke on the occasion. The event also featured a vibrant cultural programme in which the widows showcased their talents through dances, singing and games.



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Demolition at Bobby Das' quarters raises eyebrows

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a significant development, major demolition activities were undertaken at the government quarters allotted to BJD organisational secretary and former MLA Pranab Prakash (Bobby) Das in Bhubaneswar on Tuesday.

As per reports, at least 20 people were engaged in the demolition work. While many huge structures were dismantled, it was not clear as to who was undertaking the demolition work at the sprawling complex located in the heart of the capital city.

Unconfirmed reports claimed that the building was renovated with an expenditure of a few crores. However, it is not clear whether the huge amount of money was spent by the previous BJD government or Das himself. Sources



said BJD leaders were holding important meetings at the building.

It was not immediately clear whether the demolition activity was undertaken as per

the instruction of Das himself.

Das, also a former Minister, contested the recent elections from Sambalpur Lok Sabha constituency and was

defeated by BJP leader and Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. Following his defeat, the BJD leader may have to vacate the government quarters.

Now, questions are being raised about the legality of the highly expensive renovation work done in the government quarters. It is not known whether proper permission had been obtained for such construction work in an official residence.

Explaining the reason behind demolition, Das said government quarters are returned in the same condition in which they were allotted. He told media that a temporary extension had been built in his official residential complex to accommodate many BJD leaders and workers who were visiting him as he was the organisational secretary of the party.

The temporary structures need to be dismantled to bring the entire complex to the original shape as at the time of allotment, he added.

Aghria community meets CM



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Members of the All India Aghria Samaj on Tuesday met Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and discussed about their problems.

The organisation's members said that when they and

the functionaries of the Aghria Samaj come to the State capital Bhubaneswar, they want an accommodation of their own. They had earlier informed the previous government, but their demand has not been met.

After the Chief Minister

assured them to look into their grievance, they thanked him and expressed their happiness.

During the discussion, more than 50 members of the Aghria Samaj and functionaries from different districts of the State were present.

Most Odisha MPs take oath in Odia

One each in Santali, Sanskrit & 2 in English

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Most of the BJP MPs from Odisha took oath as members of the 18th Lok Sabha in Odia language and ended it with 'Jai Jagannath, Jai Bharat, Bande Utkala Janani' on Tuesday.

The BJP had swept the Lok Sabha elections in the State on 'Odia Asmita' poll plank by winning 20 of the 21 seats.

Besides, among the BJP MPs, Baleswar's Pratap Sarangi took oath in Sanskrit and Mayurbhanj MP Naba Charan Majhi in Santali dialect. Brahmapur MP Pradeep Kumar Panigrahy and Kalahandi's Malvika Devi, however, took oath in English and invoked Lord Jagannath and presiding deities of their regions.

On Monday, Union Ministers Dharmendra Pradhan and Jugal Kishore had also taken oath in Odia.

IIM S'pur holds 5-day training for varsity teachers

To equip them with technical, managerial, interpersonal skills

NIMAIN CHARAN SAHU ■ SAMBALPUR

Aligned with the National Education Policy, the IIM Sambalpur conducted the 'Nurturing Future Leadership Programme' (NFLP) under the Malaviya Mission Teacher Training Programme (MMTTP).

This five-day residential programme was designed to equip faculty from various universities with technical, managerial, and interpersonal skills for effective leadership in higher education institutions (HEIs).



The inaugural ceremony featured an introductory session on "Strategic Leadership for Academic Governance and 21st Century Learning" led by Director of IIM Sambalpur Prof Mahadeo

Jaiswal. He emphasised on strategic innovation, besides improving quality and international rankings through research and innovation.

Prof Padmavathy Dhillon presented a session on "Mak-

ing Classroom Psychologically Safe Adaptive for a Happy Classroom," and Prof Diwahaar Sunder Nadar discussed "Understanding Institute Finance and Budget-Making and Financial Man-

agement."

The second day included sessions on "Managing Performance Dynamics and Leadership" by Prof Atri Sengupta, "Effective Communication for Academic Leaders" by Prof Shilpi Kalwani, and "Management Planning, Crafting, and Publishing High-Quality Research Papers" by Prof Saumya Ranjan Sahoo.

On the third day, Prof Soumya G Deb addressed institutional challenges in "Accreditation and Challenges of the Institution," followed by Prof RK Padhy's talk on "Ranking and Improving the Performances of Institutes," and Prof Poonam Kumar's session on "Fostering Academic Excellence Through Critical and Designing Think-

The day four included sessions on "Managing Change in Academic Institutions" by Prof Shikha Bhardwaj, "Team Management in Academic Institutions" by Prof Padmavathy Dhillon, and "Managing Self, Time, and Stress" by Prof Shilpi Kalwani.

The final day stressed on "Engaging Stakeholders (Students/Community/Alumni)" presented by Prof Sumita Sindhi. Prof Siddharth Majhi led a session on "Building Institute Brands in the Digital Era." The programme concluded with a session on "Designing/Preparing and Delivering Research and Consultancy Projects," followed by project presentations evaluation by Prof Poonam Kumar and Prof RK Padhy.

State to launch bus services to prime religious places

Destinations include Ayodhya, Tirupati, Vrindavan

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government will soon launch bus services from the State to various prominent religious places across the country.

Speaking to mediapersons after a review meeting at the Odisha State Road Transport Corporation office here, Transport and Commerce minister Bibhuti Bhushan Jena said, "Bus services to religious places such as Ayodhya, Tirupati, Mahakaleswar, Varanasi, Vrindavan, etc., will be started soon."

He also said buses to these religious places would be rolled

out from the State's various towns like Puri, Bhubaneswar, Brahmapur and Rourkela.

Besides, he also hinted at renaming of the Location Accessible Multi-modal Initiative (LAccMI) scheme, the ambitious public transportation service from the gram panchayats up to the State capital launched by the previous government. "We are examining the LAccMI scheme, but it is our firm assurance that people will get the bus service," Jena said.

He said bus services would be provided from all the 314 block headquarters of the State to the holy city of Puri during the Rath Yatra. The Transport Department would introduce environment-friendly EV buses across the State under the PM-eBus Sewa, he added.

Traffic signals to be removed for easy travelling

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Traffic signals would be removed to ease traffic congestion, and alternatives like overbridge or approach/service roads would be planned to streamline vehicular movement, said Housing & Urban Development Minister Krishna Chandra Mahapatra said on Tuesday.

Speaking to mediapersons, he said department-level discussions are being held to



implement the changes.

"People returning home from office often get stuck at traffic signals for hours. They also start two hours early from home to be able to reach offices in time. We will look into alternatives to manage the vehicular flow and relieve

commuters of long wait at an intersection for the red signal to turn green. To ensure ease in travelling, a plan will be prepared to remove bottlenecks at places that witness traffic jams," he said.

Experts, however, opine that initially steps should, instead, be taken to remove encroachments on the roads and streamline parking of vehicles as unavailability of space can prove to be an impediment for building over-bridges.

FOBs at Palasuni, Baramunda approved

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In a bid to make the roads safe for pedestrians, the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has approved construction of two more foot over-bridges (FOBs) on National Highway-16.

The two new bridges would come up at Palasuni and near the Rajdhani College at Baramunda, two of the most

accident-prone areas on the NH, in which many pedestrians have been killed or injured while crossing the road.

Bhubaneswar MP Aparajita Sarangi in a tweet on her X handle said these bridges would come up at a cost Rs 5 crore. "It was people's demand. I had been pursuing the matter," she wrote and expressed her gratitude to the NHAI and Union Surface

Transport Minister Nitin Gadkari.

Two such bridges have already been constructed near the Crown Hotel on the side of NH-16 and another near Satsang Vihar.

The NHAI also notified two more foot over-bridges at Manguli Chhak on the Chandikhole-Jagatpur-Bhubaneswar Section of NH-16.

Govt to accelerate city metro project

To seek Centre's support if needed: Minister

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Affirming its commitment to quick implementation of the Bhubaneswar metro rail project, the Odisha Government on Tuesday said all necessary steps would be taken to complete the work as per schedule.

The government would execute the metro project to resolve persistent traffic congestions in the twin cities of Bhubaneswar and Cuttack, said Housing and Urban Development Minister Krishna Chandra Mohapatra.

He said the support of the Union Government for the ambitious project would be sought, if necessary, after a review of the State Budget. Detailed discussions would soon be held on how to start the project work in the rainy season.

The Minister said the Centre would definitely extend all nec-



essary assistance for smooth and speedy implementation of the project.

Notably, the State Government had roped in the DMRC for the metro project, which seeks to connect the Biju Patnaik International Airport (BPIA) in Bhubaneswar to Trisulia in Cuttack in the first phase. Taken up at an investment of Rs 6,255 crore, the project is expected to be com-

pleted in the next four years.

The DMRC received approval for its Detailed Project Report (DPR) from the State Government on October 7, 2023 while the foundation-stone for metro rail was laid by the then Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik on January 1.

In the first phase, the project is proposed to cover 26 km with 20 stations including BPIA, Capital Hospital, Sishu Bhawan,

Bapuji Nagar, Bhubaneswar railway station, Ram Mandir, Vani Vihar, Acharya Vihar, Jayadev Vihar, Xavier Square, Rail Sadan, District Centre, Damana Square, Patia Square, KIIT Square, Nandan Vihar, Raghunathpur, Nandanakan Zoological Park, Phulapokhari and Trisulia Square. The State Government has allocated Rs 1,000 crore for the project in the vote-on-account 2024-25

'Save natural resources, Adivasis' rights'

Activists urge CM Majhi

BIJAY MISHRA ■ BHUBANESWAR

The National Alliance of People's Movement (NAPM) in a convention and followed by a Press meet urged the new Odisha Government headed by Adivasi Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi to put an end to the mindless exploitation of natural resources carried out by the previous Government.

Addressing a large gathering of leaders and representatives of various people's movement at Bhubaneswar on Sunday, Prafulla Samantara and Lingaraj Ajad urged the new Government to implement the land and forest rights of the Adivasis, Dalits and other marginalised communities.

Samantara, who is leading various people's movement in Odisha, told that the new Government should put an end to the exploitation of land and



natural resources by cancelling all mining and land leases that have been given to companies by the previous Government in gross violation of the laws of the land.

"In the last 24 years, Adivasis, dependent on these forests, land and natural resources have been forcefully displaced, faced false and fabricated cases. The Naveen Pattanaik Government has violated the Mineral (Auction) Rules-2015, Article 244 and the Fifth Schedule of Constitution. The PESA and FRA-2006, Odisha Scheduled

Areas (Transfer of Immovable property) Regulations have been violated in auction process of mining leases in Maliparbat, Sijimali, Katurumali, Balada, Ketameta and Uskalbag in undivided Koraput district, Karlapat in Kalahandi district and Gandharpaf iron ore mines in Keonjhar district," said Samantara.

Various leaders of the people's movement urged the Government to take steps against toxic and polluting industries, protect the social and cultural iden-

tity of Adivasis and other forest dwellers, provide to the landless Dalits, revive the textile, spinning mills and sugar factories and set up small industries based on forest and agriculture products.

The forum also demanded to withdraw all cases against the leaders and people who participated in various people's movements. Among others, the convention was addressed by leaders including Narendra Mohanty, Satya Banchar, Arun Jena, Upendra Bag, Shanti Majhi, Kantilal Naik and Kartik Naik.

In Sundargarh Postmaster on run after embezzling Rs 50L

PNS ■ SUNDARGARH
The Postmaster of Kumajharia Post Office under the Birmatrapur police station in Sundargarh district is absconding after allegedly duping depositors of around Rs 50 lakh.

The accused Kuntilata Ganj allegedly cleaned off the money from the accounts of many people who had deposited the amounts in several postal schemes.

The matter was known when a woman depositor came to the Kumajharia branch post office to withdraw money from her account. However, she couldn't withdraw the money and didn't get any satisfactory answer from the Postmaster.

Subsequently, she went to the Kuanramunda branch post office to enquire about her account. However, to her utter dismay, she found that no money had been deposited in her account.

Following the development, some other depositors also found that money was not deposited in their accounts at the post office.

Subsequently, the victims lodged a complaint in this connection with the Birmatrapur police. Ganju is on the run from May 8 following the incident. The depositors also detained a Postal Department official for hours in protest demanding immediate return of their amounts. The Birmatrapur police reached the spot and pacified the protestors.

Woman killed by jumbo in B'swar

PNS ■ BALESWAR
In yet another incident of man-animal conflict, a woman was trampled to death by an elephant at Shrideipur village in Santaragadia gram panchayat under Nilgiri block in Baleswar district on Monday night.

The deceased identified as Puniti Dehury (61) had gone out of home to answer nature's call when she was lifted by the jumbo with its trunk and thrown to the ground.

Although the victim was rushed to the Nilgiri Sub-Divisional Hospital, the doctor there pronounced her dead.

Buddha bust stolen from BeMC Guest House

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
A statue of Lord Buddha, which was installed by the Brahmapur Municipal Corporation behind the Municipality Guest House near the Congress Office Square in Bijipur, has been stolen. The statue, a revered symbol for many Buddhists and locals who regularly visited it, was taken away by unknown miscreants with malicious intent a few days ago.

The residents of the area, along with the Buddhist followers, are deeply distressed by the incident. In this connection, an FIR has been lodged at the Brahmapur Town Police Station by Pitabas Panda, an advocate and member of the Odisha State Bar Council.

Panda has urged the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the theft. He emphasized taking strong action against the culprits and ensuring the prompt recovery of the stolen statue.

In Birmaharajpur Snake catcher dies after bitten by snake



PNS ■ SONEPUR
In a shocking incident, a snake catcher allegedly died after being bitten by a venomous cobra at Champamala village under Birmaharajpur police limits in Subarnapur district.

The deceased has been identified as Goura Kumbhar of Mendhamala village.

Though not trained, Kumbhar was known for rescuing snakes and releasing them in forests in his village and neighbouring villages. He had been rescuing snakes from residential premises for the last 15 years. And, he never demanded anything in return of his service, sources said.

Upon being informed by a villager of Champamala, Kumbhar rescued a cobra from his residence and kept the reptile in a plastic container.

After rescuing the snake, he visited Birmaharajpur police station for some work. He showed the snake by taking it out from the plastic container to some police personnel and others. He was keeping it inside the jar when the poisonous snake bit him due to his carelessness.

Kumbhar was rushed to Subarnapur District Headquarters Hospital in a police van. He, however, died while undergoing treatment.

When he went to the police station, the IIC asked him about his involvement in the playing of Ghudghudu Patti in the town. Boxi confessed to his offence. But IIC Sahu allegedly thrashed him and abused him in filthy language. He also threatened Boxi to book him in a Ganja case and send him to Jail.

Following the thrashing, Boxi suffered injuries on various part of his body. Later, Boxi wrote a praying letter to Subarnapur SP Yash Pratap Shramal seeking justice on April 2 and also prayed him to conduct an impartial inquiry by scrutinizing the CCTV footage of the police station. However, Boxi has yet to receive justice.

Boxi sent his complaint letter via registered post instead of personally visiting the police station due to his lack of confidence in the Sonepur police and fear for his life. But the Registered Post article was refused acceptance by the IIC of Sonepur police station on April 22, 2024, and returned to Boxi on April 24, 2024, according to the Postal Tracking Report.

Non-registration of First Information Report (FIR) at the Sonepur PS is a clear violation of the Supreme Court guideline/direction dated 12.11.2013 in the case of Lalita Kumari Vs State of UP and Ors. and Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr. PC).

After that Boxi moved to the High Court regarding the non-registration of FIR at the Sonepur PS under Section of Illegal confinement (Section 340 IPC), Forcing to sign blank papers under duress, Attempted murder (Section 307 IPC) and Misuse of power and position as a public servant.

Harassment to man, FIR not registered High Court puts Sonepur PS IIC on notice



SRIKUMAR MAHANTA ■ SONEPUR
The Orissa High Court has passed an order in its first hearing to the Inspector-in-Charge (IIC) Lokanath Sahu of Sonepur police station on a petition alleging non-registration of a complaint of a man of the Sonepur town.

As per sources, Mrummaya Singh Boxi (43), a resident of Ghodaghat pada of the Sonepur town was called to the Sonepur police station by IIC Sahu through Havildar Ramjee Panigrahi on March 27.

When he went to the police station, the IIC asked him about his involvement in the playing of Ghudghudu Patti in the town. Boxi confessed to his offence. But IIC Sahu allegedly thrashed him and abused him in filthy language. He also threatened Boxi to book him in a Ganja case and send him to Jail.

Following the thrashing, Boxi suffered injuries on various part of his body. Later, Boxi wrote a praying letter to Subarnapur SP Yash Pratap Shramal seeking justice on April 2 and also prayed him to conduct an impartial inquiry by scrutinizing the CCTV footage of the police station. However, Boxi has yet to receive justice.

Boxi sent his complaint letter via registered post instead of personally visiting the police station due to his lack of confidence in the Sonepur police and fear for his life. But the Registered Post article was refused acceptance by the IIC of Sonepur police station on April 22, 2024, and returned to Boxi on April 24, 2024, according to the Postal Tracking Report.

Non-registration of First Information Report (FIR) at the Sonepur PS is a clear violation of the Supreme Court guideline/direction dated 12.11.2013 in the case of Lalita Kumari Vs State of UP and Ors. and Section 154 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (Cr. PC).

After that Boxi moved to the High Court regarding the non-registration of FIR at the Sonepur PS under Section of Illegal confinement (Section 340 IPC), Forcing to sign blank papers under duress, Attempted murder (Section 307 IPC) and Misuse of power and position as a public servant.

In Kendrapada Owners of electrocuted cattle to get compensation

PNS ■ KENDRAPADA
Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Monday directed the Kendrapada district Collector to ensure payment of compensation to the owners of six cattle, which were electrocuted on Sunday.

As many as six cattle, including three cows, two calves and an ox, were killed on Sunday after they came in contact with a snapped live electric wire at Tulasidia village under Pattamundai Tehsil of the district.

When the matter came to the notice of the Chief Minister, he directed to district Collector, Suryawanshi Mayur Vikash to order the Tata Power Central Odisha Distribution Limited (TPCODL) to pay the compensation to the owners of the electrocuted livestock.

It has been directed by the CM that the owners of the electrocuted cattle should be provided compensation amount as per the rules of the Odisha Electricity Regulatory Commission (OERC). According to the rules of the OERC, the owner of a cow gets a compensation of Rs 30,000, whereas Rs 25,000 for an ox and Rs 16,000 for a calf is given as compensation. A sum of Rs 1.47 lakh compensation will be given to the owners of the deceased cattle.

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Medical negligence NHRC sanctions aid of Rs 4L to woman

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR
The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has directed the Odisha Government to pay Rs four lakh compensation to a woman in a case of medical negligence at a Community Health Centre in Keonjhar district in 2022.

The patient suffered serious complications due to the medical negligence by an Ayush doctor.

The NHRC has also directed the Odisha Chief Secretary to submit the compliance report within six weeks.

"The Odisha Government through its Chief Secretary is recommended to release Rs 4 lakh to the victim Gurubari Mahanta, wife of Pradeep Patel of Sendkap in Keonjhar Sadar block, and submit the compliance report along with the proof of payment to the commission within six weeks," the NHRC stated as per report.

The State Government has agreed to the suggestion regarding the deduction of the compensation amount from the salary of the erring Ayush doctor Ashok Kumar Sahoo.

Earlier, Keonjhar CDMO conducted a probe and stated that as per the guidelines, the Ayush doctor should have referred the woman to the District Headquarters Hospital, which is just 12 km away from Padmapur, after providing initial treatment.

The woman who experienced profuse bleeding after the delivery of a baby girl was admitted to the Padmapur CHC on August 13, 2022 and the doctor, instead of referring her to the Keonjhar DHH, allegedly stitched her urinary bladder.

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Night curfew to continue in Baleswar 91 arrested; 24 cases lodged by police

PNS ■ BALESWAR
Night curfew would remain in force in the areas under the Town and Sahadevkhunta police stations in strife-hit Baleswar town. The curfew period would be further relaxed from Wednesday and would be in force between 9 pm and 5 am, said Baleswar Collector Asish Thakre on Tuesday.

"There was no report of any further untoward incident from any part of the town," he said.

"After having discussions with prominent persons and organisations, the administration decided to form micro-level peace committees in various pockets," said Thakre.

Baleswar SP Sagarika Nath said a strict watch was being kept on the rumour mongers and propagators of fake news. Strict action would be taken against the offenders.

"All our arrests have been made with corroboration of visual images and on evidence. The innocent persons who have fled from the villages should return without fear," Nath said, adding that 91 arrests have been made so far with registration of 24 cases.

