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## INDIA LIFTS DREAM WORLD CUP



Team India erupts in celebration after South Africa's Reeza Hendricks, right, leaves the field after losing his wicket to India's Jasprit Bumrah, centre, with his arms raised, during the ICC Men's T20 World Cup final cricket match between India and South Africa at Kensington Oval in Bridgetown, Barbados, on Saturday

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

On an emotion-filled day, India ended their years' wait for a global trophy, overcoming South Africa, who choked at the business end of the match by seven runs to emerge champions in the T20 World Cup here. It was India's second T20 World Cup victory after they had won it in 2007 under the legendary MS Dhoni in South Africa, and first since winning the Champions Trophy in 2013. Star batter Virat Kohli, who was an upcoming cricketer 17

years ago, made his first fifty of this tournament in the final — a classy 76 off 59 balls with six fours and two sixes that carried India to a competitive 176 for seven. Then the Indian bowlers, led by Arshdeep Singh (2/20) and Jasprit Bumrah (2/18), worked their magic as they did throughout this tournament, limiting South Africa to 169 for eight to propel India to their second T20 World Cup. There were pockets of fight from the Proteas, who were playing in their maiden World Cup final. Heinrich Klaasen threatened

India with a 52 off 27 balls (2x4, 5x6) but Hardik Pandya (3/20) snatched the crucial wicket to bring the game decisively in favour of India. But a large chunk of the credit should go to Kohli for anchoring the innings and pushing India to a fighting total. He completed his fifty in 48 balls, but the knock was what precisely India needed the early dismissals of skipper Rohit Sharma (9), Rishabh Pant (0) and Suryakumar Yadav (3), which had reduced India to a worrying 34 for three.

However, Kohli had an able partner in Axar Patel (47, 31 balls, 1x4, 6x4) during the fourth wicket alliance that produced precious 72 runs to ease the early nerves. After the run-out of Axar, who took on SA bowlers bravely, another left-hander Shivam Dube (27 off 16 balls, 3x4 1x6) gave some late steam to Indian innings. **Brief scores:** India: 176/7 in 20 overs (Virat Kohli 76, Axar Patel 47; Keshav Maharaj 2/23) beat South Africa: 169/8 in 20 overs (Henrich Klaasen 52, Jasprit Bumrah 2/18, Arshdeep Singh 2/20) by 7 runs.

## JD(U) invokes Bihar Package Bond

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Janata Dal (U), a major partner in the NDA Government at the Centre, on Saturday urged the Central Government to consider either special category status or a special package for Bihar underlining the party's important role in the formation of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi-led Government.

The party's national executive meeting held in the national Capital flagged price rise and unemployment as "burning issues", as its political resolution expressed the confidence that the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government would take more effective steps to handle them. In the meeting chaired by JD (U) president and Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, the party appointed Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Kumar Jha as its working president since he enjoys good rapport with the BJP leadership and is considered to be very good at crisis management. Meanwhile, Congress took the opportunity to ask JD (U) to pass a Cabinet resolution for the special status in Bihar where it's in alliance with the BJP and simultaneously hoped that another major partner of NDA, TDP, too would gather courage to press demand for a special package.



Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar during the party's National Executive Meeting in New Delhi on Saturday

JD (U) was part of Congress-led INDIA Bloc before the Lok Sabha polls while TDP was looking for a Third Front until it joined hands with BJP. The JD (U) resolution called for extensive probe into paper leak cases to ensure stringent action against the guilty and maintain the credibility of central competitive exams. "There is also a need for Parliament to enact a strong law against leaks of examination papers," it added. The JD (U)'s decision to include a special package as an alternative to its historical push for special category status for Bihar marked a pragmatic climbdown as the Modi Government had cited the 14th Finance Commission's report to rule out special category status for any more states.