Scribes meet Min Swain, submit memo

PNS ■ PARADIP
Members of the Senior Journalists' Association of Odisha (SJOA) visited Industries, Skill Development and Technical Education Minister and Paradip BJP MLA Sampad Chandra Swain at his residence on June 23.

The delegation extended their congratulations and presented him with flowers bouquets.

During the visit, the SJOA representatives discussed several fundamental issues faced by journalists in the Paradip and Jagatsinghpur areas.

The delegation comprised association State president Kanhu Charana Nanda, general secretary Ashutosh Behera, State vice president Pradipta Kishore Choudhury, organizational secretary Biplab Mohanty, executive member Ratnakar Jena, along with Paradip representatives Sasanka Acharya, Prashanta Mohapatra, Shukdev Jena, and Basant Sahu.

Minister Swain assured the delegation that he would forward their letter to the relevant department and bring their concerns to the attention of the Chief Minister.



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Reasons behind BJP's loss in 2 Assly seats in JSpur

KAHNU NANDA ■ JAGATSIINGHPUR
The BJP won two Assembly seats and the Lok Sabha seat in Jagatsinghpur. On the contrary, the BJD retained the rest two Assembly segments such as Tirtol and Balikuda-Erasama in Jagatsinghpur district.

Factors that could have played against the saffron party in the two Assembly seats it lost to rival BJD are said to be its weak organisation, not fielding potential candidates, internal conflicts and weak on-ground election machinery.

The victory of the BJP in Paradip and Jagatsinghpur Assembly seats was nonetheless a landmark win as it is for the first time that the saffron party opened its account in both the seats. The prediction of most of the exit polls was that BJD will retain all four Assembly seats like in 2019 polls.

In the Tirtol seat, BJD candidate Ramakanta Bhoi scored 83,155 votes and BJP nominee Rajkishor Behera got 54,814 votes. Interestingly, Congress candidate Himansu Mallick got 42,570 votes and finished third. This time BJD vote share came down to 45.48 percent which was 54.18 percent in 2019 polls and 52.91 in 2020 byelection held due to the death of incumbent MLA Bishnu Das.

The BJP's vote share increased as the party earned 30.01 percent votes in 2024 elections which were 30.90 in 2019 and 27.92 in the 2020 byelection. Congress votes rose to 23.27 percent this time which was 13.73 in 2019 elections and 17.24 in 2020 byelection.

Although the BJD won the Balikuda-Erasama Assembly segment against BJP, its vote share declined by about 7 percent in 2024. The party candidate Sarada Prasanna Jena got 46.04 percent votes which was 53.83 percent in 2019 polls. BJP nominee Satya Sarathi Mohanty earned 33.26 percent votes which was earlier 19.05 percent in the 2019 elections, a sharp increase of 14 percent votes.

Congress candidate received 13.78 percent votes and stood in third position in 2024. The party had maintained second rank after securing 25.51 percent votes in 2019 polls. Consequently, Congress's vote share decreased about 12 percent.

What went wrong for the BJP in Tirtol and Balikuda-Erasama Constituencies? Political analysts opined that there were conflicts within the party for the Balikuda-Erasama seat due to candidate selection.

BJP awarded ticket to newcomer Satya Sarathi Mohanty. Senior leaders and ticket aspirants were discouraged as the party ignored them.

In the Tirtol Assembly seat BJP's candidate selection became a core issue for defeat. Saffron party fielded Rajkishor Behera, who had joined the party in 2020 only and unsuccessfully contested the by-election against BJD candidate Bijaya Shankar Das. He had lost the by-poll by over 25 percent votes. Strangely, the party re-nominated Behera in the 2024 elections creating unhappiness among the party sympathizers.

The corruption and Odia Asmita allegations against the BJD government by BJP campaigners failed to cut any ice in the two seats. Moreover, BJP's weak grassroots organisation was largely responsible for the party's loss in Tirtol and Balikuda-Erasama.

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BU NSS wing observes Yoga Day



PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR
The National Service Scheme (NSS) Bureau of Berhampur University conducted a mega yoga event to celebrate the International Yoga Day on June 21. The event began with a warm welcome address by chief guest of the occasion Vice-Chancellor Prof Geetanjali Dash setting the tone for a day of mindfulness and well-being.

In her address, Prof Dash emphasized the significance of yoga as a medium for India to achieve its vision of becoming a Vishwaguru, uniting the world through the practice of yoga.

She encouraged everyone to incorporate yoga into their daily routines for maintaining a healthy body and mind, as well as fostering spiritual consciousness for meaningful survival.

Eminent yoga guru, meditation coach and founder of the Sahayata Yoga Foundation, Kiran Ji attended the event as a guest.

He spoke about the benefits of regular yoga practice and Pranayam, starting his session with the chanting of the Om mantra. The key highlight of the event was a mesmerizing yoga demonstration by instructor Subash Chandra Baral. Dr Itishree Geetha Kumari, Program Officer of the NSS, led the participants to taking a collective pledge to adopt and practice yoga regularly. As a token of appreciation, Vice-Chancellor Prof Dash presented mementos to the distinguished guests. The event concluded with a vote of thanks from NSS Program Officer Dr Shankarshan Mallick. Various officials of the university, students and teachers were present.

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Modi, BJP leaders slam Cong on 1975 Emergency anniversary

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling BJP and Opposition Congress continued to engage in a political slugfest over the imposition of Emergency in the country five decades ago by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday said those who imposed the Emergency have no right to profess love for the Constitution.

"The mindset which led to the imposition of the Emergency is very much alive among the same party which imposed it. They hide their disdain for the Constitution through their tokenism but the people of India have seen through their antics and that is why they have rejected them time and again," Modi said on social media platforms.

Countering the PM, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge on his part said Modi keeps scratching the past to hide his failures. "In the last 10 years, you made 140 crore Indians realise what 'undeclared emergency' is, which caused a deep trauma to democracy and the Constitution," Kharge said.

Home Minister Amit Shah came out strongly against the grand old party and said the opposition party crushed the spirit of the Constitution several times for the sake of "maintaining a certain family in



power."

On the 49th anniversary of the 1975 Emergency, Shah also hit out at Congress leader Rahul Gandhi, calling him the "yuvraj" of the party and saying it has forgotten that his grandmother Indira Gandhi had imposed the Emergency and his father and successor of Indira, Rajiv Gandhi said in Parliament on July 23, 1985, that "there is nothing wrong with an emergency".

While Congress hit back at Prime Minister Narendra Modi on his comments on the Emergency, and accused him of enforcing an "undeclared emergency" in the last 10 years. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said the prime minister is raking up the past only to hide his failures. He also said that PM Modi talks of consensus and cooperation but does just the opposite.

"Mr. Rajiv Gandhi even said, 'If any Prime Minister of this

country who feels that an Emergency is necessary, under these circumstances and does not apply the Emergency, he is not fit to be the Prime Minister of this country.' This very act of taking pride in a dictatorial act shows that nothing else is dear to the Congress other than the family and power," Amit Shah wrote on social media and shared some news clippings of those days.

Censorship was imposed on the media, the Constitution was amended and even the judiciary was restrained, Shah said, paying tributes to those who waged a fight against the Emergency.

His party the BJP also launched a sharp attack on the Congress, with its president J P Nadda saying that those who claim to be the guardians of Indian democracy today had spared no efforts to suppress the voices raised in the defence of constitutional values.

Modernisation of Armed forces must in turbulent times: IAF Chief

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

IAF Chief Air Chief Marshal V R Chaudhari said on Tuesday the contemporary security landscape presents "multi-faceted challenges" from border disputes and terrorism to cyber threats and regional volatility, and India must invest in modernisation of its armed forces to navigate through these "turbulent times".

Delivering a keynote address at a seminar here, the IAF chief also said modern warfare is characterised by rapid technological advancements, asymmetric threats and the need for a comprehensive understanding of geopolitical, social and cultural contexts. His remarks come amid the backdrop of evolving geopolitics with conflicts being seen in some of the regions of the world.

The seminar was hosted by the Indian Air Force (IAF), College of Air Warfare (CAW) and Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) at the Air Force Auditorium at Subroto Park to mark the culmination of the third Warfare and Aerospace Strategy Programme (WASP). "This programme has enabled us to refine the definition of scholar warriors," the IAF chief said.

"This 'multi-faceted landscape' requires such military personnel who are not only adept at combat but also possess a deep



understanding of the broader implications of their actions, the air chief marshal said. Therefore, in my opinion, a scholar warrior is a military professional who combines intellectual acumen with combat prowess in today's "increasingly complex and dynamic security environment", Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari asserted.

To emphasise the point, the IAF chief also invoked the words of ancient Greek historian Thucydides, who said "The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools". He said India's strategic culture is shaped by historical experiences and the "ever-evolving geopolitical environment".

It emphasises on strategic autonomy, caution and a "strong focus on territorial integrity", he added.

"The contemporary security landscape presents multi-faceted challenges from border disputes and terrorism to cyber

threats and regional volatility. To navigate through these turbulent times and secure our national interests, India must invest in modernisation of its armed forces, strengthen strategic partnerships, promote indigenous defence production and adopt an integrated approach to both internal and external security," Air Chief Marshal Chaudhari said. The event was also attended by various air warriors, retired senior officers of the IAF and scholars, among others.

The IAF chief underlined that India's strategic thinking can be traced back to the ancient texts like the Arthashastra written around the 4th century BC. It emphasised realpolitik and strategic pragmatism, "shades of which are visible today in every way we are dealing with contemporary issues". In his address, he said the colonial experience taught India to remain "ever cautious and adopt a sovereign entity-centric approach" towards foreign policy and defence.

Atmanirbharta (self-dependence) and Make in India are, therefore, an "offshoot of our strategic culture and a key towards preserving national security", he said.

"Whether India has a strategic culture or not is a matter of opinion, however, realpolitik, statecraft and diplomacy have always been a part of our historical tapestry and have shaped contemporary geopolitics," the IAG chief added.

TN Govt, police chief get NHRC notices over hooch tragedy



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) on Tuesday said it has issued notices to the Tamil Nadu Government and police chief in connection with the hooch tragedy in Kallakurichi district and sought a report in a week. The death toll in the Kallakurichi hooch tragedy climbed to 58 on Monday. As many as 219 people have been admitted to various hospitals.

In a statement, the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) said it has taken suo motu cognisance of a media report that several people lost their lives after "consuming spurious liquor" in Kallakurichi.

Reportedly, a large number of people including women are under treatment in hospitals and some of them are in critical condition. The content of

the news report, if true, raises a serious issue of violation of the right to life of the victims, it said.

States have the exclusive power to regulate the production, manufacture, possession, transport, purchase and sale of intoxicating liquors.

Accordingly, notices have been issued to the chief secretary and the director general of police of Tamil Nadu, seeking a detailed report within one week, the statement said.

According to the latest reports, as on Monday, the death toll in the hooch tragedy surged to 58 while 111 persons are undergoing treatment at Kallakurichi Government Medical College hospital. At Pudukkottai 11 persons, in Salem district 30 persons, and in Villupuram district 4 persons are undergoing treatment at various government hospitals, as per the authorities from the hospitals.

Defence Ministry ties-up with private firm to build miniaturised satellite

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Defence will collaborate with a private firm working in the space sector for design and development of a "miniaturised satellite" capable of carrying multiple payloads up to 150 kg.

The collaboration will follow a contract inked with SpacePixxel Technologies.

Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX), the flagship initiative of the ministry, signed the landmark 350th contract here on Tuesday. "The contract was inked with SpacePixxel Technologies Pvt Ltd for design and development of a miniaturised satellite capable of carrying electro-optical, infrared, synthetic aperture radar and hyper-spectral payloads up to 150 kg," the defence ministry said in a statement.

The 150th iDEX contract was signed in December 2022, and within a span of 18



months, the 350th contract has been signed, it said.

The contract was exchanged between Additional Secretary (Defence Production) and CEO, Defence Innovation Organisation (DIO), Anurag Bajpai, and founder and CEO of SpacePixxel Technologies Awas Ahmed Nadeem Alduri in the presence of Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane and other senior civil and military officials of the ministry. SpacePixxel has been active-

ly working to build and launch high-resolution hyper-spectral imaging satellites to provide detailed earth observation data, the statement said.

"This 350th iDEX contract enables innovation in space electronics, wherein many payloads earlier deployed on dedicated large satellites are now being miniaturised.

The modular small satellite will integrate multiple miniaturised payloads as per

requirement, providing advantages like faster and economical deployment, ease of manufacturing, scalability, adaptability and less environmental impact," it said.

In his address, the defence secretary appreciated the unwavering commitment of new defence innovators for pushing the boundaries of technology and safeguarding the nation.

Emphasising the importance of combining indigenisation with innovation, he said domestic capabilities provide a foundation for fostering innovation by offering a platform for experimentation and development.

Innovation fuels indigenisation by driving the creation of new technologies and solutions that can be produced domestically, the defence secretary said, assuring all possible support to the innovators at every step.

The ministry said iDEX, the recipient of the Prime Minister Award for Public

Policy in Innovation Category in 2021, has emerged as a "game-changer in the defence ecosystem".

Established by the DIO under Department of Defence Production, iDEX has launched 11 editions of the Defence India Start-up Challenge (DISC), and recently unveiled the Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI) scheme to promote innovations in critical and strategic defence technologies.

"In a brief period, iDEX has successfully gained momentum, fostering a burgeoning community of start-ups within the defence sector. It is currently engaged with over 400 start-ups and MSMEs.

"Till now, procurement of 35 items, worth over Rs 2,000 crore, has been cleared. iDEX has facilitated the creation of numerous job opportunities and played a pivotal role in the development of the defence

Jairam points out gaps in Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2022

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Jairam Ramesh, former Union Environment Minister and Congress leader on Tuesday flagged issues in the elephant translocation laws, pointing out gaps in the Wildlife (Protection) Amendment Bill, 2022.

Criticising the vague terms allowing elephant transport "for any other purpose", which could lead to misuse, he stressed the need for stringent regulations to prevent exploitation and ensure proper elephant conservation.

In his letter written to Union Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav, he said, "The Captive Elephant (Transport or Transfer) Rules 2024 notified in March do not effectively prevent the wild capture and commercial trade of elephants."

In his letter, Ramesh further

said the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2022, allowed the non-commercial transfer of elephants for "any other purpose" but failed to clarify what this phrase means, leaving room for misuse.

"This is no way to treat India's national heritage animal, declared thus in 2010," Ramesh wrote on X and urged Yadav to reconsider the Rules in light of these concerns and those raised by various animal welfare organisations. Ramesh reminded Yadav that during his speech on the Wildlife Protection (Amendment) Bill, 2022, he had objected to the non-commercial transfer of elephants "for any other purpose".

He said this was contrary to the recommendation of the Standing Committee that examined the Bill in detail and that he had only supported the exception for "religious" pur-

poses.

"You had assured the House that 'any other purpose' would be clarified in the Rules. Unfortunately, the Rules still do not clarify what 'any other purpose' means. This leaves wide gaps for misuse," Ramesh wrote.

The Congress leader pointed out that the current Rules do not effectively close the routes for both wild capture and commercial trade of captive elephants, especially from the Northeast to other parts of India.

He cited recent examples of commercial transactions involving elephants from Arunachal Pradesh to Kerala, Odisha, and Gujarat, and serious attempts to transfer wild-caught elephants to these states under the guise of being captive or as donations.

Ramesh said these issues are documented and well known to the officials.

Climate change will have wide-reaching consequences, warns Uttarakhand MLA

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Climate change is causing a significant reduction in snowfall in the Himalayas and accelerating glacier melt, which will have wide-reaching consequences for cities such as Delhi that are already facing a water crisis, an Uttarakhand MLA warned on Tuesday.

At a press conference in New Delhi, the BJP's Tehri MLA Kishore Upadhyay cited studies predicting that the Himalayas could be devoid of snow in the next two to three decades.

He also said climate change-induced rapid glacier melt is affecting the strength and pattern of the Indian monsoon. Upadhyay has launched the Global Himalayan Organisation to raise awareness

about the critical state of the mountain range.

Avinash Mishra, former adviser to NITI Aayog and a member of the initiative, cited a report by the Indian Space Research Organisation and said more than 27 per cent of the identified glacial lakes in the Himalayas, 130 of which are located in India, have significantly expanded since 1984.

"The burning of fossil fuels is accelerating glacier melt and the expansion of glacial lakes, increasing the risk of glacial lake outburst floods. The rise in forest fires is further warming the Himalayas," Mishra said.

He added that reduced snowfall in the Himalayas will have a severe impact on industries along the rivers originating from the mountains and on agriculture.

Mishra warned that the climate change-driven glacier melt will affect not only the Himalayas but also cities such as Delhi. "Even the president's house will not be safe."

"The rapid melting of glaciers and reduced river flow due to declining snowfall will have a wide and far-reaching impact, not only on Himalayan villages and cities but also on urban areas such as Delhi," BJP MLA Upadhyay said.

He also blamed deforestation in the plains for contributing to warming in the hills and the subsequent glacier melt. "In the past, the mountains would get six to seven feet of snowfall. Now, it has declined to just one to two feet. I am not blaming anyone but one reason for this is the large-scale deforestation and concretisation in the lower latitudes," Upadhyay said.

74 per cent Indians support wealth tax: Survey

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

As G20 Finance Ministers prepare to consider a wealth tax on the super-rich next month amid climate change crisis impacting lives and livelihood, a survey has revealed that 68 per cent of people in these countries, including 74 per cent in India, support the idea to address global hunger and inequality.

The proposal for a levy on the super-rich has been under discussion since 2013 with international support on the issue growing over the years. The survey by the Earth4All initiative and Global Commons Alliance surveyed 22,000 citizens in the world's largest economies. Brazil, the current president of the G20, aims to build consensus on the taxation of wealth and is likely to push for a joint



declaration at a meeting of G20 finance ministers in July. Gabriel Zucman, a French economist and a key influencer behind Brazil's G20 proposal for progressive international taxation to promote tax justice, will release a report on Tuesday, outlining

how "a global minimum tax on the ultra-rich" could work and how much it could raise. According to Zucman, the super-rich pay significantly less tax than the ordinary people. The proposal aims to establish a new international standard: billionaires in every

country would be required to pay at least 2 per cent of their wealth in taxes annually.

Nationwide, support for a wealth tax on wealthy people is highest in Indonesia (86%), Turkey (78%), the UK (77%) and India (74%). Support is lowest in Saudi Arabia (54%), and Argentina (54%), but still over half the respondents surveyed. In the United States, France and Germany around two in three of those surveyed support a wealth tax on wealthy people (67%, 67% and 68% respectively). Owen Gaffney, co-lead of Earth4All, said, "Indians want a giant leap on climate and nature -- 68 per cent demand dramatic reforms across all economic sectors within the next decade. This is a strong mandate for planetary stewardship that cannot be ignored." Seventy-four per cent of

Indians support taxing wealth. Tax on high incomes and corporations to fund climate initiatives alongside a 'polluter pays' approach with income redistribution are also strongly supported, he said. Seventy-one per cent of Indians endorse universal basic income, 74 per cent support policies that encourage healthy diets to cut emissions, and 76 per cent seek a better work-life balance.

Sixty-eight per cent of Indians believe the world needs to take dramatic action in the next decade across all sectors of the economy -- electricity generation, transport, buildings, industry, and food. Eighty-one per cent of the Indians surveyed support a shift to "wellbeing economies" that have a stronger focus on health and the environment than a narrow focus on economic growth.

Track, trace and eliminate illicit tobacco trade, control unrecorded alcohol: WHO

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Noting that progress in combating illicit tobacco trade has been slow in the Southeast Asia Region, with appropriate policies and tools either not in place or not optimally implemented, the World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday called on member nations to take effective steps to track, trace and eliminate illicit trade of the products and control unrecorded alcohol.

Effective control of illicit tobacco trade and unrecorded alcohol is a challenging and daunting task but now is the time to prudently make our decisions and choose the best way forward," WHO Regional Director Saima Wazed urged in her opening remarks at a regional workshop in New Delhi to address the challenges of illicit tobacco trade and unrecorded alcohol. "As a first step, all our remaining member states should become parties to the WHO FCTC (Framework Convention on Tobacco Control) protocol to eliminate illicit trade in tobacco products," she said. India and Sri

Lanka from the WHO's Southeast Asia Region are parties to the WHO FCTC protocol so far.

The workshop is exploring integrating "quitlines" for tobacco, alcohol and substance use, besides global best practices to monitor and combat illicit tobacco trade and unrecorded alcohol consumption.

Wazed also called on member countries to devote optimal resources to develop, implement and sustain effective track-and-trace mechanisms for tobacco products. Experience from many coun-



tries shows illicit trade can be successfully addressed, even when tobacco taxes and prices are raised, Wazed said.

"It is essential to compile existing and generate new regional evidence to enable policymakers to make better-informed and more effective policy decisions to monitor and combat illicit tobacco trade and unrecorded alcohol," she added.

An estimated 25 per cent of global alcohol consumption is unrecorded. This is usually of a lower price and appeals to consumers from low socio-economic status and people

with underlying alcohol use disorders. It is often irregularly labelled and frequently contains unknown ethanol percentages and potentially toxic compounds.

It is a complex interplay of these factors that make unrecorded alcohol potentially more harmful than regulated alcohol, the regional director said.

Online sale of unrecorded alcohol, which circumvents alcohol availability regulations, is an emerging challenge, she said. In addition to the valuable lives lost, both tobacco and alcohol have sub-

stantial economic and societal costs.

Mukesh Kejriwal, an anti-tobacco activist echoed similar views, calling for stringent laws to curb smuggling of e-cigarettes which are being flooded by the unscrupulous tobacco lobbies despite being banned in the country. He cited a recent case where the air intelligence unit (AIU) of customs department at Trichy International Airport seized more than 1,200 e-cigarettes from two air passengers who arrived from Malaysia in May 2024. "This is just the tip of the iceberg," he said.

Bomb threat delays Air India's London flight; suspect held

PTI ■ KOCHI

A London-bound Air India flight received a bomb threat on Tuesday but it turned out to be a hoax and a 29-year-old man suspected of making the threatening call has been apprehended here by authorities, an official said. Security personnel conducted extensive checks on the aircraft and found no danger, allowing the flight to proceed as planned, a Cochin International Airport spokesperson said in a statement here. According to him, a bomb threat call was received by the Air India call center in Mumbai early on Tuesday for flight AI 149, scheduled to fly from Cochin to London Gatwick. The alert was promptly communicated to Air India here and the Cochin International Airport Limited



(CIAL) at 1.22 AM. Following established protocols, a Bomb Threat Assessment Committee (BTAC) was immediately convened at CIAL. The threat was assessed and declared specific. Following this, thorough security checks were conducted by the Airport Security Group (ASG-CISF),

airline security personnel, and inline baggage screening systems. In accordance with the recommendations from the Cochin Airport BTAC, the aircraft was moved to an isolated aircraft parking point, and comprehensive security measures were undertaken. The aircraft was thoroughly

checked and subsequently cleared for flight. The check-in process for AI 149 was completed by 10:30 am. The flight left for its destination at 1.25 PM. It was originally scheduled to depart at 11.50 AM on Tuesday. Efforts were made to identify the caller who reported the threat to the Mumbai call center. Investigations revealed the call was made by Suhaib (29), a native of Kondotty in Malappuram district, who was scheduled to travel to London on the AI 149 flight. Suhaib, along with his wife and daughter, was intercepted by ASG at Cochin Airport's international departure terminal during check-in. "He has since been handed over to the police for further questioning and legal action," the spokesperson said in a statement.

Amarnath Yatra: High-end CCTVs installed to monitor traffic on J&K highway

PTI ■ JAMMU

Ahead of the beginning of the annual Amarnath Yatra, high-end CCTV cameras have been installed along the Jammu-Srinagar national highway to monitor both pilgrimage and regular vehicular traffic, officials said on Tuesday. The traffic department has installed 10 360-degree CCTV cameras from Udhampur to Banihal in Ramban district, while the police department has placed 60 cameras along the highway to monitor vehicular movement and identify suspicious individuals, they said. The 52-day pilgrimage to the 3,880-metre-high cave shrine in south Kashmir is set to start on June 29 and conclude on August 19, as announced by the Shri Amarnath Shrine Board (SASB). "We have installed 10 high-end CCTV cameras at various



key points from Udhampur to Banihal to monitor traffic," Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Traffic National Highway, Rohit Baskotra, told PTI. These cameras are positioned at locations, including the Jakhani area of Udhampur, Dalwas, Khoni Nallah, Mehar, Battery Cheshma, Nachlana, Banihal

Chowk, Tunnel-5, Shaligadi and Cutpoint, he said. A control room has been established in Ramban to oversee traffic movement around the clock, Baskotra said. "The control room monitors the highway 24/7, enhancing our efficiency in managing congestion, traffic jams, and

other issues," the SSP said. The cameras are strategically placed at points where traffic conditions are particularly problematic and accidents are frequent, he added. The traffic police have also issued an advisory for drivers on the highway during the Amarnath yatra, emphasising lane driving and warning of heavy fines for traffic violations. Contact numbers for technical support are also provided in case of vehicle breakdowns. "With the CCTV cameras, if a vehicle breaks down or a traffic jam occurs, it will be visible in the control room, allowing a police team to quickly respond," Baskotra said. Special preparations have been made by the traffic police of Ramban and Udhampur to ensure smooth traffic flow on the national highway, a significant challenge during the pilgrimage period, he said.

Bihar Govt cancels ₹826-crore contracts awarded during Mahagathbandhan regime

PTI ■ PATNA

The NDA government in Bihar has cancelled 350 contracts worth Rs 826 crore, which were awarded during the previous 'Mahagathbandhan' dispensation in the state for supplying drinking water in rural areas, a minister said on Tuesday. The decision to cancel the contracts was taken after an inquiry by the Public Health Engineering Department revealed that there were "irregularities in the process of selecting contractors," he said.



"During the previous grand alliance regime in the state, many contracts were awarded by the department. An inquiry by the department revealed that due process was not followed in awarding 350 contracts worth Rs 826 crore. These were related to the rural water supply, including the installation of hand pumps and mini water supply systems," PHED Minister Niraj Kumar Singh told PTI. The department has handed over the preliminary inquiry report to the competent authority in the state government for a thorough probe, he said. "I recently called a meeting of senior officials of the department after getting the report, and later the cancellation order was issued," he said, adding that strict action would be taken against those who would be found guilty. RJD leader Lalit Yadav was the PHE minister during the previous grand alliance government in the state. Altogether 1,160 contracts worth Rs 4,600 crore of the PHE department were awarded by the previous government in 17 months, Singh said. "We have so far cancelled 350 contracts, the remaining are being examined," he said.

The minister, however, refused to give details of the alleged irregularities detected by the department. "It is not appropriate time to divulge the details as the matter is being investigated by a competent authority," he said. According to documents available by PTI, Baska district tops the list where a maximum of 106 contracts related to rural water supply systems have been cancelled, followed by Jamui (73), Lakhisarai (20), Aurangabad (18) and Ara (11). Commenting on the Bihar government's decision to cancel the contracts of the PHE department, RJD's state unit spokesperson Mrityunjay Tiwary, said, "Chief Minister and JD(U) supreme Nitish Kumar and BJP leaders are scared of our leader Tejashwi Yadav. The previous 'Mahagathbandhan' government in the state had executed several people-friendly projects and taken major decisions like employment to 7-8 lakh youths and providing social security to the economically and socially weaker sections of the society." The NDA partners are also "scared" of the impact of the

Odisha Govt asks district collectors to remain alert for possible floods

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha government has asked all district collectors and municipal commissioners to remain fully prepared for probable flood situation in the monsoon season. In a letter to all collectors and municipal commissioners, Special Relief Commissioner (SRC) Satyabrata Sahu on Monday said IMD has forecasted that an intense spell of rainfall due to active monsoon would occur throughout the state from June 26. "As a result, there may be instances of flash floods, flood like situation, waterlogging



and landslides at different locations. Keeping this in mind, you are requested to take immediate action," Sahu told the collectors. He said the field-level functionaries should not leave

the headquarters and they should be deployed in strategic locations of flash flood or waterlogging and ready to meet any eventuality. As low-lying areas in urban pockets may have

waterlogging and roads may be submerged, the SRC directed the urban local bodies (ULBs) to keep the drains and storm water channels decongested and deploy adequate dewatering pumps. In case of very heavy rain, movement of vehicles on submerged roads should be regulated and people in low-lying areas may be shifted to safer locations temporarily, he advised. The SRC also asked for pre-positioning of water pumps with generators in low-lying areas susceptible to waterlogging. "Ensure supervision of weak and vulnerable points in river and canal embankments. Flood

fighting materials may be pre-positioned at such places. Drainage clearance must be ensured for free flow of rainwater," he directed. According to IMD Bhubaneswar Centre's bulletin, heavy rainfall is expected in the districts of Mayurbhanj, Keonjhar, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Kalahandi and Koraput on June 26. Some places of Balasore, Bhadrak, Jajpur, Kendrapara, Cuttack, Jagatsinghpur, Puri, Khurda, Nayagarh, Ganjam, Gajapati, Mayurbhanj, and Keonjhar districts would also experience thunderstorm and lightning on Wednesday, it said.

NCP (SP) urges EC to delist similar symbols for upcoming Maharashtra Assembly polls

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Ahead of the Maharashtra Assembly elections, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP has requested the Election Commission of India to withdraw or exclude certain symbols which it claimed are "deceptively similar" to the "man playing turha" symbol officially allotted to it. The NCP (Sharadchandra Pawar) argued that allocating phonetically similar symbols, such as "Trumpet/Tutari," to Independent candidates has put the party at a significant disadvantage and goes against the principle of creating a level playing field. It refuted that allocating the "Trumpet" symbol to Independent candidates was appropriate and cited instances in the recently-held Lok Sabha polls wherein similar symbols confused voters, affecting the party's



free and fair elections. Citing data from nine Lok Sabha constituencies in Maharashtra, the NCP (SP) emphasised how "deceptive" symbols had led to relatively unknown candidates gaining a significant number of votes. In the recent Parliamentary polls, the Sharad Pawar-led NCP bagged 8 of the ten seats it had contested as a Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) constituent in Maharashtra, which sends 48 members to Lok Sabha. The party cited the example of Independent nominee Sanjay Gade who contested from the Satara seat on the Trumpet symbol and garnered 37,062 votes, which led to the defeat of NCP (SP) candidate Shashikant Shinde by a narrow margin of 32,771 votes. Shinde bagged 5,38,363 votes against the winning candidate Udayanraje Bhosale of BJP who secured 5,71,134 votes.

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Kerala village pays last respects to brave soldier killed in Naxal attack

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Hundreds of people on Tuesday thronged a tiny hamlet near the Kerala capital to pay their last respects to a brave soldier who was killed after Naxalites blew up a truck in which he was travelling, in Chhattisgarh two days ago. The mortal remains of R Vishnu, attached to the Central Reserve Police Force's jungle warfare unit, CoBRA, were brought to his native village near Palode here in the early hours of on Tuesday. Mayor Arya Rajendran and other government officials received the body at the airport in the early hours and CRPF personnel paid their respects. As Vishnu's mortal remains were brought to the village in

a mourning procession, people, including the elderly, women and children, apart from his relatives and friends, waited with heavy hearts to pay their last respects to him. The soldier's newly-constructed house witnessed heartbreaking scenes as his little children, wife and parents were inconsolable seeing his lifeless body. Civil Supplies Minister G R Anil visited his home and paid his respects to the deceased soldier. Governor Arif Mohammad Khan placed a floral wreath on the mortal remains when it was kept for public homage at the school where he had studied, and consoled Vishnu's relatives there. Before the cremation, CRPF personnel accorded him full ceremonial honours.

Pune bar case: Two excise officials suspended; liquor, other materials seized

PTI ■ PUNE

The Maharashtra excise department has suspended two of its inspector-rank officers for alleged dereliction of duty in connection with a probe into violation of rules by a bar in Pune, a senior official said on Tuesday. The official also said they have seized 241 litres of foreign liquor and other materials valued at Rs 3 lakh from the Liquid Leisure Lounge or L3, located on the Fergusson College Road here, and suspended the bar license. Pubs in the state's second largest city have come into focus after a video, allegedly from L3, on Sunday showed some youth with a drug-like substance. A police probe into the viral video has led to the arrest of eight persons, including an event organiser, and suspension of four police personnel after the L3 bar was found operating beyond the



permissible time limit. Besides, the excise department has arrested six waiters of L3 for allegedly flouting norms related to serving of liquor and its stock. According to the police, the bar was operating till 5 am on Sunday and liquor was being sold beyond permissible time limit. Bars and pubs in Pune are allowed to remain open till 1.30 am. An official on Tuesday said 14 regular squads and three special squads of the excise personnel have been set up to check illegal manufacturing of alcohol, its transportation and sale in Pune district. "The state excise

commissioner has suspended an inspector and a sub-inspector rank officer of the department for dereliction of duty in the case related to the Liquid Leisure Lounge," Excise Superintendent, Pune division, Charansingh Rajput told PTI. The official said they have seized 241 litres of foreign liquor and other materials of Rs 3 lakh and suspended the bar license for allegedly making internal changes at a permit room in the establishment. Citing the viral video, the prosecution on Monday told a Pune court that it has emerged through social

media that the accused had given narcotic-like substances to its patrons in the establishment and they want to probe the issue further. Prima facie, it has been found the accused used social media to invite patrons to the establishment to consume narcotics substances, alcohol and smoke cigarettes, the prosecution said, adding the police want to conduct a probe further about these customers. The police want to trace the youth as well as a minor seen in the viral video, it said in the court. Samples have been collected from the toilet of L3 and sent for an examination to check the presence of narcotic substance, police told the court on Monday while seeking the custody of eight persons, including the bar owners and staffers. The police also said they want to send blood samples of the arrested persons for tests to find out if they had consumed drugs.

Congress will respond appropriately to Ministers pushing for 3 more DCMs in Karnataka: Shivakumar

PTI ■ MANGALURU

Seemingly expressing his displeasure against ministers demanding three more deputy chief minister posts in Karnataka, state Congress President D K Shivakumar on Tuesday said the party would respond to them appropriately. Currently, Shivakumar from the Vokkaliga community is the only DCM in the Siddaramaiah-led cabinet. Some of the ministers in the cabinet have been pitching for DCM posts to be given to leaders from Veerashaiva-Lingayat, SC/ST and minority communities. "You people (media) put in news if someone says something. Why should I say no to people who are happy (by appearing in news)... Let anyone make any demand, the party will respond to them appropriately. Simple," Shivakumar told reporters here in response to a question. Asked whether there is a plan in the party to

have more deputy chief ministers, he said, "You please meet Mallikarjun Kharge (AICC president) and our in-charge general secretary or ask the chief minister." A section within the Congress is said to be of the opinion that the statement by ministers seeking three more DCM posts was part of a plan by Siddaramaiah's camp to keep Shivakumar in check, amid talks that he might seek the CM post after two-and-a-half years of this government's tenure, and to counter his influence both in the government and the party. The ministers — Co-Operation Minister K N Rajanna, Housing Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan, Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi and few others — who have pitched for three more DCMs are considered close to Siddaramaiah. The Congress had decided that Shivakumar will be "the only" deputy CM amid stiff

competition between him and Siddaramaiah for the chief minister's post after the assembly election results in May last year. It was also said to be a "commitment" made by the Congress leadership to Shivakumar while convincing him to give up his claim for the CM post and to take up the role of deputy chief minister. Asked whether he or his brother and former MP D K Suresh would contest in the assembly bypolls from Channapatna, Shivakumar, who has recently been making repeated visits to the segment, did not want to give any direct response but indicated that he may contest. "My brother is not interested, as people have decided to give Suresh a rest (through defeat in Lok Sabha polls), but there is a desire to work for the party, as people there (Channapatna) have trusted us and given us (Congress) about 85,000 votes (in Lok Sabha polls). We have to save them," he said.

SP demands cancellation of NEET exam

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

The youth wing of the Samajwadi Party (SP) on Tuesday organised a protest march here over alleged malpractices in the conduct of medical entrance exam NEET-UG, demanding cancellation of the exam and resignation of the education minister. Starting from the party headquarters, the slogan-shouting agitators climbed the barricades placed by the police on Vikramaditya Marg to stop them. The police used 'lathis' to disperse the protesters, who were later taken into custody and removed from the protest venue. SP chief Akhilesh Yadav and his party have been vociferously raising the issue of the alleged question paper leak in the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET)-UG as well as the police recruitment exam under the BJP government in the state.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

A new leaf

The 18th Lok Sabha begins on a promising note amid Opposition challenges to the Government

The much-awaited inaugural session of 18th Lok Sabha started on June 24th. This marks a pivotal moment in India's democratic journey. With the NDA returning to power albeit with lesser seats would make it a much-balanced house than the 17th Lok Sabha in which NDA had brute majority. However, the political landscape has undergone significant shifts which will reflect in the functioning of the new Lok Sabha. Indeed, the priorities set in this session will shape India's trajectory for the next five years. The first session of the 18th Lok Sabha hit the controversy on its very first day. The leaders of the INDIA bloc staged a protest outside Parliament on Monday, coinciding with the oath-taking ceremony of newly elected Members of Parliament. Key figures, including Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, party leader Sonia Gandhi, and Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav, held copies of the Constitution as they demonstrated against the BJP-led NDA government. The swearing-in process for other Union ministers and newly elected MPs was conducted by Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab. Members of the Congress and the INDIA bloc, who are part of parliamentary panels, opted out of assisting with the oath-taking process for the newly elected MPs. They expressed their dissatisfaction over the appointment of BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab as pro-tem Speaker instead of their preferred candidate, eight-time Congress MP K Suresh. This is a first indication that the functioning of this Lok Sabha would not be smooth.



The 18th Lok Sabha's first session will continue until July 3. The election for the Lok Sabha Speaker is set for June 26, and President Murmu will address a joint session of both houses on June 27. Interestingly this session will see the appointment of a Leader of the Opposition for the first time in a decade. The session is expected to be contentious, with the opposition poised to challenge the BJP-led NDA on various issues, including the Speaker election on June 26, paper leaks in NEET-UG and UGC-NET exams, and disputes over the pro-tem Speaker's appointment. The opposition aims to address rising prices, food inflation, fatalities due to extreme heatwaves, and recent 'irregularities' in exam administrations. The 18th Lok Sabha is expected to prioritize measures to boost economic growth, tackle inflation, and create employment opportunities. The new session is also expected to focus on social justice, addressing issues related to inequality and ensuring that the benefits of economic growth reach all sections of society. Besides India's strategic interests and security concerns are expected to be prominent in the 18th Lok Sabha's deliberations in the wake of terrorist attacks in Jammu. Beefing up security and restoring law and order in various parts of the country should be taken up on priority. This session not only sets the legislative framework but also reflects the aspirations of a diverse and dynamic nation, eager to carve out a resilient and equitable path forward in a rapidly changing global landscape.

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PICTALK



An Indian cricket fan blows into a shell horn prior to the ICC Men's T20 World Cup cricket match AP/PTI

Lessons from the life of lord Rama!

Our experiences, coupled with the wisdom imparted through stories told by our elders or discovered in books, often shape us in profound ways

Our experiences, and even the stories narrated by our elders or those read by us, impart a certain wisdom. Many of these get so deeply ingrained in our minds that often we develop characteristics unknown to our conscious self. My mother always kept a copy of Ramcharitmanas in her prayer corner. We would listen wide-eyed to her recitation of the chaupais (a quatrain verse of Indian poetry), my imagination running wild with the story of Lord Rama, and his victory over evil. It remained a story to me in my growing up years, till I joined my railway job.



As a branch head, I was also responsible for allotting government accommodation to the staff under my control. It was a routine exercise following the waitlist; however, the branch head had the discretionary authority to make an out-of-turn allotment. A few days into my posting, I was approached by the widow of

one staff, supported by a few union leaders, for an out-of-turn allotment on compassionate grounds. I passed the orders. Then I started having doubts, knowing that I would now also be approached by the rival union for favour. I refused the approach several weeks later despite their polite requests to follow the precedence I had set. I learned that it was important to be fair while making decisions. One day a few union leaders came to me quite agitated. They complained about the disrespectful communication by one of my junior officers. The officer had used the Hindi tum (you), instead of the more respectable aap (you), when addressing a staff. I tried to assuage their hurt sentiments by pointing out the north Indian origins of the junior officer, where, in some regions, even the parents are addressed as tum. I learned to respect the local sentiments. I also learned the importance of nurturing relations. Armed with bookish knowledge, I was a novice in the practical professional life. The staff had been dealing with these issues far before I had

joined the engineering college and many even from before I was born. I had no hesitation to sit with them without any biases and learn. I took strength from the stories of Nishad, Shabri, Sugriva, and many others. It was only after I faced difficult situations in my professional life, I understood that the life of Lord Rama as a prince and then king was tough. He had to uphold integrity in his public life even at the cost of personal suffering. He also had to build and nurture new relationships without pre-conceived notions to fight for the good. I had learned important lessons from the stories narrated by my mother. Ramcharitmanas was not just a story, it was a way of life! Following the principles that He lived and fought for on this earth was the true devotion that I could offer. I did not need the sanctuary of a temple to pray!