Kumar's decision to appoint his confidant Jha as the party's working president, a position not held by anyone, gives ample hint of his inclination to maintain better coordination with the BJP and drive a helpful bargain as Jha has good ties with the party's national leadership. A former Minister in Bihar, Jha was originally in the BJP and served as its link with Kumar before crossing over to the JD (U). Seen as competent, likeable and low-profiled, the Mithilanchal leader has long been a trusted aide of his ageing mentor who has burnt his fingers in the past due to shifting loyalties of his ostensibly reliable colleagues, including former JD(U) president RCP Singh, now in the BJP.



## Fresh dates for UGC NET

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Amid a raging row over alleged irregularities in the conduct of competitive exams, the National Testing Agency (NTA) has released fresh dates for cancelled and postponed examinations, announcing the UGC-NET will now be held from August 21-September 4. The University Grants Commission-National Eligibility Test (UGC-NET) was cancelled a day after being conducted on June 18 as the Education Ministry received inputs that the integrity of the exam was compromised. Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said the question paper was leaked on the darknet and circulated on the Telegram app. The matter is being probed by the CBI. The UGC-NET is a test to determine the eligibility for the award of Junior Research Fellowship, for appointment of assistant professors and admission to PhD courses.

## CM's public grievance hearing from July 1

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi would hold hearing of public grievances from July 1. The Chief Minister would hold the hearing at the CM's Grievance Cell located at Unit-V in Bhubaneswar from 11 am. This was notified by the General Administration and Public Grievances Department on Saturday. Registration for the public hearing would be done at the

spot from 9 am to 12 noon on the same day. Members of the public who want to put forth their grievances before the Chief Minister for hearing should reach the spot and get themselves registered for the purpose. Accordingly, joint hearing of public grievances would be held by Collectors and SPs in their respective districts on every Monday. After the grievance hearing, the reports should be sent to the Chief Minister's Office (CMO).

## CM meets Jaishankar, Nadda

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi on Saturday met External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Union Health Minister JP Nadda at New Delhi and discussed about various issues concerning Odisha. In his discussion with Jaishankar, he stressed on opening a Consulate in UAE as many Odias are working in Dubai and it would help in in-

creasing business relation with Dubai. While meeting Nadda, the Chief Minister urged for opening of medical colleges in three districts, where there are no such institutions. He also discussed about opening of a second AIIMS in Sambalpur and expansion of the AIIMS Bhubaneswar. Majhi also discussed about implementation of the Ayushman Bharat Yojana in the State.

## In Rayagada Accused sentenced to life for witch-hunting

BADAL TAH ■ RAYAGADA

A murder accused, Rajesh Kulesika (32) of Koilapada village, Rohit Colony, Rayagada, was convicted in the killing of his neighbour Chandrama Bibhar on the suspicion of sorcery and was awarded life term here. The crime took place on September 5, 2022. While returning to his house, Abhinav Bibhar, son of deceased Chandrama, saw Rajesh hack-

ing his mother to death with an axe. Later, the accused had absconded from the spot. Rayagada SP Vivekananda Sharma who had taken the charge of the investigation said during the course of investigation, it was ascertained that the deceased was staying with her son and grandson Ajit. The wife of the accused deserted his company for which the accused was of the strong belief that the deceased and her witchcraft was solely

responsible for such disturbance in his family and for the reason he was frequently quarreling with the deceased and to even was threatening her to kill her. The trial was taken up on Monday by Sessions Judge Rayagada. The court sentenced Rajesh to undergo rigorous imprisonment (RI) for life and to pay fine of Rs 10,000 and, in default to suffer further RI for one year U/S 302 of the IPC and to undergo RI for five

years and to pay fine of Rs 5,000 and in default to suffer further RI for three months under Section 450 IPC and to undergo RI for one year for the offence u/s. 4(1) of the Odisha Prevention of Witch Hunting Act, 2013. All the sentences shall run concurrently and the under trial prisoner (UTP) period already undergone by the convict shall be set off as per the provision U/S 428 of the Cr. PC, the court ordered.

## Delhi siblings rescued Bollywood style

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Two siblings, aged three and eleven, kidnapped from Laxmi Nagar on Saturday by a man posing as a parking attendant, were rescued after a dramatic three-hour car pursuit by the Delhi Police, straight out of a Bollywood thriller. The daring rescue unfolded as officers chased the suspect across the city, ultimately saving the children.