(The author is an electrical engineer with the Indian Railways and conducts classes in creative writing; views are personal)



SANJAY CHANDRA

Inordinate delay in naming new army chief



ASHOK K MEHTA

The Govt's decision to extend the tenure of Chief of Army Staff by 30 days, instead of announcing the new appointee has sparked controversy and conjecture

It is intriguing why the appointment of Lt Gen Upendra Dwivedi was not announced on 26 May but on 11 June which would have obviated a 30-day extension to COAS Gen Manoj Pande and the unnecessary speculation that followed. Government would not have been deterred by Model Code of Conduct for election as it had already appointed VAdm Dinesh Tripathi as Chief of Naval Staff on 19 April. That a supersession was contemplated but not implemented as the '400 paar' goal, even 272 mark were missed probably led to discretion superseding valour. Further NDA allies had already flagged the Agniveer issue!

Strange are the ways of the government. Just six days before Pande's superannuation-bringing the appointment down to wire-it ordered an extension after he had been feted out by his successor on 21 May. The extension was quite baffling. Government officials like Cabinet Secretary, Home Secretary and others (including Director ED) who run government for politicians get extensions as a matter of routine. In the case of ED's Sanjay Mishra, Supreme Court had to intervene to issue a deadline. But bureaucrats have made themselves indispensable like the repetition of NSA shows. The extension to COAS triggered extensive speculation: The last extension was given to COAS Gen Gopal Bewoor who succeeded Field Marshal Manekshaw. This extension ensured that Lt Gen PS Bhagat, a Victoria Cross winner was denied the post of COAS, opening the path for Lt Gen Tappy Raina, a Kashmiri, to get the coveted job. Incidentally, both Bewoor and Bhagat were Rimcollians (studied at RIMC Dehradun) and good friends. Appointments of CDS and COAS have got highly politicised - as their stature diminishing - as their most conspicuous relegation in the seating plan during PM's oath taking ceremony demonstrated. No one but they are to blame. Equally unusual was Defence Minister Minister Rajnath Singh being welcomed back to MOD by CDS Gen Anil Chauhan holding



a bouquet. A soldier's salute is the highest tribute. A month's extension in the armed forces is a first, though in one case, extension was given for one day. The extension will affect the line of succession beyond the present contenders. VCOAS Lt Gen Dwivedi was the seniormost followed by Lt Gen Ajai Singh GoC-in-C Southern Command. Both were batch-mates but the tyranny of 'order of merit' while graduating from IMA dictates seniority. Both were to retire on 30 June. Next senior was Northern Army Commander. Lt Gen Suchindra Kumar followed by Lt Gen Raja Subramani of Central Command. Interestingly all the Generals named except the outgoing COAS who is an Engineer officer are Infanteers. Pande is the first Sapper officer to break the glass ceiling. On 1 July the new Army Commanders will be Lt Gens Raja Subramani VCOAS, Devu Sharma AARTRAC, Dhiraj Seth Southern, Sengupta South Western and Manjinder Singh Central. Traditionalists hold that extensions in the military are not par for the course as they disrupt the line of succession and officers should refuse to accept extension. It is the government's prerogative to choose a Service Chief by seniority, merit and deep selection



GOVERNMENTS MUST NOT BE SEEN BREACHING THE SACROSANCT SERVICE RULE BOOK OR INVENTING NEW RULES. INSTANCES OF SUPERSESSION ARE RARE: THE MOST RECENT BEING THE APPOINTMENT OF LATE GEN BIPIN RAWAT AS COAS WHO OVERTOOK TWO SENIOR GENERALS

superseding officers or even recalling the selected from retirement. But service rules should not be tweaked whimsically. In 2014 after BJP won the elections it tried to prevent the ruling UPA from appointing the seniormost Gen Dalbir Suhag as COAS. The thing is, Governments must not be seen breaching the sacrosanct service rule book or inventing new rules. Instances of supersession are rare: the most recent being the appointment of late Gen Bipin Rawat as COAS who overtook two senior Generals. Supersessions have happened in the Navy and Air Force also. Admiral Robin Dhawan in 2014 and Admiral Karambir Singh in 2019 superseded their senior VADM's Shekhar Sinha and Bimal Verma. Superseded officers have generally resigned but some continued to serve. So why the one-month extension to Gen Pande. The government wanted to be back in power (as it was on 9 June) before taking any unusual step like deviating from seniority principle. Remember all three - Incumbent Pande, next senior Dwivedi followed by Singh - were all to retire on 30 June. If government had wanted to appoint seniormost Lt Gen Dwivedi as COAS, his name could have been announced on 26 May as it had announced appointment of

VAdm Tripathi as CNS on 19 April while moral code of conduct was on. Instead, the government preoccupied with election extended service of Gen Pande giving itself more leeway in naming new COAS. Choices were A) appoint the seniormost Dwivedi. B) retire both Dwivedi and Singh and appoint either Suchindra Kumar or Raja Subramani or And C) Supersede Dwivedi and appoint Singh by tweaking the rulebook (one day extension for Singh) or deep-select from other eligible Army Commanders. In the Air Force, service rules were tweaked by MoD in 1988. Air Chief Marshal Polly Mehra retired on 31 July. Air Marshal Nimmi Suri who was to retire on 31 July was given one day extension and appointed Air Chief Marshal and Chief of Air Staff, superseding Air Marshal MM Singh. In another case I believe the forenoon/afternoon tweak was applied which is being replicated now - retiring Gen Pande F/N and appointing Gen Dwivedi in A/N. The extension merely created a storm in a tea cup, the El Nino effect!

(The writer, a retired Major General, was Commander, IPKF South, Sri Lanka, and founder member of the Defence Planning Staff, currently the Integrated Defence Staff. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

COMBATING LONELINESS

Madam — The World Health Organization (WHO) declared loneliness a "global health threat" in November 2023 and should be commended for launching the WHO Commission on Social Connection to address this issue. Connecting with others has become easier in our modern era of smartphones and the internet. Here are a few practical suggestions to help older individuals combat loneliness: Each apartment complex or neighborhood should have a common room for social gatherings and reading, where people can read newspapers and magazines, chat, discuss general topics, and stay until family members return home from work. Employ a coordinator for the social room to attend to the needs of the elderly, such as running errands, engaging in conversations, and providing a cheerful atmosphere.

A written understanding should be established that discussions in the common room remain private to prevent controversies. Allow lonely individuals from nearby homes to join. Provide cots for naps and encourage bringing lunch boxes. Encourage keeping pets. Promote hobbies such as gardening, puzzle-solving, and reading. Participate in social platforms. Create quiz groups on WhatsApp and other social platforms for daily quizzes, with participants taking turns to pose questions and answers. Make humor and laughter sessions mandatory in every apartment complex, educational institution, and workplace, at least for 10 minutes each morning and evening. The internet offers an endless supply of jokes that are considerate of others' feelings.

PVS Sreelekha | Secunderabad

OPPOSITION TAKES ON GOVT

Madam — The parliamentary session starting on June 24 promises to be significant, as it marks the first time in a decade that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) will not govern alone. New mem-

Monetary compensation to housewives



Housewives are just as valuable as their employed male counterparts in families. From managing household chores to planning family events, housewives possess a range of skills that many working men cannot match. Years ago, the Supreme Court challenged the census for categorizing homemakers as 'non-workers' and called for laws to recognize their economic contribution. A woman's

role as a mother, wife, and homemaker should itself be regarded as productive work, transcending mere monetary value. She brings emotional attachment and selfless service to the family. Society often views housewives solely as nurturers, failing to respect them as individuals independent of their familial roles. It took insightful minds and the efforts of many women to rebrand the term 'housewife' to the more respectful 'homemaker.' Unpaid household work by women must be recognized as productive labor, not just as tasks done for the family's welfare. The reality is that in most cases, women have little choice when it comes to housework. It's high time the contributions of homemakers are acknowledged through appropriate monetary compensation.

Ranganathan Sivakumar | Chennai

bers of Parliament will take the oath of secrecy, overseen by temporary speaker Bhartruhari Mehtab. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA), including the BJP's 240 members, now totals 294 members, highlighting a shift in the political landscape. The Congress party, with 100 seats, alongside its allies totaling 234 seats, will have a strengthened position, allowing it to assume the role of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha for the first time in ten years. This change amplifies the opposition's ability to hold the government accountable on issues like inflation, unemployment, and the ongoing violence in Manipur. This 18th Lok Sabha stands out for its strong opposition, and how the ruling party navigates this dynamic will be closely observed in the coming days.

Shantaram Wagh | Pune

INDO-BANGLADESH TIES GET A BOOST

Madam — This has with reference to your editorial "Friend in need" published on June 24. Bangladesh Prime Minister

Sheikh Hasina's two-day visit to India highlighted the tight relationship between the two countries. The two countries signed ten agreements and memoranda of understanding, but the agreement struck on India's plan to send a technical team to conserve and manage the Teesta River garnered special notice. The distribution of Teesta River water has been viewed as a problematic issue between the two countries. Considering this, China began to express interest in the management and conservation of the Teesta River in 2020. All parties were aware of the sensitivity of the situation, given India's reservations about it. Looking at countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives, we can see that China's approach was not new. However, given India's good relations with Bangladesh, the issue over Teesta water sharing did not raise suspicions and animosity between the two countries.

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com



FIRST COLUMN WE ARE PLAYING THE SCRIPT OF LIFE

The world is a stage where we each have a unique, pre-scripted part to play



RAJYOGI BRAHMAKUMAR NIKUNJJI

Recently a veteran actor from the Indian film industry was given the Highest Civilian Award for his contribution towards spreading cultural values across the Globe through his acting career. While he was given the award, everyone in the audience stood up to give him a standing ovation with so much love and respect to the legend, who brought so many characters to life on celluloid screen. We all have experienced this euphoria in theatres, while a heroic character makes an entry on screen, there are loud cheers, whistles, applause and more. And at the end of the film, the hero wins the audience's hearts and steals the show. Whether he plays a prince or a pauper, it does not matter as his fans through the theatres to catch a glimpse of him.

The beauty of his performance lies in his ability to internalize the character to the extent that he and his role seem one to his fans. But even while doing it, he is very much conscious of the fact that he is merely an actor in a particular drama, his role is carved, his dialogues are scripted and the costumes are designed for that particular character. Hence, his greatness lies only in playing the role to the best of his capability. On his long journey to stardom, every actor often turns a spectator and critiques his own work so that he can improve upon his act. It is this element of detachment from the different roles he plays that allows him to progress, play multiple roles simultaneously with clarity and then return to his personal life at the end of the day.

Not many of us know that the world cycle is very much similar to this drama in which all of us are actors with unique parts. Everyone is the protagonist in his life and can become a hero who draws applause. However, today we hardly find anyone cheering for the other person. Because, there is great dissatisfaction either with each other's performance or the script. As a result the drama appears to have become a tragedy. There is widespread chaos with actors criticizing each others' performances instead of theirs. The reason for this trouble is that most of us act without the knowledge that the earth is a stage and we have all come here to play our individual roles. Secondly, each actor's role is unique and pre-scripted and hence trying to match it with anybody else's



is futile. Thirdly, the biggest law of the world drama is that it is ever beneficial for everyone. In the absence of this understanding or its consciousness, we get attached to our roles, forget to change our costumes and make-up and lose the flexibility to adapt to each part. Take a simple example of a person who plays a son, a husband, a father, a friend and several other roles at the same time. If he is in the consciousness of being a male, he could dominate his wife at home or look down upon his female staff at office. At work, he would stick to his role of being a boss so much so that he forgets to become their colleague. On the other hand, if he is conscious that he is an actor and must like a hero win everyone's hearts, then he would understand the requirements of his role and become active, accurate and attractive at whatever he does.

Living the peaks and troughs of each character we play, we drain ourselves and are unable to muster enough strength to meet the demands of each role or take well the twists in the scenes, as a result of which there are emotional upheavals and sorrow becomes a regular visitor when the purpose of the drama is to help the actors experience joy and happiness. On the other hand, if we become detached to the roles we play and keep faith in the eternal law that the drama has been scripted for universal benefit, the feeling of loss and gain, comfort and pain would begin to dissolve and our mind would stop to question the developments in every scene. So, the moral of the story is that we should be detached and yet be involved in the part we are playing. That's the quality to be a superstar in this World Drama.

(Writer is a spiritual educator & popular columnist; views are personal)

Water crisis in Delhi is entirely man-made



UTTAM GUPTA

The ruthless exploitation of natural endowments and that too when resources are being put to misuse is unconscionable

The gravity of water crisis facing Delhiites has forced the Delhi government to approach the Supreme Court (SC) seeking its intervention to direct neighboring states Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, and Himachal Pradesh (HP) to provide additional raw water supply to the national capital. Initially, the SC directed HP to release 137 cusecs of raw water which translates to 70 million gallons per day (MGD) of more water for the city. It also asked Haryana to make arrangements for ensuring its free flow to Delhi.

But, now with HP claiming that it can't release more than what it is already giving (70 MGD), the top court has directed the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) to convene a meeting with all parties and take a decision expeditiously. The mandate of UYRB is to inter alia regulate the allocation of available water flows amongst the beneficiary States and also monitoring the return flows. Is Delhi really short of water?

According to Delhi's Economic Survey Report 2023, the overall water requirement of the city is 1,290 MGD, with an increase in the summer months. Against this, the Delhi Jal Board (DJB) which has the mandate to manage the water supply in the city (including procurement of raw water from various sources, its processing in water treatment plants or WTPs and its distribution) had said on April 3, 2024 in a written statement that water production in the capital stood at around 990 MGD on average between March end and start of April. The DJB actually produced 1,002 MGD on June 7, 2024.

Further, the Economic Survey of Delhi, 2023-24, says, "As per Outcome Budget (Q2 of 2023-24) of DJB, the total distribution losses are at about 52.35 percent". Distribution losses is a sophisticated nomenclature for pilferage of water supplies by tanker mafia and industries. The pilferage is happening at all stages of the water supply chain viz. the WTPs, conveyance systems and distribution systems. This couldn't have happened without the connivance of the authorities.

Deduct 52 percent pilferage or 520 MGD from production of around 1000 MGD, the quantity available for consumption by households in Delhi would be 480 MGD. This is barely 37 percent of the demand estimated at 1290 MGD. It sounds bizarre! If, that were the case, nearly 2/3rd of Delhiites would have been without drinking water; a complete disaster. That hasn't happened even as we see people chasing water tankers in several parts of Delhi.

So, what are we missing? There is something fundamentally wrong with the way mandarins in the government estimate the requirement. Ideally, this should be done from the demand side which involves conducting household survey, collecting data on how much each unit needs, aggregating and so on. Instead, they look at the total supply in the past say 2023-24, presume that that much quantity was consumed and apply an incremental factor/percentage increase to arrive at the requirement for 2024-25.

In this process, they end up including even the pilfered quantity in the requirement. It means that 1290 MGD also includes 520 MGD of water plundered by dubious operators from the system



A SUSTAINABLE SOLUTION TO DELHI WATER WOES REQUIRES THAT THE STATE GOVERNMENT ADDRESSES PILFERAGE ON A WAR FOOTING. YET, ITS OVERWHELMING FOCUS HAS BEEN ON GETTING MORE RAW WATER FROM HARYANA, UTTAR PRADESH, HP ETC.

(assuming that 52 per cent pilferage has continued in the current year). Minus this, the requirement of households was 770 MGD. This being higher than the net availability of 480 MGD, Delhiites are feeling the stress.

Unambiguously, plunder of water by tanker mafia is at the root of Delhi's water woes (last year, Delhiites were spared as the HH demand being muted, the net supply after accounting for the greed of the tanker mafia was sufficient to meet it). But, for this, the entire production of 1000 MGD would have been available for HH consumption resulting in a surplus of 230 MGD (1000-770) forget any shortage that we are experiencing today.

A sustainable solution to Delhi water woes requires that the State government addresses pilferage on a war footing. Yet, its overwhelming focus has been on getting more raw water from Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, HP etc. While, making the demand it is oblivious of the fact that all its nine WTPs are already operating above their installed capacities (yielding a total of around 1000 MGD which is around 47 MGD more than the combined capacity of all nine WTPs) and that the DJB won't be able to deliver more even if it gets more raw water from the neighboring states.

As for addition to the processing capacity, last year, the Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal had approved an action plan to increase water production by 131 MGD in the short-term and by 380 MGD in the long-term. It

involved construction of a new plant at Chandrawal, with a capacity of 105 MGD and completion of another plant at Dwarka, which has the potential to increase production by 50 MGD. That plan hasn't made much headway. While, work on Chandrawal plant is yet to start, even the Dwarka project which was to come up by March 2024 is running behind schedule.

Unable to manage water supplies from the rivers viz. Yamuna, Ravi-Beas, Ganga and so on, the Delhi government is now increasing its dependence on groundwater which currently contributes a little more than 10 percent - almost 100 percent increase over the level five years ago. According to the Central Ground Water Board (CGWB), over 41 percent of Delhi's total area is overexploited even as it has been drawing more groundwater than it recharges. The total annual groundwater recharge decreased from 0.41 billion cubic meters (bcm) in 2022 to 0.38 bcm in 2023, while the annual extractable groundwater resource available decreased from 0.37 bcm to 0.34 bcm.

This is not a healthy trend. The ruthless exploitation of natural endowments and that too when resources are being put to misuse (read: diversion of water meant for HH consumption to industrial use) is unconscionable.

Apart from the huge imbalance between the demand and supply, the gross mismanagement and irregularities in running Delhi's water supply systems is also push-

ing DJB to the brink of financial bankruptcy. Pilferage of more than half of water supply means the Board doesn't get any revenue on that much quantity. Then, you have Kejriwal's free scheme that involves no payment for consumption up to 20,000 litres a month per household.

Even for HHs who get the bills and haven't paid for years, the Chief Minister has been trying to get a one time settlement package cleared by the Lieutenant Governor which will tantamount to the State exchequer foregoing thousands of crore. Finally, there are reports of payments having been made by the households albeit to private entities (authorized to collect the money) but never reached the revenue department.

All this has led to a pathetic situation whereby DJB which until a decade back was making profit today has an accumulated debt of over Rs 70,000 crore. The Board is able to run its operations solely because it can borrow money from banks and other financial institutions (FIs) backed by sovereign State guarantee. Left to fend for itself, it would have collapsed long ago. One shudders to think of what this would entail for water supply to the capital city. The water crisis as also seriousness of problems on other infrastructure fronts such as electricity etc and overall governance issues in Delhi calls for some drastic action by the Centre.

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

Navigating the complexities of drug abuse and illicit trafficking

With a strong emphasis on prevention, awareness, and eliminating stigma, the UN champions a holistic approach to tackling drug abuse

Annually observed on June 26, 'The International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking' was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1987 to combat drug abuse globally. The day serves to highlight the challenges posed by drug abuse and illicit trafficking, stressing the need for international cooperation. The 2024 campaign, "The evidence is clear: invest in prevention", focuses on raising awareness about the importance of providing help and treatment to individuals struggling with drug use. It advocates for a compassionate approach, emphasizing empathy and care over punitive measures. This shift, aims to promote understanding of the negative impacts of drugs on



RAJDEEP PATHAK

personal, social, and spiritual well-being. The campaign also calls for treating people who use drugs with respect and without judgment, aiming to change societal attitudes. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) underscores the significance of eliminating stigma and adopting a people-centered approach based on human rights and evidence-based practices to effectively

combat drug abuse globally. Besides, the primary objective is to address the multifaceted issues of drug abuse and trafficking by raising public awareness, promoting preventive measures, and advocating for robust policies and programs. Educating communities about the severe dangers and consequences of drug abuse and illicit trafficking is essential. Fostering international cooperation is crucial for a comprehensive approach, emphasizing global partnerships and collaboration among law enforcement agencies to dismantle drug trafficking networks. Addressing these objectives will create a more informed, prepared, and united front against the global drug crisis. Going by the 2024 theme -

"The evidence is clear: invest in prevention", the message of the Secretary General of the United Nations António Guterres is pertinent in which he reiterated that drugs inflict profound suffering, deteriorating health and wellbeing, with overdoses claiming countless lives annually. To him, the rise of more lethal synthetic drugs and record-breaking illicit drug production fuels crime and violence globally, impacting the most vulnerable, especially youth. Those struggling with substance abuse face repeated victimization from the drugs, societal stigma, and harsh responses. To break this cycle, 'we must invest in evidence-based prevention programs that safeguard individuals and communities, disrupt illicit

economies, and prioritize rehabilitation, education, and harm reduction'. He cited the example of Portugal saying that prevention is effective. António Guterres said, "As this year's theme reminds us, breaking the cycle of suffering means starting at the beginning, before drugs take hold, by investing in prevention." But what does 'Drug Abuse' actually mean? Drug abuse can be defined as the improper or excessive consumption of illegal drugs or prescription medications for non-therapeutic purposes. Drug abuse severely impacts physical health, manifesting in serious conditions. Reports point that chronic cocaine or methamphetamine abuse leads to cardiovascular issues, including heart disease and

stroke. Smoking drugs like crack cocaine can cause lung cancer, while intravenous drug use increases HIV risk. Other risks, as medical reports point, include nasal damage from snorting, liver and kidney disease from prolonged substance use, and oral cancer from smokeless tobacco. Contaminants in illicit drugs are linked to leukemia, and severe weight loss is common among stimulant addicts. Besides, mental health issues include depression, anxiety, memory and learning problems, insomnia, violent behaviour, delusions, paranoia, confusion, extreme mood swings, and substance dependence. Some report also suggests that the relationships between drug-related crime, crimes that affect the environment,

and convergent crime are complex and evolving. Drug cultivation and trafficking and crimes that affect the environment are surging in the Amazon Basin. Also, the 'UNODC World Drug Report 2023' highlights social and economic inequalities driving drug problems and their environmental and human rights impacts and rising conflicts. Treatment coverage remains low, with only one in five affected receiving help, notably lacking in some regions. Recent data from the Government of India reveals alarming statistics: more than 10% of the population grapples with psychiatric disorders such as depression, anxiety, and psychosis. A substantial segment, comprising 15 individuals per 1000, engages in drug

use, while chronic alcohol addiction affects 25 per 1000 people. The availability of psychiatric and de-addiction beds starkly contrasts with demand, with only 20% of the required facilities accessible nationwide, leaving an alarming 80% shortfall in inpatient care capacity. Following a tailored treatment plan involving detoxification, counseling, and possibly medication is crucial. Lifestyle adjustments such as adopting healthy habits and avoiding triggers support recovery. The way out is, facing the problem, discussing and treating it with experts' guidance, but not being the escapist. (The writer is Programme Executive, Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti; views are personal)

Israeli SC says ultra-Orthodox men must serve in military

AP ■ JERUSALEM

Israel's Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled unanimously that the military must begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men for military service, a decision that could lead to the collapse of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition as Israel continues to wage war in Gaza. The court ruled that in the absence of a law that distinguishes between Jewish seminary students and other draftees, Israel's compulsory military service system applies to the ultra-Orthodox like any other citizens. Under longstanding arrangements, ultra-Orthodox men have been exempt from the draft, which is compulsory for most Jewish men and women. These exemptions have long been a source of anger among

the secular public, a divide that has widened during the eight-month-old war, as the military has called up tens of thousands of soldiers and says it needs all the manpower it can get. Over 600 soldiers have been killed. Politically powerful ultra-Orthodox parties, key partners in Netanyahu's governing coalition, oppose any change in the current system. If the exemptions are ended, they could bolt the coalition, causing the government to collapse and leading to new elections. During arguments, government lawyers told the court that forcing ultra-Orthodox men to enlist would "tear Israeli society apart." The court decision comes at a sensitive time, as the war in Gaza drags on into its ninth month and the number of

dead soldiers continues to mount. The court found that the state was carrying out "invalid selective enforcement, which represents a serious violation of the rule of law, and the principle according to which all individuals are equal before the law." It did not say how many ultra-Orthodox should be drafted. The court also ruled that state subsidies for seminaries where exempted ultra-Orthodox men study should remain suspended. The court temporarily froze the seminary budgets earlier this year. In a post on the social media platform X, cabinet minister Yitzhak Goldknopf, who heads one of the ultra-Orthodox parties in the coalition, called the ruling "very unfortunate and disappoint-

ing." He did not say whether his party would bolt the government. "The state of Israel was established in order to be a home for the Jewish people whose Torah is the bedrock of its existence. The Holy Torah will prevail," he wrote. The ultra-Orthodox see their full-time religious study as their part in protecting the state of Israel. Many fear that greater contact with secular society through the military will distance adherents from strict observance of the faith. Ultra-Orthodox men attend special seminaries that focus on religious studies, with little attention on secular topics like math, English or science. Critics have said they are ill-prepared to serve in the military or enter the secular work force.

Sunak withdraws party support from 2 over betting scandal

PTI ■ LONDON

Adding to the turmoil for an embattled Rishi Sunak, the British Prime Minister on Tuesday decided to withdraw his party's backing from two of his Conservative colleagues embroiled in a betting scandal over the date of the general election. The move comes just over a week before the July 4 polls after days of the row dominating the campaign headlines, with the Opposition demanding the suspension of those accused. A Conservative Party spokesperson confirmed that Tory candidates Craig Williams and Laura Saunders will no longer have the party's backing to contest as MPs from Montgomeryshire and Gwynwr in Wales and Bristol North West in England

respectively. "As a result of ongoing internal enquiries, we have concluded that we can no longer support Craig Williams or Laura Saunders as parliamentary candidates at the forthcoming general election," a Conservative Party spokesperson said. "We have checked with the Gambling Commission that this decision does not compromise the investigation that they are conducting, which is rightly independent and ongoing," the spokesperson said. Sunak had come under intense pressure to take action following the revelations over the past couple of weeks, including from some members of his own party. Saunders is the wife of the Tory director of campaigns, Tony Lee, and Williams a

close parliamentary aide to the Prime Minister. Sunak had previously admitted being "incredibly angry" when the revelations that members of his close circle were embroiled in betting on the election date but insisted he did not want to interfere with the Gambling Commission's independent probe. However, that position has now changed implying some evidence of impropriety. While betting is legal in the UK, any bets placed with the advantage of insider information could fall within the purview of illegality. When Sunak stepped out onto the steps of 10 Downing Street amid pouring rain on May 22 to announce July 4 as the date of the general election, he took the country by surprise with a summer election as opposed to the wide-

ly speculated September-October timeline. The date was therefore considered a very closely guarded secret, with only a handful of close party aides expected to have been in the know. Under Section 42 of the UK's Gambling Act 2005, it is an offence to cheat at gambling or to do anything that allows someone else to cheat. It could come with a jail term attached if it leads to a prosecution. The Gambling Commission has only admitted "investigating the possibility of offences concerning the date of the election" and declined to provide any details on the "ongoing investigation." "We are not confirming or denying the identity of any individuals involved in this investigation," a spokesperson said.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange freed from UK prison

AP ■ BANGKOK



A plane carrying Julian Assange landed Tuesday in Bangkok for refuelling, as the WikiLeaks founder was on his way to enter a plea deal with the US government that will free him and resolve the legal case that spanned years and continents over the publication of a trove of classified documents. A chartered flight from London that Assange's wife, Stella, confirmed was carrying her husband landed at Don Mueang International Airport. Officials there told The Associated Press the plane was scheduled to continue on to Saipan, the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands, a US commonwealth in the Pacific, where Assange is expected to appear in court on Wednesday. He's expected to plead guilty to an Espionage Act charge of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified national

defence information, according to the US Justice Department in a letter filed in court. Assange is expected to return to his home country of Australia after his plea and sentencing. The hearing is taking place in Saipan because of Assange's opposition to travelling to the continental US and the court's proximity to Australia, prosecutors said. The guilty plea, which must be approved by a judge, brings an abrupt conclusion to a criminal case of international intrigue and to the US govern-

ment's yearslong pursuit of a publisher whose hugely popular secret-sharing website made him a cause celebre among many press freedom advocates who said he acted as a journalist to expose US military wrongdoing. Investigators, in contrast, have repeatedly asserted that his actions broke laws meant to protect sensitive information and put the country's national security at risk. Stella Assange told the BBC from Australia that it had been "touch and go" over the past 72 hours whether the deal would go ahead but she felt "elated" at the news. A lawyer who married the WikiLeaks founder in prison in 2022, she said details of the agreement would be made public once the judge had signed off on it. "He will be a free man once it is signed off by a judge," she said, adding that she still didn't think it was real. She told Britain's PA news agency that the flight was cost-

ing Assange USD 500,000 and they would start a fundraising campaign to help pay for it. Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks, said the deal for Assange came about after the growing involvement of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. "This is the result of a long, long process which has been going on for some time. It has been a tough battle, but the focus now is on Julian being reunited with his family," Hrafnsson told the PA news agency. "The most important thing is that Julian is free and he is finally able to enjoy the big blue sky." In a statement posted on the social media platform X, WikiLeaks said Assange boarded a plane and departed Monday after leaving the British prison where he has spent the last five years. WikiLeaks applauded the announcement of the deal, saying it was grateful for "all who stood by us, fought for us,

and remained utterly committed in the fight for his freedom." Albanese told Parliament that an Australian envoy had flown with Assange from London. "Regardless of the views that people have about Mr. Assange's activities, the case has dragged on for too long," Albanese said. "There's nothing to be gained by his continued incarceration and we want him brought home to Australia." The deal ensures that Assange will admit guilt while also sparing him from additional prison time. He had spent years hiding in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London after Swedish authorities sought his arrest on rape allegations before being locked up in the United Kingdom. Assange is expected to be sentenced to the five years he has already spent in the British prison while fighting extradition to the US to face charges, a process that has played out in a series of hearings in London.

Last month, he won the right to appeal an extradition order after his lawyers argued that the US government provided "blatantly inadequate" assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen if extradited from Britain. Assange has been heralded by many around the world as a hero who brought to light military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the files published by WikiLeaks was a video of a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by American forces in Baghdad that killed 11 people, including two Reuters journalists. But his reputation was also tarnished by rape allegations, which he has denied. The Justice Department's indictment unsealed in 2019 accused Assange of encouraging and helping US Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks published in 2010.

Prosecutors had accused Assange of damaging national security by publishing documents that harmed the US and its allies and aided its adversaries. The case was lambasted by press advocates and Assange supporters. Federal prosecutors defended it as targeting conduct that went way beyond that of a journalist gathering information, amounting to an attempt to solicit, steal and indiscriminately publish classified government documents. The plea agreement comes months after President Joe Biden said he was considering a request from Australia to drop the US push to prosecute Assange. The White House was not involved in the decision to resolve Assange's case, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly about the case and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Aus leaders welcome expected plea that could bring Assange home

Melbourne (AP): Australian leaders cautiously welcomed an expected plea agreement that could set free Julian Assange, who was pursued for years over WikiLeaks' publication of a trove of classified documents. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday there was nothing to be gained by keeping the Australian incarcerated. A plane thought to be carrying Assange landed Tuesday in Bangkok as he heads to the Northern Mariana Islands, a US commonwealth in the Pacific midway between Australia and Japan, where he is expected to appear in a US federal court Wednesday local time. He is expected to plead guilty to an Espionage Act charge of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified national defense information, the US Justice Department said in a letter filed in court. Assange is expected to return to Australia if a judge accepts the plea agreement. Public support for Assange has grown in Australia during the seven years he has spent avoiding extradition to the United States by hiding in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London and later during his five years in Belmarsh Prison. Albanese has been lobbying since his government was elected in 2022 for the United States to end its prosecution of Assange, and his plight was seen as a test of the prime minister's leverage with President Joe Biden. Albanese had been a senior minister in a center-left Labor Party government that in 2010 staunchly backed US criticisms of WikiLeaks' classified information dumps. But Assange has breached no Australian law. Albanese told Parliament that Australian High Commissioner to the UK Stephen Smith had flown with Assange from London. "The government is certainly aware that Australian citizen Mr Julian Assange has legal proceedings scheduled in the United States.

Canada's Liberals suffer major upset in Toronto special election

Toronto (AP): Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal party has suffered a major upset in a special election for a Toronto district it has held for three decades, raising doubts about Trudeau's leadership ahead of next year's general election. Elections Canada reported the opposition Conservative candidate winning the Toronto-St. Paul's district by almost 600 votes, 42.1% over the Liberal candidate's 40.5% with all 192 polling stations reporting. The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation declared Conservative Don Stewart the winner early Tuesday. The Liberals had held Toronto-St. Paul's since 1993. It is one of 338 seats in Canada's House of Commons. Losing in Canada's largest city, a traditional Liberal stronghold, does not bode well for Trudeau ahead of the election expected in the fall of 2025.

Prosecutor in classified documents case clashes with judge over request to restrict Trump's speech

AP ■ FORT PIERCE

A federal prosecutor in the classified documents case of Donald Trump clashed with the judge Monday as the judge was questioning a request to bar the former president from threatening comments about law enforcement agents involved in the investigation. Special counsel Jack Smith's team is seeking to make as a condition of Trump's freedom pending trial a prohibition on remarks that could endanger agents participating in the case. Prosecutors say those restrictions are necessary after Trump falsely claimed last month that the FBI was prepared to kill him when it searched his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, for classified documents two years ago. But prosecutor David Harbach, a member of Smith's team, encountered immediate pushback from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee, whose handling of the case has generated intense

scrutiny. The judge questioned Harbach about how she could fashion an order that did not run afoul of Trump's First Amendment rights and whether prosecutors could prove a direct link between Trump's comments and actions that might then follow. "There still needs to be a correlation between the alleged, dangerous comments and the risk" to public safety, she said. At one point, as Harbach tried despite frequent interruptions from Cannon to rattle off the multiple rationales that he said existed for speech restrictions on Trump, the visibly exasperated prosecutor noted acerbically that "I've got one reason out so far." The comment drew a rebuke from Cannon, who said, "Mr. Harbach, I don't appreciate your tone." She said that if he could not behave in a more professional manner, one of his colleagues could take over. Harbach completed his arguments and later apologized to

the judge, saying he hadn't meant to be unprofessional. Defense lawyer Todd Blanche disputed the idea that Trump's comments posed an imminent threat to anyone in law enforcement and said prosecutors' request would have a "chilling" effect. Trump is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee and is set to debate President Joe Biden on Thursday. Trump was not required to be present for the hearing and was not in attendance. Trump's often-inflammatory rhetoric has carried legal consequences in other cases. The New York judge presiding over Trump's hush money trial, in which he was convicted of 34 felony counts last week, fined him a total of \$10,000 for violating a gag order that barred him from verbal attacks on witnesses and jurors. A federal judge in Washington handling his election subversion case imposed a similar gag order last year that an appeals court later upheld.

It was not immediately clear when Cannon might rule. The arguments were part of a three-day hearing that began Friday to deal with several of the many unresolved legal issues that have piled up in a case that had been set for trial last month but has been snarled by delays and a plodding pace. Cannon indefinitely postponed the trial, and it's all but guaranteed that it will not take place before the November presidential election. Trump faces dozens of felony charges accusing him of illegally hoarding top-secret records at Mar-a-Lago and obstructing the FBI's efforts to get them back. Given the breadth of evidence that prosecutors have put forward, many legal experts have regarded the case as the most straightforward of the four prosecutions against Trump, who has pleaded not guilty. But Cannon has been slow to rule on numerous motions and has proved willing to entertain defense requests that prosecutors say

Part of Kenya parliament set on fire amid protest

Nairobi (Kenya) (AP): Thousands of Kenyan anti-tax protesters have entered parliament, and part of the building is on fire. Legislators are evacuating. Police earlier Tuesday fired live ammunition at the protesters in the capital, Nairobi, as thousands continued to rally and demand that legislators vote against new taxes proposed in a controversial finance bill. Two people died in protests last week but there were no immediate reports of any fresh casualties Tuesday. Medics set up emergency response temporary shelters in different cities with supplies donated by Kenyans. The third round of protests took place as lawmakers vote on the finance bill that would introduce new taxes, including an eco-levy that would raise the price of goods like sanitary towels and diapers. A proposal to tax bread was removed after public outcry but demonstrators are still calling on Parliament not to pass the bill.

The Kenya Human Rights Commission on Tuesday shared a video of officers shooting at protesters and said they would be held to account. The commission wrote on X addressing President William Ruto: "The world is watching your descent into tyranny! Your regime's actions are an assault on democracy. All those involved in the shooting - actively or passively - must be held to account." The Kenya Law Society President Faith Odhiambo on Tuesday said 50 Kenyans, including her personal assistant, had been "abducted" by people believed to be police officers. She said there were instances of extrajudicial killings, police abductions, torture and people kept incommunicado for several days. Some of those missing included those who were vocal in the ongoing demonstrations and were taken away from their homes, workplaces and public spaces in the run-up to the Tuesday protests, according to civil society groups.

Chang'e-6 probe brings back first-ever samples from Moon's far side

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's Chang'e-6 lunar probe module returned to Earth on Tuesday, completing its historic mission to collect the first-ever samples from the Moon's unexplored far side, in a major step forward for the country's ambitious space program. The return capsule landed precisely in the designated area in Siziwang Banner, north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region at 2:07 pm (Beijing Time), operating normally, and "the mission is a complete success," China National Space Administration (CNSA) announced. Chinese President Xi Jinping extended congratulations on the complete success of the Chang'e-6 mission, said state-run Xinhua news agency. China's probe was the first to reach and collect samples from the far side of the moon.

The development came after India in August 2023 became the first country to land near the little-explored lunar South Pole region when its Chandrayaan-3's lander, carrying the Pragyaan rover, successfully landed there. China is the only country to have landed on the far side of the Moon, having done so before in 2019. The far side - which faces away from Earth - is technically challenging to reach due to its distance, giant craters and few flat surfaces. In his congratulatory message, Xi noted that Chang'e-6, for the first time in human history, collected samples from the moon's far side and returned to Earth, marking another landmark achievement in China's endeavour to build a strong country in space as well as in science and technology. He called for meticulous

research on the lunar samples, the continued implementation of the country's major space projects, including deep space exploration, and the enhancement of international exchanges and cooperation. He also urged efforts to make new contributions to revealing the mysteries of the universe, to promoting the well-being of humanity, and to building a great country and advancing national rejuvenation on all fronts through Chinese modernisation. The re-entry module will be airlifted to Beijing for opening, and the lunar samples will be transferred to a team of scientists for subsequent storage, analysis and study, said the CNSA. The Chang'e-6 probe is expected to have returned to Earth with up to two kilograms of moon dust and rocks from the lunar far side, which will be analysed by

Chinese researchers before being opened for access by international scientists, it said. The Chang'e lunar exploration probe is named after the Chinese mythical moon goddess. Consisting of an orbiter, a returner, a lander and an ascender, Chang'e-6 was launched on May 3 this year. Supported by the Queqiao-2 relay satellite, placed earlier, the lander-ascender combination landed at the designated landing area in the South Pole-Aitken (SPA) Basin on the far side of the moon on June 2 and carried out sampling work. On June 4, the ascender took off from the moon with samples and entered the lunar orbit while on June 6, it completed rendezvous and docking with the orbiter-returner combination and transferred samples to the returner.

NASA calls off spacewalk after spacesuit water leak

Washington (AP): NASA on Monday canceled a spacewalk at the International Space Station after water leaked from an astronaut's spacesuit. Astronauts Tracy Dyson and Mike Barratt opened the hatch to the space station's airlock when Dyson reported water leaking from her spacesuit's cooling system. The leak occurred when Dyson switched her spacesuit to battery power. The astronauts hadn't floated outside yet. "There's literally water everywhere here now," Barratt said. The duo were not in danger, according to NASA. The astronauts were supposed to remove a faulty communications box and collect microbe samples from outside the orbiting laboratory.

King Charles III welcomes visiting Japanese emperor and empress

AP ■ LONDON

King Charles III welcomed the Japanese emperor and empress for a state visit that began on Tuesday, offering the best in pomp and circumstance as the UK seeks to bolster its role as the most influential European nation in the Indo-Pacific region. Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako are to attend a banquet hosted by the king, lay a wreath at Westminster Abbey and tour one of Britain's premier biomedical research institutes. But the emperor began this week's trip by visiting a site that has special meaning: The Thames Barrier. The retractable flood control gates on the River Thames seemed a natural destination for a royal long interested in the waterway that runs through the heart of London. Naruhito studied 18th-centu-



ry commerce on the river as a graduate student at the University of Oxford some 40 years ago. He chronicled the interest in his memoir "The Thames and I," together with his fondness for Britain and its people. The future emperor got a chance to experience life outside the palace walls, including doing his own ironing, going to the bank and taking part in pub

crawls. Tuesday's ceremonial welcome seemed warm. Charles and Naruhito, who have known each other for years, settled into the back of a carriage and chatted like old chums. Both countries look to each other as a source of stability and mutual reassurance at a time of potentially destabilizing global political change.