Friday night when they had briefly left them in a vehicle while they stepped into a nearby confectionery shop. Little did they know, their

kidnapper abandoning the car with the children inside before escaping. The vehicle was eventually found abandoned in the Samaypur Badli area after a relentless pursuit spanning approximately 100 to 150 kilometres. Deputy Commissioner of Police (East) Apurva Gupta reported receiving information about the kidnapping at 11:30 pm on Friday. The children's father informed the police that they were sitting in the car in front of Hira Sweets shop on Vikas Marg in the Shakarpur area.

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# LaccMI to be renamed 'Mukhyamantri Bus Seva'

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Even as passengers across Odisha have been expressing their resentment over the poor implementation of the Location Accessible Multi-Modal Initiative (LaccMI scheme), Transport Minister Bibhuti Bhusan Jena informed on Saturday that the scheme would be renamed as 'Mukhyamantri Bus Seva' soon.  
The Minister said a discussion in this regard has already been made. He further said that no party symbol would be used in the service.  
"You will not find any party symbols in all our schemes. All the schemes will be meant for the welfare of people. We give strong assurance to the people to provide bus service. After analysing the LaccMI scheme, we have decided not to use any party symbol and rename it as 'Mukhyamantri Bus Seva'." said Jena.  
"Most importantly, buses will run from every block of the State on the occasion of Lord Jagannath's Rath Yatra," he added.



Though the outgoing BJD government initiated the LaccMI scheme aimed at establishing a seamless public transport network from panchayats to the State capital, it completely failed to serve its purpose.  
With many LaccMI buses worth crores gathering dust and getting damaged at various places across the State due to a lack of proper maintenance, questions were being raised over the continuity of the scheme.

# Odia labourers stranded in Dubai

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Allege torture, seek help from CM, Baijayant  
Several migrant workers from Odisha's Jagatsinghpur, Cuttack and at least eight from Kendrapada district are now stranded in Dubai. They were working as plumbers in Dubai and have alleged mental and physical torture, unpaid salaries and passport confiscation.  
In a video message, they narrated their ordeal and revealed how they had been deprived of food for the last five days.  
The workers alleged that they were being made to work under extreme conditions for long hours without food and pay. Their passports have been allegedly confiscated by their employer who is threatening them with life.  
Through the video, the workers appealed to Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and BJP national vice-president and Kendrapada MP Baijayant Panda to rescue them immediately from the Gulf capital.  
According to sources, a private agent from Bhubaneswar took them to Dubai a month ago on the false promise of better pay.  
With folded hands, the workers said, "We request our Chief Minister that we have been held captive in Dubai. They are forcing us to work in extreme conditions. We are not given our passports. We are in deep trouble; so we request our CM to save us."  
"Baijayant Panda is our MP; so, we also request him to immediately rescue us and save our lives," they added.  
No comments could be obtained from the agent or their employer in this regard.



# 2 Odisha IAS officers now in Secy rank



**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Two senior IAS officers of Odisha cadre, Anu Garg and Chandra Sekhar Kumar, have been empanelled for holding posts at Secretary or equivalent rank in the Central Government.  
According to a notification, the Appointments Committee of the Union Cabinet has approved the empanelment of seven IAS officers, including Anu Garg and Chandra Sekhar Kumar, for holding posts at the Centre at Secretary or Secretary-equivalent level.  
While Garg happens to be a 1991-batch IAS officer of Odisha cadre, Kumar is an IAS officer of 1992-batch.  
Garg is at present posted as Development Commissioner and Additional Chief Secretary, Water Resources, in Odisha, while Kumar is on Central deputation.