Ukraine, Moldova all set to launch EU membership talks

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Ukraine is set to officially launch membership talks with the European Union on Tuesday in what President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has described as a dream come true for his country's citizens more than two years into a war with Russia.

Deputy prime minister for European and Euro-Atlantic integration Olga Stefanishyna will lead Ukraine's delegation at an intergovernmental conference in Luxembourg marking the official opening of talks to align the country's laws and standards with those of the 27-nation bloc.

A few hours later, Moldova, which applied to join the EU after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and was granted candidate status four months later, will take part in a separate intergovernmental conference to officially launch its own accession process.

Ukraine, too, sought candidate status in the days after Russia invaded. By June 2022, EU

leaders had quickly made it official. But things have moved more slowly since then and membership, if it comes, might be years away.

Turkey's accession talks have lasted almost two decades without result.

Still, starting the talks process is sending another strong signal of solidarity with Ukraine beyond the billions in financial support the EU has provided. It's also a show of support for Moldova, which has faced its own challenges with Russia.

"Generations of our people are realizing their European dream. Ukraine is returning to Europe," Zelenskyy said in an online post after EU member states agreed on Friday to open the talks.

Tuesday's intergovernmental conference marks the launch of talks but the negotiations themselves are unlikely to begin for a few months.

Candidate countries must bring their laws and standards into line with those of the EU in 35 policy areas, known as chapters, ranging from the free movement of goods through

fisheries, taxation, energy and the environment to judicial rights and security.

Unanimous agreement must be given by all 27 member countries to open or close chapters, providing ample opportunity for EU nations to demand more work or to delay proceedings.

Hungary, which takes over the EU's rotating presidency from Belgium in July, has routinely put the brakes on EU and NATO support for Ukraine.

"We are still at the beginning of the screening process. It's very difficult to say at what stage Ukraine is in. From what I see here, as we speak, they are very far from meeting the accession criteria," Hungarian Minister for European Affairs Janos Bokai said as he arrived at the venue.

Bordering EU members Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and Romania, Ukraine would overtake France to become the largest member of the bloc if it joined, shifting its center of gravity further eastward. As a top grain producer its entry would have a huge impact on

EU agriculture policy.

Together with Moldova, Ukraine stands in a long line of EU hopefuls — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Turkey — with yearslong membership aspirations and which have felt left behind by Kyiv's rapid progress.

Spanish State Secretary for European Affairs Fernando Sampedro Marcos praised both countries for their preparatory work, saying they have made "a tremendous effort in very difficult circumstances in the last months."

"Of course, this requires reforms and it's a merit-based process," he noted, and paid tribute to the countries of the Western Balkans which also want to join. "We will not leave them behind."

Ukraine wants to join by 2030, but it must carry out dozens of institutional and legal reforms first. That daunting list is led by steps to combat corruption and includes broad reforms to public administration and judiciary.

Death toll from attack in Russia's Dagestan reaches 21

Moscow (AP): The death toll in the attack by Islamic militants in Russia's southern region of Dagestan has risen to 21 after a wounded police officer has died in a hospital, officials said on Tuesday.

Sunday's attack, in which militants attacked Christian and Jewish houses of worship and fired at police in the cities of Derbent and Makhachkala in the predominantly Muslim region in the North Caucasus, was the deadliest in Russia since March, when gunmen opened fire at a concert in suburban Moscow, killing 145 people.

An affiliate of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan, which claimed responsibility for March's raid, was quick to praise the attack in Dagestan, saying it was conducted by "brothers in the Caucasus who showed that they are still strong."

The Investigative Committee, Russia's top state criminal investigation agency, said all five attackers were killed.

Mavsum Ragimov, head of the Derbent region, said Tuesday that a police sergeant died of his wounds in a hospital, bringing the total number of victims to 21, 16 of them police.

Medical authorities in Dagestan said Monday at least 46 people were injured, 13 of them police. Among the dead was the Rev. Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old Russian Orthodox priest at a church in Derbent. The attack came as the Orthodox faithful celebrated Pentecost, also known as Trinity Sunday.

In the early 2000s, Dagestan saw near-daily attacks on police and other authorities that were blamed on militant extremists.

After the emergence of the Islamic State group, many residents of the region joined it in Syria and Iraq.

The violence in Dagestan has abated in recent years, but in a sign that extremist sentiments still run high in the region, mobs rioted at an airport there in October, targeting a flight from Israel. More than 20 people were hurt — none of them Israelis — when hundreds of men, some carrying banners with antisemitic slogans, rushed onto the tarmac, chased passengers and threw stones at police.



Christian F Nunes, president of National Organization for Women speaks as abortion rights activists and Women's March leaders protest as part of a national day of strike actions outside the Supreme Court in Washington on Monday. AP/PTI

Russia keeps up frontline pressure before Ukraine receives a boost from Western military aid

AP ■ DONETSK REGION

Relentless Russian attacks on Ukrainian positions defending the strategically important eastern city of Chasiv Yar are disrupting troop rotations and the delivery of some supplies, soldiers in the area say.

The Kremlin's army is seeking to press its advantages in troop numbers and weaponry before Ukrainian forces are bulked up by promised new Western military aid that is already trickling to the front line, analysts say.

It has been hitting civilian targets just as hard, using powerful glide bombs that obliterate buildings and leave huge craters. Its monthslong campaign to cripple Ukraine's electricity supply aims to sap public morale and deny energy to Ukraine's burgeoning arms industry.

Attacks on such civilian targets brought arrest warrants from the International Criminal

Court on Tuesday for former Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and military chief of staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov for alleged war crimes. Judges said there is evidence they "intentionally caused great suffering or serious injury to body or to mental or physical health" of Ukrainian civilians.

For Ukrainian soldiers defending the eastern Donetsk region, the Russian ground assaults and aerial barrages allow little respite after more than two years of war.

"We work, you could say, without rest," said a platoon commander who, in line with his brigade's rules, identified himself only by his first name, Oleksandr.

"So no two days are alike. You always need to be ready to work day and night," he told The Associated Press on Monday.

His platoon is part of Ukraine's 43rd Artillery Brigade. It dashes to positions and without

delay fires a Soviet-era Pion self-propelled howitzer at Russian positions before it can be targeted itself.

Holding Chasiv Yar is crucial. The town, highly sought-after due to its strategic location and elevated position but now largely in ruins, lies to the west of neighbouring Bakhmut, which was captured by Russia last year after a 10-month battle.

Ukraine is racing to stabilize parts of the about 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line after badly needed military assistance was approved by the United States in April. A six-month delay in US aid threw Ukraine's military onto the defensive. Members of the artillery brigade in Chasiv Yar reported that supplies of American ammunition have started to arrive. The US is expected to announce Tuesday it is sending an additional USD 150 million in critically needed munitions to Ukraine, and

Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said Tuesday that the first shipment of ammunition under a Czech initiative has been delivered to Ukraine.

The Czechs are looking to acquire from countries outside the European Union at least 800,000 artillery shells that Ukraine badly needs. The war has drained stockpiles in Europe, the United States and Russia.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank, said it will take time for the effects of the new Western weaponry to be felt on the front line.

Meantime, it said, "Russian forces are attempting to make tactical and operationally significant gains" before it arrives.

Elsewhere, the Kremlin's forces kept up their barrages of civilian infrastructure with three aerial strikes in the northeastern Kharkiv region Tuesday, local officials said, though nobody was injured.

Pak: New counter-terror op won't be large-scale military campaign

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Amidst criticism over a newly announced counterterrorism operation without consulting Parliament, the Pakistan government has said that it would not be a kinetic large-scale military campaign, nor would it entail the mass displacement of the people.

"Operation Azm-i-Istehkam," announced by the government on Saturday, is the latest in a series of counter-terrorism operations launched by the Pakistan Army since the mid-2000s. The announcement came after the Central Apex Committee of National Action Plan meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

The Opposition parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, Jamiat Ulema Islam-Fazl and Awami National Party have refused to support the new counterterrorism operation. They demanded that Parliament be taken into confidence before any offensive against militancy was launched.

Prime Minister Sharif on Tuesday clarified that the planned counterterrorism campaign "Vision Azm-i-Istehkam" would entail intensifying ongoing intelligence-based operations (IBOs) rather than a "new and organised" military offensive, Dawn newspaper reported. The clarification comes after the PM's Office (PMO) late Monday night said that "Operation Azm-i-Istehkam" would not be a kinetic large-scale military operation, nor would it entail the mass displacement of the local population.

"The prime minister took the cabinet members into confidence regarding the misunderstandings and speculation regarding 'Vision Azm-i-Istehkam,'" state-run PTV News quoted the PMO as saying during a meeting of the federal cabinet. The statement quoted Sharif as saying that the new operation is an overall national vision of a multifaceted cooperation of various security agencies and the entire state system.

"For this purpose, already ongoing IBOs will be intensified rather than [launching] a new and organised armed operation," he added.

The PMO said that "previous kinetic operations were conducted to physically dislodge terrorists from their known locations which [became] no-go areas and compromised the writ of the state. These operations required mass displacement of the local population and systematic clearance of affected areas."

"As there are no such areas in the country anymore and terrorists' ability to carry out large-scale organised operations inside Pakistan had been 'decisively degraded by earlier kinetic operations... no large-scale military operation is being contemplated where displacement of population will be required,'" the statement said.

Meanwhile, Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has assured opposition parties that their reservations regarding the newly announced counterterrorism campaign would be addressed.

Hong Kong court inches closer to sentencing democracy activists

AP ■ HONG KONG

A Hong Kong court began mitigation hearings for prominent pro-democracy activists who were convicted under a national security law and now face up to life in prison. The activists were among 47 democracy advocates who were charged with conspiracy to commit subversion in 2021 for their involvement in an unofficial primary, in the biggest case brought under the Beijing-imposed national security law.

They were accused of attempting to paralyze Hong Kong's government and topple the city's leader by securing a legislative majority and using it to block city budgets.

Forty-five of the defendants either pled guilty or were convicted by a three-judge panel whose membership was approved by the government. The judges said their plans to effect change through the election would have undermined the government's authority and created a constitutional crisis, in a verdict that critics said raised doubt about judicial independence.

The first batch of defendants to plead for lenient sentences contains legal scholar Benny Tai and activists Au Nok-hin, Andrew Chiu, Ben Chung and Gordon Ng. The mitigation hearings are expected to continue until early August.

Barrister Stewart Wong, representing Tai, told the judges that his client should be jailed for two years. He's expected to continue laying out his argument Tuesday on.

Hours before the hearing began, dozens of people were queuing up outside the court building tightly guarded by police. Some of them, including retiree William Wong, arrived at about 6 p.m. on Monday despite summer heat.

Wong said he voted in the primary and shared the defendants' hopes for democracy. "It's a normal election. Why do people have to be jailed for this? I can't accept this," he said.

Tai, a former law professor at the University of Hong Kong, nodded and smiled at people sitting in the public gallery after he walked into the courtroom. Wearing a black blazer, he appeared to be relaxed during the hearing.

Tai is best known as a co-founder of the city's 2014 Occupy Movement, during which demonstrators occupied streets for 79 days and brought traffic in some areas to a standstill, demanding direct elections for the city's leader.

The judges wrote in their verdict last month that Tai had laid out plans to block city budgets by acquiring a legislative majority, calling it a "constitutional weapon of mass destruction." They said Tai's aim was to use the plans to "undermine, destroy or overthrow the existing political system and structure" of Hong Kong. Tai, Au, Chiu and Chung were among 31 activists who pled guilty. They have a better chance of receiving shorter prison terms.

The law authorizes a range of sentences depending on the seriousness of the offense and the defendant's role in it, going from under three years for the least serious to 10 years to life for people convicted of "grave" offenses. The convictions have drawn concern from foreign governments. The United States has said it plans to impose new visa restrictions on both Chinese and Hong Kong officials responsible for implementing the security law.

A British judge also said the verdict "is symptomatic of a growing malaise in the Hong Kong judiciary," days after resigning from a post on the city's top court.

Pak court reserves verdict on suspension of Imran, wife's sentence in 'iddat' case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Tuesday reserved its verdict on petitions requesting suspension of sentences handed out to jailed former prime minister Imran Khan and his wife Bushra Bibi in the 'iddat' case, a judgment that was widely criticised by civil society and women activists.

Khan, 71, and Bushra, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison each on February 3 by a trial court for contracting their marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce.

Islamabad district and ses-

sions court on Saturday, while resuming the hearing for pleas seeking suspension of sentences, asked the counsel for Bushra Bibi's ex-husband, Khawar Fareed Maneka, to conclude his arguments by June 25 as the court would then take up the main appeals against their convictions, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Khan and his wife had challenged the conviction before district and sessions judge Shahrukh Arjumand, who recused himself at a time when the hearing had been concluded and the court was supposed to announce the verdict, the report said.

Subsequently, the case was transferred to Additional District and Sessions Judge

Mohammad Afzal Majoka. However, the counsel for Bushra Bibi had filed a petition before the Islamabad High Court seeking her release on bail and suspension of her sentence.

Separately, the Islamabad High Court had ordered the sessions court to decide in 10 days on pleas by the PTI founder and his wife. The judgment was widely criticised by civil society and women activists for being a "blow to women's right to dignity and privacy". There were protests by activists in Islamabad against the verdict and a demonstration in Karachi against the "state's intrusion into people's private lives" had also denounced it,

the Dawn reported. Judge Majoka reserved the verdict after hearing the arguments from both sides. The verdict will be announced on June 27 at 3 pm, the report said.

On Monday, the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician moved the Supreme Court, seeking an expedited hearing of his appeal against his disqualification by the election commission in the Toshakhana corruption case. In December last year, the PTI founder challenged in the Lahore High Court the Election Commission of Pakistan's ruling of disqualifying him for five years for not declaring Toshakhana gifts in his statement of assets and liabilities.

Knife attack at school bus stop in China wounds 3

Beijing (AP): A suspect has been detained in China after a knife attack at a school bus stop that injured three people, including a Japanese woman and her child, a spokesperson for the Japanese Embassy confirmed on Tuesday.

A man stabbed the woman and her child at a bus stop for a Japanese school, and then seriously injured a Chinese woman on the bus who tried to block him when he tried to get on, the spokesperson said, speaking on condition of anonymity because of embassy policy.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said the man was arrested at the scene after the Monday afternoon attack in Suzhou, a tech centre and historic canal city outside Shanghai. "It is a regrettable incident," she said. "China

will continue to take effective measures to earnestly protect the safety of all foreigners in China." The motive for the attack was unclear, the Japanese Embassy spokesperson said. An investigation is ongoing.

The Chinese woman was being treated at a hospital, Mao said. The injuries to the Japanese mother and child were not serious. In an email sent to Japanese nationals living in China, the Japanese Embassy warned them to take precautions as stabbing incidents have occurred in various parts of China in public places including parks, schools and subways.

Earlier this month, a Chinese man stabbed four US university instructors at a public park in Jilin in the northeast, as well as a Chinese person who tried to intervene.

US, allies clash with Tehran, Moscow over Iranian N-programme

AP ■ UNITED NATIONS

The United States and its key European allies clashed with Iran and Russia over Tehran's expanding nuclear programme, with the US vowing "to use all means necessary to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran" in a UN Security Council meeting on Monday.

The US, France, Britain and Germany accused Iran of escalating its nuclear activities far beyond limits it agreed to in a 2015 deal aimed at preventing Tehran from developing nuclear weapons, and of failing to cooperate with the UN nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Iran and Russia accused the US and its allies of continuing to apply economic sanctions that were supposed to be lifted under the deal, and insisted that Tehran's nuclear programme remains under constant oversight by the IAEA.

The clashes came at a semi-annual meeting on implementation of the nuclear deal between Iran and six

major countries — the US, Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany — known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action.

Under the accord, Tehran agreed to limit enrichment of uranium to levels necessary for the peaceful use of nuclear power in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions.

Then-President Donald Trump pulled the US out of the deal in 2018. Trump said he would negotiate a stronger deal, but that didn't happen.

The council meeting followed an IAEA report in late May that Iran has more than 142 kilograms (313 pounds) of uranium enriched up to 60 per cent purity, a technical step away from weapons-grade level of 90 per cent. The IAEA said this was an increase of over 20 kilograms (45 pounds) from February.

The IAEA also reported on June 13 that its inspectors verified that Iran has started up new cascades of advanced centrifuges more quickly enrich uranium and planned to install more.

US deputy ambassador Robert Wood

told the council that the IAEA reports "show that Iran is determined to expand its nuclear programme in ways that have no credible civilian purpose."

Wood said the US is prepared to use all means to prevent a nuclear-armed Iran, but said it remains "fully committed to resolving international concerns surrounding Iran's nuclear programme through diplomacy."

The three Western countries that remain in the JCPOA — France, Germany and the United Kingdom — issued a joint statement after the council meeting also leaving the door open for diplomatic efforts "that ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon." They said Iran's stockpile of highly enriched uranium is now 30 times the JCPOA limit, and stressed that Iran committed not to install or operate any centrifuges for enrichment under the JCPOA.

Their joint statement also noted that "Iranian officials have issued statements about its capacity to assemble a nuclear weapon."

Iran's UN Ambassador Amir Saeed Iravani blamed "the unilateral and unlawful US withdrawal from the JCPOA" and the failure of the three European parties to the deal "to honour their commitments," saying it is "crystal clear" they are responsible for the current non-functioning of the agreement.

In the face of US and European sanctions, he said, Iran has the right to halt its commitments under the JCPOA.

Iravani reiterated Iran's rejection of nuclear weapons, and insisted its nuclear activities including enrichment are "for peaceful purposes" and are subject to "robust verification and monitoring" by the IAEA.

The Iranian ambassador strongly endorsed the JCPOA, calling it a hard-won diplomatic achievement "that effectively averted an undue crisis."

"It remains the best option, has no alternative, and its revival is indeed in the interest of all of its participants," he said. "Our remedial measures are reversible if all sanctions are

lifted fully and verifiably." But France, Germany and the UK said some of Iran's nuclear advances are irreversible.

Russia's UN Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia said US promises "to abandon the policy of maximum pressure on Tehran and to return to the nuclear deal remained empty words." He accused some other JCPOA parties, which he didn't name, of "doing everything possible to continuously rock the boat, jettisoning opportunities for the implementation of the nuclear deal."

Nebenzia urged the European parties to the agreement and the United States to return to the negotiating table in Vienna and "demonstrate their commitment to the objective of restoration of the nuclear deal."

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, the coordinator of the JCPOA, said the compromise text he put forward two years ago for the US to return to the JCPOA and for Iran to resume full implementation of the agreement remains on the table.

Sensex breaches 78,000 level for first time

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Benchmark Sensex breached the historic 78,000 level for the first time while Nifty settled at a new record high on Tuesday on buying in blue-chip bank stocks and Reliance Industries.

The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 712.44 points or 0.92 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,053.52. During the day, the benchmark soared 823.63 points or 1 per cent to hit a fresh lifetime high of 78,164.71.

The Sensex breached the 77,000 mark for the first time on June 10.

The Nifty went up by 183.45 points or 0.78 per cent to settle at a fresh record high of 23,721.30. During the day, it climbed 216.3 points or 0.91 per cent to hit an intraday lifetime high of 23,754.15.

Among the 30 Sensex companies, Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, HDFC Bank, Tech Mahindra, Larsen &



Toubr, Bajaj Finserv, State Bank of India, Reliance Industries and Infosys were the biggest gainers. Power Grid, Asian Paints, Tata Steel, Nestle, Maruti and JSW Steel were among the laggards.

"A rally in the banking stocks pushed Nifty to hit another record - 34th time this year though a host of

surplus in Q4 FY24. This will take away the pressure on the rupee and pave the way for FII inflows when clarity emerges on the Fed rate cuts," said V K Vijayakumar, Chief Investment Strategist at Geojit Financial Services.

India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday.

This is the first time in ten quarters that the crucial metric of the country's external strength has turned into surplus mode.

mong indices, bankex jumped 1.87 per cent, financial services climbed 1.45 per cent, IT by 0.53 per cent, capital goods by 0.28 per cent and teck by 0.43 per cent. Realty declined 1.82 per cent. Power (1.05 per cent), utilities (0.95 per cent), metal (0.84 per cent) and telecommunication (0.28 per cent) also dropped. "The markets edged higher

signaling a resumption of the uptrend after a brief pause. Nifty traded within a range during the first half, but selective buying in heavyweight stocks, particularly from the banking sector, spurred a sharp surge," Ajit Mishra - SVP, Research, Religare Broking Ltd, said.

"We believe the current buoyancy in banking, coupled with notable strength in IT, will dictate the trend, while other sectors may contribute on a rotational basis," Mishra added.

In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled higher while Shanghai ended lower. European markets were trading in the negative territory. US markets ended on a mixed note on Monday.

Global oil benchmark Brent crude declined 0.44 per cent to USD 85.63 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 653.97 crore on Monday, according to exchange data.

Rupee settles 3 paise higher at 83.44 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The rupee appreciated 3 paise against the US dollar on Tuesday, tracking a firm trend in domestic equities amid stable global crude oil prices.

However, a strengthening American currency in the overseas market weighed on the local unit and restricted the up move, forex traders said.

At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.46 and hit the intraday high of 83.41 and a low of 83.48 against the greenback during the session. It finally settled at 83.44 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 3 paise from its previous close.

On Monday, the rupee appreciated 10 paise to settle at 83.47 against the US dollar. "We expect the rupee to trade with a slight positive bias as positive domestic markets and a soft US dollar may support



the rupee. However, a rise in crude oil prices and geopolitical tensions may cap a sharp upside.

"Investors may remain cautious ahead of core PCE data from the US this week. USD/INR spot price is expected to trade in a range of Rs 83.20 to Rs 83.65," said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas.

Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was trading 0.03 per cent higher at 105.50. Brent crude futures, the global oil benchmark, were trading

0.48 per cent lower at USD 85.60 per barrel.

In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex rose 712.44 points, or 0.92 per cent, to close at a new peak of 78,053.52. The broader NSE Nifty settled 183.45 points, or 0.78 per cent, higher at a record 23,721.30.

Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net sellers in the capital markets on Monday, as they offloaded shares worth Rs 653.97 crore, according to exchange data.

On the domestic macroeconomic front, S&P Global Ratings on Monday retained India's GDP growth forecast for the current financial year at 6.8 per cent and said high interest rates and lower fiscal spur would temper demand.

Moreover, India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter, the Reserve Bank of India said on Monday.

Industry pitches for tax reduction, rationalisation of duty structure in Budget

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to boost the economy, representatives of various industries on Tuesday urged Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman to reduce the incidence of indirect taxes and rationalise duty structure wherever required.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, FIEO president Ashwani Kumar made a case for an extension of the Interest Equalisation Scheme for the next five years.

"We request the scheme which is valid till 30th June, 2024 may be extended for a period of 5 years. Looking into the rates in interest rates consequent to the increase in Repo rate from 4.4 per cent to 6.5 per cent in the last 2 years, the subvention rates may be restored back from 3 per cent to 5 per cent for manufacturers in MSMEs," Kumar said.

Kumar also urged for the establishment of an Indian shipping line of global repute to reduce foreign shipping line dependency and save foreign exchange.

Emerging from the nearly two-hour meeting, Ajay



Sardana, President & Head of Petchem-Industry Affairs, at Reliance Industries, said there is a need for a review of tariffs on imported goods from China related to the petrochem industry.

"China has created a lot of overcapacity...They are putting a lot of products in India at a very cheaper price and a lot of dumping is happening. So, what we

requested is a review of the tariffs regime so that the domestic capacity can be increased," Sardana said. Shree Cement Chairman HM Bangur said the government should spend more on capital expenditure so that the cement industry benefits.

"We sought faster and simultaneous environmental clearances and no hindrance in capex," he added.

Representing the services sector, Nasscom Vice President and Head of Public Policy Ashish Aggarwal said, "From the Budget perspective, we are looking for easing the transfer pricing regime as a lot of our industry is not able to benefit from transfer pricing provision."

Nasscom also made a case for enhancing the scope of the safe harbour regime by increasing the threshold limit from Rs 200 crore in international transactions to Rs 2,000 crore so that global capability centres can take benefit from the safe harbour, he said. "We also suggested for strengthening of advance pricing agreement mechanism for promoting ease of doing business," he added.

Gujarat Chamber of Commerce and Industry Vice President Sandeep Engineer said, "We represented small and medium industries. The 45-day payment window is positive but have sought some relaxation in the time cycles." He also made a case for changing the definition of MSME and rationalisation of taxes for Limited Liability Partnership (LLP) and high net-worth individuals.

Leather, footwear exporters seek PLI scheme in Budget to boost jobs, manufacturing, shipments

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Leather and footwear exporters body CLE on Tuesday sought an extension of the Production-linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for the sector with a view to boost job creation, domestic manufacturing and shipments.

In a pre-budget meeting with Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Council for Leather Exports Chairman Rajendra Kumar Jalan also urged the government to provide import duty exemption on wet blue, crust and finished leather.

"Implementation of PLI will lead to structural transformation of the industry and will make the country a major manufacturing hub," Jalan said.

He added that the PLI will provide a major fillip to the domestic and overseas investments in not only capacity modernisation and expansion of existing units but also in start-ups, thereby leading to expansion of the overall production base.

"The benefits of PLI will include an incremental investment of Rs 6,000 crore



and an additional employment generation of about 2 million labour workforce, both directly and indirectly," he said.

He added that the import of wet blue, crust and finished leathers during 2022-23 was USD 450.73 million, but the export of value-added products was USD 5.26 billion, which is more than 10 times the value of import.

"Hence, it is requested that the 10 per cent import duty now being levied on wet blue, crust and finished leathers may kindly be removed to increase the price

competitiveness of the value-added products segment," Jalan urged.

Jalan also requested the government to allow the export of all value-added leathers including crust leathers without any export duty.

"This will lead to a quantum jump in the export of value-added leathers by at least USD 1 billion in the next 2-3 years," he said.

Presently, there is a 40 per cent export duty on raw and pickled hides, crust and wet blue leather and 30 per cent on raw buffalo hides.

Stanley Lifestyles IPO subscribed over 96 times

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The initial public offer of luxury furniture brand Stanley Lifestyles got subscribed a whopping 96.25 times on the last day of subscription on Tuesday.

The Rs 537 crore initial share-sale received bids for 98,56,97,520 shares against 1,02,41,507 shares on offer, according to NSE data.

The portion for Qualified Institutional Buyers (QIBs) fetched 222.10 times subscription while the quota for non-institutional investors got subscribed 118.65 times.

The quota for Retail Individual Investors (RIIs) attracted 18.13 times subscription.

The Initial Public Offer (IPO) has a fresh issue of up to Rs 200 crore and an offer for sale of up to 91,33,454 equity shares.

The initial share-sale has a price range of Rs 351-369 per share.

The IPO of Stanley Lifestyles got subscribed 1.43 times on the first day of subscription on Friday.

Telcos eye four spectrum bands

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Telecom operators showed interest in four spectrum bands -- 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,500 MHz -- as the auction entered the fourth round around 3pm on Tuesday, sources said.

Spectrum auction for over 10,500 Mhz mobile services worth over Rs 96,238 crore started at 10 am, an official statement said.

"There was activity in four spectrum rounds initially -- 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, and 2,500 MHz band. Spectrum auction entered the

fourth round around 3pm," a source told PTI.

It is the 10th spectrum auction since the process for sale of radiowaves started through an online bidding process in 2010.

The last spectrum auction was held in August 2022, which, for the first time, included radio waves for 5G services.

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated the spectrum auction and notice inviting applications was issued on March 8.

"The Ministry of

Communications announced that the following spectrum bands will go up for bidding in the upcoming auction -- 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz, 2,500 MHz, 3,300 MHz and 26 GHz.

"Total quantum of spectrum being auctioned is 10,522.35 Mhz in various bands valuing Rs 96,238.45 crores at reserve prices," the statement said.

The 3,300 Mhz band and 26 Mhz band are seen as suitable bands for 5G services. Reliance Jio has deposited the highest earnest money of Rs 3,000 crore for the auction,

which provides the company with the potential to bid for maximum radio waves.

According to pre-qualified bidder details released by the Department of Telecommunications, Bharti Airtel has submitted the earnest money deposit (EMD) of Rs 1,050 crore and Vodafone Idea (VIL) of Rs 300 crore.

Telecom industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India Director General SP Kochhar said the 5G auctions will catalyze the rapid rollout of 5G services across the country, leading to

enhanced coverage and vastly improved connectivity.

"By bridging the digital divide, the 5G spectrum auctions will ensure that even the most remote areas of our country gain access to high-speed internet, thereby fostering greater economic opportunities and social advancement.

"The auctions also symbolize our commitment to 'Viksit Bharat' and we are confident that the outcomes of these auctions will lay a strong foundation for a prosperous and digitally empowered India," Kochhar said.

Tata Motors partners Bajaj Finance for commercial vehicle finance

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Tata Motors on Tuesday said it has partnered with Bajaj Finance Ltd for offering financing solutions across its entire commercial vehicle portfolio.

The company has signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Bajaj Finance Ltd, part of Bajaj Finserv Ltd, for the same and customers will benefit from the latter's wide reach, competitive interest rates, flexi loan and

digitally-enabled loan processing, Tata Motors said in a statement.

"We are confident that their (Bajaj Finance) inaugural venture into commercial vehicle financing will allow them to tap the immense potential that the transportation sector brings in, and this partnership will benefit entrepreneurs across the country," Tata Motors Commercial Vehicles Vice President & Business Head - Trucks, Rajesh Kaul said.

With Bajaj Finance's wide network in rural and urban areas, customers will have easy access to financing solutions as per their requirements, he added. Bajaj Finance Deputy Managing Director Anup Saha said, "... We aim to make the process of purchasing a commercial vehicle accessible and hassle-free. We are confident that the partnership will empower more commercial vehicle owners with financing solutions."

Bank holds blood donation camp in G'gram



Gurugram: As part of its ongoing commitment to community welfare and to commemorate its 117th foundation day on Monday Punjab and Sind Bank Zonal Office Gurugram hosted a series of impactful initiatives starting from plantation drive on June 19, blood donation camp on June 20 and donation of water coolers to schools and hospitals on June 21.

Darpan Agarwal, Zonal Manager Zone Gurugram expressed the enthusiasm for these initiatives, emphasising their importance in fostering a positive impact and strengthening community bonds. PNS

Tenth spectrum auction for radiowaves worth ₹96,238 crore begins

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Auction for Rs 96,238 crore worth spectrum began on Tuesday that is expected to see firms like Airtel and Reliance Jio bidding to acquire airwaves that will help augment their 5G services.

It is the 10th spectrum auction since the process for sale of radiowaves started through an online bidding process in 2010.

"The government begins the auction of Spectrum for Telecom Services today at 10:00 AM," an official statement said on Tuesday.

The last spectrum auction was held in August 2022, which, for the first time, included radio waves for 5G services. "To augment existing telecom services and maintain continuity of services, the



government will hold the spectrum auction on Tuesday, 25 June 2024. This is in line with the government's commitment to facilitate affordable, state-of-art high quality telecom services to all the citizens," the statement said.

The Department of Telecommunications (DoT) has initiated the spectrum Auction and notice inviting applications (NIA) was issued

on March 8. "The Ministry of Communications announced that the following spectrum bands will go up for bidding in the upcoming auction - 800 MHz, 900 MHz, 1,800 MHz, 2,100 MHz, 2,300 MHz, 2,500 MHz, 3,300 MHz and 26 GHz. Total quantum of spectrum being auctioned is 10,522.35 Mhz in various bands valuing Rs 96,238.45 crores at reserve prices," the statement said.

The 3300 Mhz band and 26 Mhz band are seen as suitable bands for 5G services.

Reliance Jio has deposited the highest earnest money of Rs 3,000 crore for the spectrum auction, which provides the company with the potential to bid for maximum radio waves.

According to pre-qualified bidder details released by the Department of Telecommunications, Bharti Airtel has submitted the earnest money deposit (EMD) of Rs 1,050 crore and Vodafone Idea (VIL) of Rs 300 crore.

Telecom industry body Cellular Operators' Association of India Director General SP Kochhar said the 5G auctions will catalyze the rapid rollout of 5G services across the country, leading to enhanced coverage and vastly

improved connectivity.

According to telecom expert Parag Kar, Reliance Jio can bid for 37.36 per cent of the total spectrum value based on EMD, Bharti 13.07 per cent and Vodafone Idea 3.73 per cent.

As per Kar's analysis, Jio may be keen on bidding for 800 Mhz band only, which may lead to an estimated cash flow of Rs 18,000 crore.

"Bharti's targeted approach in the upcoming auction is aimed at consolidating and enhancing its spectrum efficiency. The total outflow for Bharti will be Rs 11,512 crore at the Reserve Price," Kar said in his blog.

Debt-ridden Vodafone Idea (VIL) is likely to focus on strategic acquisitions, particularly in the 26 GHz band, to bring down its spectrum usage charge.

Gold rises ₹70, silver plunges ₹400

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices rose Rs 70 to Rs 72,550 per 10 grams in the local market on Tuesday in line with firm global trends, according to HDFC Securities.

The precious metal had closed at Rs 72,480 per 10 grams on Monday. However, silver prices plunged by Rs 400 to Rs 91,500 per kg. In the previous session, it had settled at Rs 91,900 per kg.

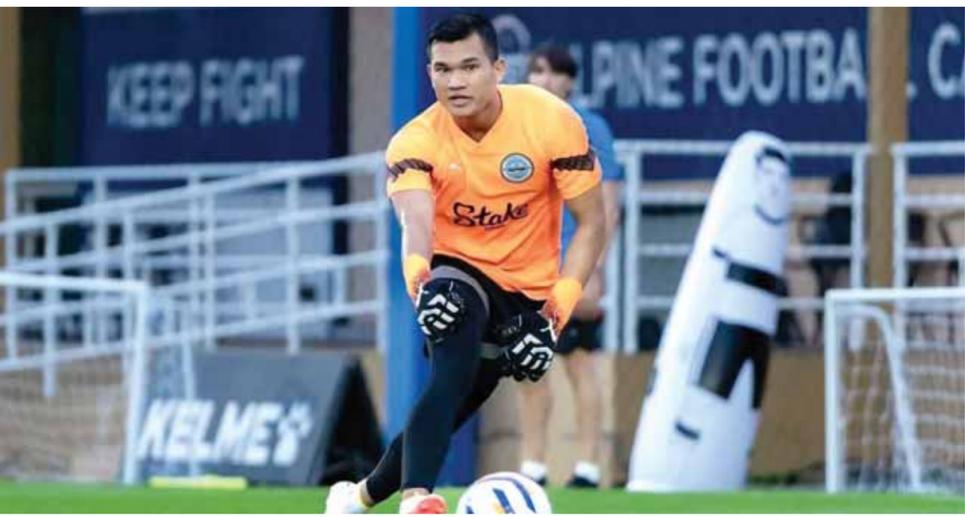
"In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams, slightly up by Rs 70 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said.

In the global markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at USD 2,324 per ounce, up USD 6 from the previous close.

Gold traded in a narrow range on Tuesday under gloomy market sentiment, Gandhi said.

"... Traders' focus is turning to macroeconomic data due at the end of this week, including US GDP and the Federal Reserve's preferred gauge of consumer inflation, which could offer clues on when the central bank will pivot to monetary policy easing," he added.

However, silver was down at USD 29.40 per ounce. It had ended at USD 29.47 per ounce in the previous session. According to Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, the yellow metal is expected to range trade ahead of the US GDP and Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) inflation data.



Brazil held to 0-0 draw by Costa Rica in a stunner to open Copa America group play

AP ■ INGLEWOOD (US)

Brazil was held to a 0-0 draw by Costa Rica, with the international powerhouse inauspiciously failing to break through in its Copa America opener. Although Brazil controlled play and outshot Costa Rica 18-2, the Seleção was held scoreless by a defense led by goalkeeper Patrick Sequeira, who made three saves while recording the team's fourth consecutive clean sheet. Brazil had an apparent goal by Marquinhos disallowed in the first half after a lengthy VAR check, but the team known for decades of sublime offensive play never got closer to a score - and never got a break on several questionable refereeing calls - in front of a lively crowd of 67,158 dominated by their yellow-clad fans at SoFi Stadium. The result left Colombia on top of Group D after its 2-1 victory over Paraguay. Brazil has won the Copa America nine times, but its current transitional squad led by Real Madrid stars Vinicius Júnior and Rodrigo got off to a discouraging start. Brazil coach Dorival Júnior said the result wasn't thoroughly poor, noting his team's wide advantages in possession and chances. "I believe that in context, it was a well-played game," Dorival said through an interpreter. "We passed the ball well and



we created good opportunities. We weren't happy with the finishes, I agree. But in general, I think we presented very positive things. Nowadays it will be like this. We have to find ways and solutions to score. We're always working on it, every moment." The draw was a monumental achievement for Costa Rica, an undermanned CONCACAF team with the youngest roster in the tournament but a reputation for overachievement and sturdy defending led by Sequeira, who plays for Ibiza in Spain's third division. Costa Rica head coach Gustavo Alfaro, the Argentine veteran leading his first major tournament since his hiring last November, was pleased by his team's tenacity. "I hope (opponents) start looking at us with respect," Alfaro said through an interpreter. "Everyone thought we were dead before the movie started. We are going to play all

the games as if they were the final." Los Ticos had lost nine straight meetings with Brazil, but Alfaro's young group capably handled a night that could have left them starstruck. "All this is a nice reward for these kids," Alfaro said. "When Vini greeted them, it meant a lot to them. He is someone who plays at the highest level, and for us who are starting out, it was a very big test." Brazil controlled from the start with 75% possession in the first half, but couldn't break through. Vinicius was taken down in the box in the 22nd minute by a big hit from Haxzell Quirós, but got no whistle. In the 30th minute, Rodrigo went low to head on Raphinha's free kick to Marquinhos, who banged it home at the far post. A 3 1/2-minute VAR review followed, and Mexican referee César Ramos eventually agreed with the assistant's decision to wave it off for offside by a minuscule margin. In the 39th minute, a kick by Lucas Paquetá appeared to go off the hand of Juan Pablo Vargas in the penalty area, but Ramos made no call. Paquetá ripped a shot off the post in the 63rd minute. Costa Rica then survived when Quirós nearly headed the ball into his own net before Sequeira smothered it. Sequeira then made a diving save in the 79th minute when Guilherme Arana ripped a shot on net. Costa Rica survived a few more moments of chaos beginning in the 86th minute, with Rodrigo failing to capitalize on a pair of scoring chances and not getting a foul call against Jeyland Mitchell in the box. Bruno Guimarães then had a clean look at the net in the first minute of injury time, but pushed it just wide. Dorival said he wants to see more "dirty movement" in Brazil's next match. "We need to make life easier for whoever has the ball at their feet," the coach said. Brazil's national team is in a transitional period - particularly without Neymar, who hasn't played since tearing a knee ligament in a match for Brazil last October. Neymar spoke to team Sunday before watching the match at SoFi Stadium, where he got massive cheers in the second half when his worried face appeared on the scoreboard.

Chennaiyin FC sign goalkeeper Nawaz for upcoming ISL season

PTI ■ CHENNAI

Chennaiyin FC on Tuesday signed young Manipuri goalkeeper Mohammad Nawaz on a two-year contract ahead of the upcoming Indian Super League season. A product of AIFF Elite Academy, Nawaz was previously part of Mumbai City FC and FC Goa. He has earned a reputation as one of the most talented

goalkeepers in Indian football with his remarkable performances. "Nawaz's arrival marks an exciting addition to Chennaiyin squad alongside other goalkeepers Samik Mitra and Prateek Kumar Singh. The 24-year-old brings youthful energy and exceptional potential, and is expected to make a significant impact in the upcoming season," the club said in a release.

Nawaz began his professional career at the age of 18 with FC Goa's reserve side in the I-League second division, where his excellent performance earned him a place in the main team. He was a vital cog in the FC Goa's Super Cup and ISL League Shield-winning campaigns in 2019 and 2020 respectively. Later, he moved to Mumbai City FC in 2021, with whom he won the League Shield in

2023 as well as the ISL title earlier this year. He has also represented India at the U-17 level. Nawaz has played 83 matches so far in his professional career, keeping 23 clean sheets. In 65 ISL games, he has recorded 15 clean sheets and 150 saves. Known for his quick reflexes, composure under pressure and impressive shot-stopping abilities, Nawaz has also saved three penalties in the ISL.



Much changed Spain beats Albania 1-0

AP ■ DUESSELDORF (GERMANY)

Spain changed almost its entire lineup and still kept up its victorious start to the European Championship with a 1-0 win over Albania, which was eliminated. With his team already assured of winning Group B, coach Luis de la Fuente changed 10 of his starters and Spain won all three group games at a Euros for the first time since 2008, when it went on to win the tournament. A 13th-minute goal from Ferran Torres and goalkeeper David Raya's stoppage-time save from Armando Broja ensured Spain completed the group stage without conceding a goal. "Every player is ready to play in this first 11 and that's key. Anyone can decide a game for you and players coming off the bench are very important as well," Torres, who made his first start of Euro 2024, said through a translator. "I will try to make things difficult for my coach so that he will have to play me." Torres scored with a deflection off the post from Dani Olmo's pass, and put his fingers to his ears in his goal celebration. He said the gesture meant he was listening to the fans, not blocking anything out. "I don't have anything to prove out there," Torres added. Italy was the second qualifier from Group B after drawing with Croatia 1-1. Albania needed at least a draw to have any hope of qualifying for the knockout stages for the first time, even as one of the best third-place teams. The loss meant it placed last. Albania's failure to beat Spain meant England,

France and the Netherlands were all assured of qualifying for the knockout stages, regardless of what happens in their last group games. All of those teams were on four points from two games and would qualify at least as one of the best third-placed teams. Spain got the job done, but this 1-0 win was far less convincing than the victory by the same margin over Italy in its last game. Defender Aymeric Laporte was the only player to start both. For much of the first half, Spain seemed on course for a big win, but Olmo and Mikel Merino in particular missed good chances. Albania didn't record a shot until the 45th minute. Albania finally started to put pressure on Spain midway through the second half. Forward Broja came off the bench and forced a good save from Raya. De la Fuente responded by sending on forwards Alvaro Morata and Lamine Yamal off the bench as Spain started to waste time. Broja tested Raya again in stoppage time as Spain held on. "We left it all on the pitch. I have no regrets for my players," Albania coach Sylvainho said. Albania was without forward Mirlind Daku, who was suspended by UEFA on Sunday after joining supporters' nationalist chants with a megaphone following the 2-2 draw with Croatia on Wednesday. Albania's soccer federation was fined over incidents at both of its first two games. It looks set to face yet more charges after fans lit flares at the Spain game and a supporter ran onto the field. Spain will play its last-16 game on Sunday in Cologne against a third-place team.

Varga has surgery for facial fractures

AP ■ MUNICH

Hungary forward Barnabás Varga is expected to be released from hospital on Wednesday after undergoing surgery on facial fractures he sustained in a collision with Scotland's goalkeeper at the European Championship. The match on Sunday was halted for nearly 10 minutes so Varga could get treatment after colliding with Angus Gunn midway through the second half. The 29-year-old Varga was carried off on a stretcher and taken to a Stuttgart hospital. He had surgery on Monday. "Barnabás Varga underwent a successful operation at Klinikum Stuttgart on Monday afternoon," the Hungarian soccer federation wrote on X. "According to the information of the institution's doctors



specializing in facial injuries, the intervention was uncomplicated, so the Ferencváros striker can leave the hospital on Wednesday." Hungary won 1-0 with a

dramatic stoppage-time goal from substitute Kevin Csoboth to leave it with a chance of advancing at Euro 2024, though Varga will play no further part.

Several of Varga's teammates appeared to be in tears as the forward received treatment on the field. They held up blankets to shield Varga as he was tended to by medical staff.

Hungary captain Dominik Szoboszlai rushed to run with the stretcher because he was concerned with how long it was taking to bring it onto the field. UEFA insists "there was no delay in the treatment of and assistance to" Varga. "We would like to clarify that the intervention of the team doctor happened within 15 seconds of the incident, followed immediately by the second stadium doctor, to conduct a first assessment of the injury and provide appropriate treatment, as per customary medical procedures," European soccer's governing body said in a statement. "The qualified pitchside emergency team were waiting pitchside, according to their protocol, and arrived with the stretcher as soon as their intervention was requested by the medics to evacuate the player for his immediate transfer to hospital."

Italy advances at Euro 2024



AP ■ LEIPZIG (GERMANY)

Italy substitute Mattia Zaccagni scored in the last minute of stoppage time for Italy to advance to the knockout stage of the European Championship after drawing Croatia 1-1. Luka Modric's second-half strike looked like sending Croatia through as the Group B runner-up, but Zaccagni swept a brilliant shot inside the far post in the eighth minute of added time to cap a furious finale from the defending champions. Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic was unhappy so much time was added after a battling performance from his side. "You can't have eight minutes of added time after that game, it's nonsense," Dalic said. "There weren't so many breaks in play, or so many fouls to justify that. I don't want to cause a fuss but I think Croatia needs to be

acknowledged and respected. We played for almost three hours." Italy needed a point to progress, while Croatia realistically needed a win to stay in the tournament. The Croatians have two points from their three games and were at the mercy of other results to see if it's enough to scrape through as one of the best third-place finishers. Dalic made no mention of waiting. He already believes his side is out. Italy will face Switzerland in the round of 16 on Saturday in Berlin's Olympiastadion, where the final is on July 14. "We were a bit soft at times in the game, we didn't produce our best football," Italy coach Luciano Spalletti said. "When you can afford to draw the game, that's how it goes, you know a draw is enough, you are a bit more timid."

But Spalletti bristled at a question asking if he was concerned about his team trailing going into stoppage time. "Worries and concerns are part and parcel of this job," the Italy coach said. "We did what we needed to do." Modric scored 33 seconds after having a penalty saved by Italy goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma to become the oldest goal-scorer ever at the tournament. Modric, at 38 years, 289 days on Monday, broke the record held by Ivica Vastic, who was 38 years, 257 days, when he scored for Austria against Poland at Euro 2008. After Modric's penalty miss, Croatia immediately attacked again and Donnarumma had to save a shot by Ante Budimir. Modric pounced on the rebound in the 55th minute. The goal sent showers of beer into the sky as ecstatic Croatian fans jettisoned the cups they were holding in the celebrations. Alessandro Bastoni headed just over in response as the Italians suddenly found themselves in need of a goal. Defeat could have seen the defending champion knocked out depending on results in other games. Modric turned his skills to defense until he went off to stand ovations in the 80th. "He wasn't tired," said Dalic, who added he wanted to give his star a rest. But Italy maintained its pressure and it finally paid off at the last possible moment with Zaccagni's curling shot.

The Hungarian players frantically signaled to medical staff after the incident and several have since spoken out about how long it took for Varga to receive treatment. Varga also sustained a concussion. "I think, yes, it took so long. I can understand, everybody understands the protocol, and what they have to wait, but the life is more important than the football, then the health is more important," Csoboth said on Monday. "We wanted to push them to go (on the field), it doesn't matter what will happen, and that's the problem. We did not agree with them, why they did not go (on the field) immediately?"

LOST

By virtue of an affidavit before Notary Public Khariar, I Sribatsa Barik aged about 43 years vide AADHAAR No. 343974846403 S/o Late Khira Prasad Barik At/ Po-Khariar, near Ambedkar-Chowk, W.N-02, PS- Khariar, Dist-Nuapada do hereby solemnly affirms and state that, I had lost my original registration sale deed vide E-RSD No. 11431501135 dtd. 08/07/2015 on the main road on dtd. 20/03/2024 nearly at about 11.30 Am. while I was coming from my house towards Tahasil Office Khariar for applying conversion of the same. But there is no chance to recover the same inspite of repeated searching. This affidavit to file before the concerned authority for future use, reference and record.

Office of The General Manager
Sewerage, WATCO, Cuttack
At-Mahanadi vihar, PO-Nayabazar, Cuttack-753004
email: pe_cs@owssb.in, gmseweragewatoctc@gmail.com

NATIONAL COMPETITIVE BIDDING THROUGH E-PROCUREMENT
Invitation for Bids (IFB) No: GM-WATCO-Sewerage-05/24-25 dtd: 24.06.2024

The General Manager, Sewerage, WATCO, Cuttack on behalf of Governor of Odisha invites percentage rate bid in single cover system in online mode from eligible contractors for the works mentioned below:

1. No. of Works	: 4 No Works
2. Nature of work	: House Sewer Connection
3. Class of Contractor	: "D", "C" & "B"
4. Paper Cost	: Rs (4000.00 to 6,000.00) + GST @18%
5. Date & Time of Availability of Bid Document in the Portal	: 11:00 hours of dt. 01.07.2024 to 17:00 hours of dt. 10.07.2024.
6. Date and time of opening of Bid	: Dt. 11.07.2024 at 03:30 hours
7. Name and address of the Officer Inviting Bid	: The General Manager, Sewerage, WATCO, Cuttack Odisha, At: Mahanadi Vihar, PO: Nayabazar, Cuttack - 753004, email: pe_cs@owssb.in

The bidders have to participate in online bidding only. Further details can be seen from the website www.tendersodisha.gov.in. Any addendum /corrigendum/ Cancellation of tender can also be seen in the same website.

General Manager
Sewerage, WATCO, Cuttack

OIPR-13232/11/0001/2425

पावरग्रिड POWERGRID

NOTICE

1. Approval under regulation-86 of CERC (Conduct of Business) Regulations'1999 and CERC (Terms and Conditions of Tariff) Regulations'2019 for determination of Transmission Tariff from DOCCs to 31-03-2024 for Asset under Eastern Region Expansion Scheme -XXVIII (ERES-XXVIII) in Eastern Region.

2. The beneficiaries of the above mentioned Transmission system are: (i) Bihar State Power (Holding) Company Ltd., (ii) West Bengal State Electricity Distribution Company Ltd., (iii) Grid Corporation Of Orissa Ltd., (iv) Damodar Valley Corporation, (v) Power Department, Govt Of Sikkim, Gangtok, (vi) Jharkhand Biji Vitran Nigam Ltd.

3. Line Length, No. of Bays, Apportioned Approved capital cost (Rs. In Lacs), Date of Commercial Operation and Capital cost up to date of Commercial Operation (Rs. In Lacs):

Asset	Line Length (km)	No of Bays;	Apportioned approved Capital cost (Rs in Lakhs)	DOCC	Capital cost on DOCC (Rs in Lakhs)
Asset-I	-	01 (400kV)	2051.00	25.03.2024	1289.79

4. The annual transmission tariff for the tariff period 2019-24 is summarized as below:

Asset/Tariff	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Asset-I	-	-	-	-	4.90

5. A copy of the application made for determination of tariff is posted on the website of the applicant at www.powergrid.in

6. The suggestions and objections, if any, on the proposals for determination of tariff contained in the application be filed by any person, including the beneficiary before the Secretary, Central Electricity Regulatory Commission, 3 & 4th floor, Chandralok Building, Janpath, New Delhi - 110001 (or other address where the office of the Commission is situated), with a copy to the applicant at the address of its corporate office within 30 days of publication of this notice.

Place : Gurugram Date : 25.06.2024

GM (Commercial)

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A Maharatna PSU



A lot of credit for my wickets goes to Bumrah: Arshdeep



PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

The pinpoint accuracy of Jasprit Bumrah allows other bowlers in the Indian team to go for wickets even in extreme pressure situations, said pacer Arshdeep Singh. The 25-year-old left-arm pacer is among the leading wicket-takers in the T20 World Cup with 15 scalps in six games at an average of 11.86 and economy rate of 7.41 runs per over. Bumrah, on the other hand, has taken 11 wickets in the same number of games, conceding just 4.08 runs per over, a rarity in the shortest format. "I guess a lot of credit goes to Jasprit because he puts a lot of pressure on the batters. He gives what, three or four runs

in and over," Arshdeep said after the 24-run win over Australia in Saint Lucia on Monday. "So, batsmen are coming hard against me and when they are trying, I just have to try and bowl my best ball and there are a lot of chances of getting wickets there because on the other hand they see the runs are not coming and the asking rate is going high. "So, they take more risk against me and there's a chance always of getting a wicket there. So there's a lot of credit of my wickets that goes to Jasprit," he said. Spinner Kuldeep Yadav once again provided the wickets when the team was in need and only three games into the tournament, he has taken his tally to seven scalps. "Kuldeep is a champion

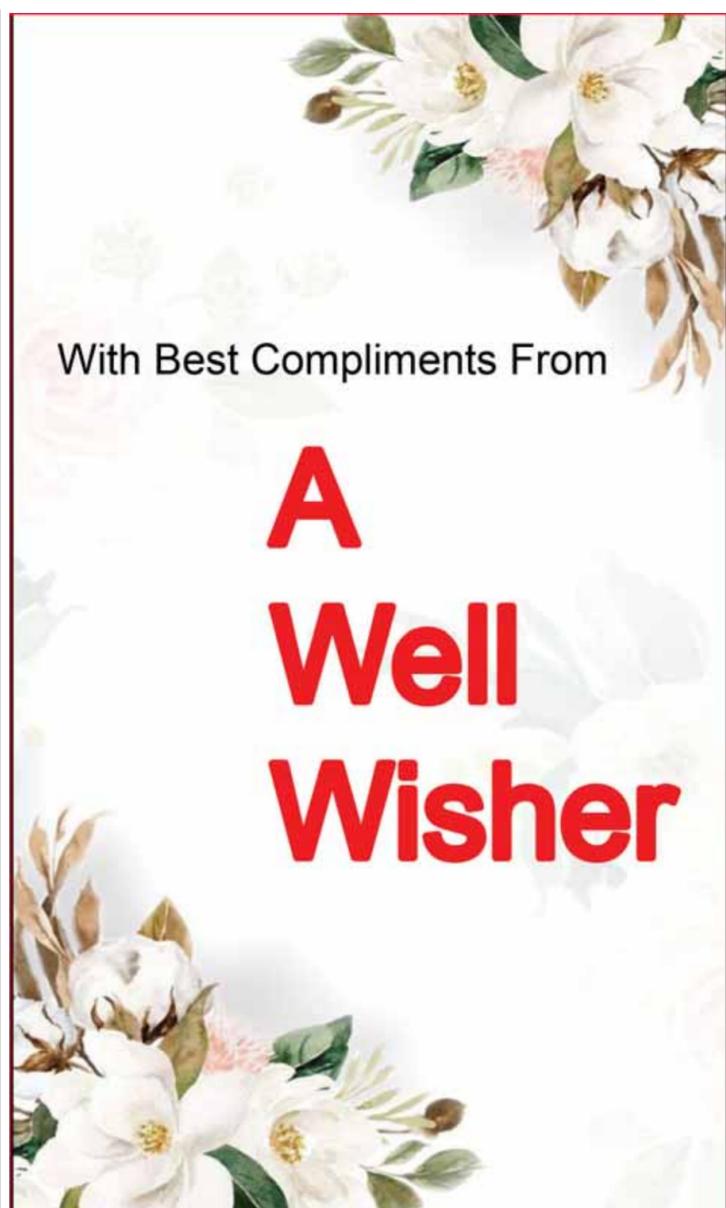
spinner. Whenever he gets a chance, he delivers and he's always been in the wickets and today as well he was bowling from the tough end and even against the wind, he managed to bowl at around 6 an over and took crucial wickets. "He is a really important player in our team and we are looking forward to take all from him and we hope he takes a lot of wickets," said Arshdeep, who had David Warner caught in the slips on Monday. India face England in the second semi-final here on Thursday and they will have last edition's crushing semifinal loss to the defending champions in mind before taking the field at the Providence Stadium. Asked about his plans for the

semifinals, Arshdeep added: "Right now, I'm not expecting anything out of that game, just we'll have a little celebration after this game and a long travel day ahead. And then we'll see what conditions there are and how we can do our best there." Australia's best bowler on the day, Josh Hazlewood, also gave due credit to Kuldeep and Bumrah, saying they made the difference. "I thought the wicket was - a pretty good wicket it was probably a 190-par score and they got the other side of it and we went underneath. "I thought the chase was well on target for quite a lot of the time there and probably till Kuldeep and Jasprit, their eight overs, probably proved the difference again as they usually," said Hazlewood.

We let down all our fans, I apologise on behalf of team: Shanto

PTI ■ KINGSTOWN

Bangladesh skipper Najmul Hossain Shanto has apologised to the cricket-loving fans of his nation for their shambolic performance in the T20 World Cup and blamed his batting unit for the disappointing run that ended with a defeat against a gritty Afghanistan here. After India beat Australia on Sunday, both Afghanistan and Bangladesh had realistic chance of making the semifinals but it was the Rashid Khan-led team that defended a below par 115 to make the last-four stage. Bangladesh needed to knock off the target in 12.1 overs but there were all out for 105 in rain-marred Super Eight contest. "First of all, I would like to say that as a team, we let down all the fans of Bangladesh who follow us and support us. So, I apologise on behalf of the team. As a batting group, we couldn't give the best to the people of the country," Shanto said at the post-match press conference. "We feel sorry for that. We will try to come out of this situation in the future." Crestfallen he may be, but Shanto drew some positives from the campaign. "The positive side is that the bowlers have bowled very well. Rishad (Hossain) has bowled very well in almost all matches in a big tournament like this. There were a lot of positives, but as a batting unit, we let down the fans and the people of our country. "We gave them a hard time. But there was no lacking in our efforts. Everyone tried their best. Everyone was honest in their place. But at the end of the day, we couldn't make it. So, on behalf of the team, I apologise," he reiterated.



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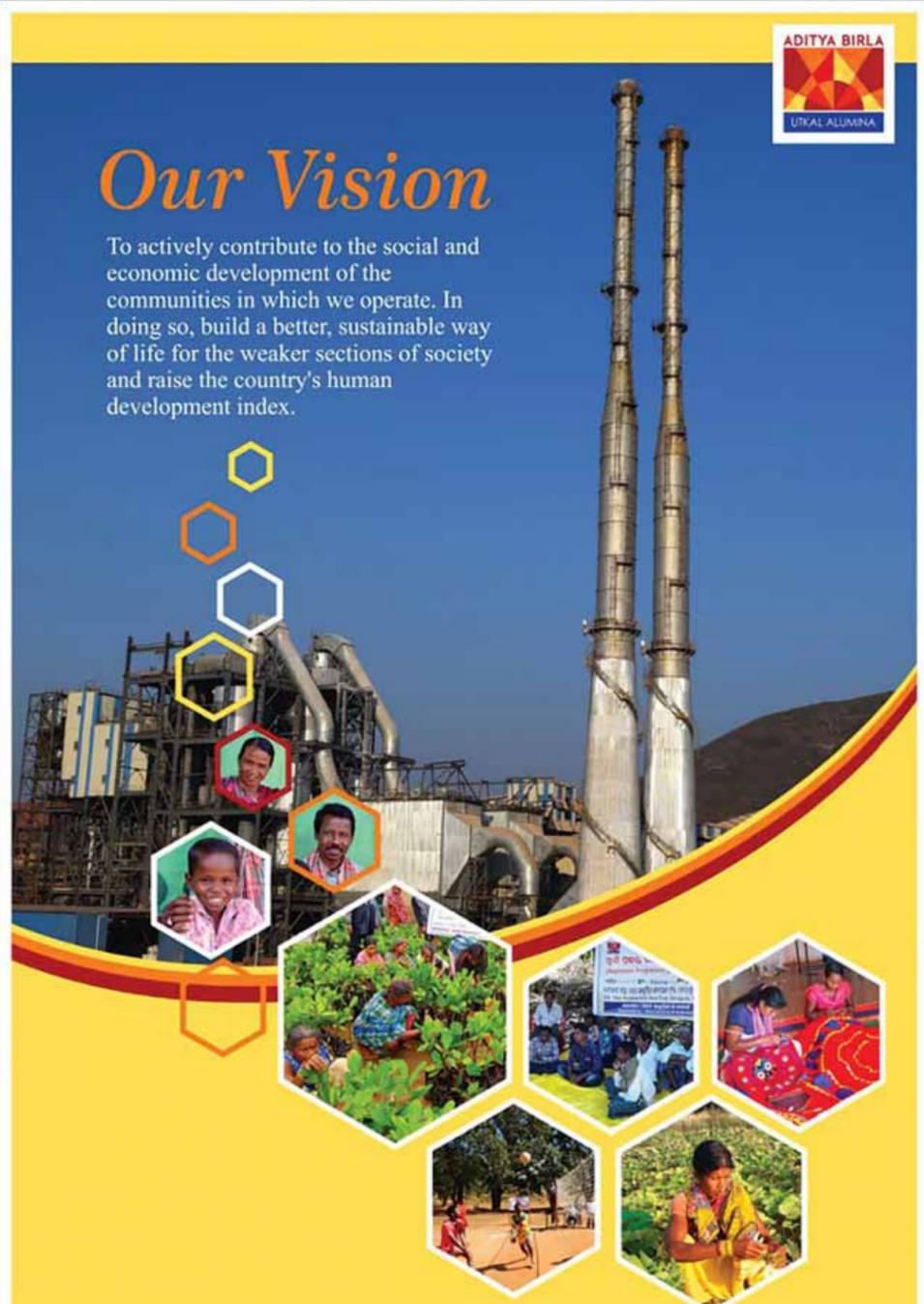
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