# In Jajpur 'Balle Balle Dhaba built with MLA, MPLAD funds'

**PNS ■ JAJPUR**  
Alleges Dharmasala MLA; probe ordered  
A day after the Jajpur district administration put up a notice, the Balle Balle Dhaba and Family Restaurant in the premises of the Dharmasala Bhawan in the district was vacated on Saturday.  
As per reports, the hotel items were shifted to another place with the help of its employees.  
The development happened after it came to the fore that MPLAD and MLALAD funds were allegedly used in setting up of the dhaba. This facility was allegedly given to a BJD woman leader on lease without any relevant documents. Dharmasala's former BJD



MLA Pranab Balabantaray was allegedly managing the show from behind the scenes.  
Dharmasala's present Independent MLA Himanshu Sahu claimed that he found the irregularity during the block inspection.  
"The dhaba was built by spending crores of rupees. A BJD woman leader has been allowed to run it. We came to know that the former Dharmasala MLA was hosting private programmes there. There, the distribution of money was also being finalised," said Sahu.  
Following Sahu's claim, the district administration swung into action on Friday and put up a notice on the wall, asking the dhaba to be vacated within three days.  
According to locals, the restaurant and lodging facility was very costly and only VIPs used to frequent it.  
Dharmasala BDO Debendra Bal said he has received a complaint regarding unauthorised occupation of the dhaba and an investigation into the matter is underway. If the allegations are proved then action would be taken.

# In State Dengue cases double compared to last yr

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
With the onset of monsoon, there has been a two-fold increase in the dengue cases in Odisha compared to last year. By Thursday, the total dengue positive cases stood at 288 with 16 new cases reported on the same day.  
Out of the total 288 cases, 80 have been reported from Khordha district alone. Sources said that maximum dengue cases are being reported from urban areas and, hence, special focus is being given in Cuttack and Bhubaneswar.  
As more rains are on the cards, the health officials have urged staffs to create massive awareness among people.  
Public Health Director Nilakantha Mishra said there has been a rise in dengue-positive cases compared to last year. The cases have increased as testing has also been increased this year and there was early rain in the State as well.  
The Health Department has instructed all District Headquarters Hospitals to take all necessary steps in view of the current situation.

# CCTVs in mandis to curb corruption

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
To use modern technology to curb corruption in procurement of paddy, the Odisha Government on Saturday said closed circuit television (CCTV) cameras would be installed in all the mandis in the State.  
Food Supplies and Consumer Welfare Minister Krushna Chandra Patra said steps are being taken for installation of CCTV cameras in all mandis as soon as possible.  
This apart, GPS would be installed in all the vehicles engaged in the transportation of paddy as part of steps to prevent irregularities in the process, he said.  
Stating that the two projects would be implemented in two months, the Minister said there is also a proposal to set up cold storage units in each block of the State.

# Setting dogs on woman scribe Police visit ex-Min's house again for probe

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
A Capital police station team on Saturday visited the residence of BJD leader and former Minister Raghunandan Das here to probe the allegations of unleashing his dogs on a woman journalist.  
The cops visited Das' house at Unit-VI for a second time and questioned his staffs and family members regarding the incident. The last time the police visited the house was on June 26, a day after the incident and had questioned Das.  
Investigating Officer and Capital police station IIC Sudhansu Bhushan Jena told reporters, "Our investigation is underway. One phase of inter-

rogation has already been done. Once the investigation is over, I will share the details with you."  
The former Information and Public Relations Minister Das triggered a row after the incident and several working journalists held demonstrations to protest against the incident.  
As per reports, the woman journalist of a local news channel had gone to Das' house to cover the demolition being carried out in the premises of BJD leader Pranab Prakash Das' government quarters adjacent to the residence of Raghunandan. Raghunandan allegedly confronted the TV crew and asked his staffs to set his dogs on them.  
As per reports, the woman journalist of a local news channel had gone to Das' house to cover the demolition being carried out in the premises of BJD leader Pranab Prakash Das' government quarters adjacent to the residence of Raghunandan. Raghunandan allegedly confronted the TV crew and asked his staffs to set his dogs on them.

# Low pressure More heavy rains predicted in State

**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Under the influence of a cyclonic circulation over the northwest and adjoining west-central Bay of Bengal, a low-pressure area has formed over the northwest Bay of Bengal off the north Odisha coast. It is likely to move northwestwards during the next two days, said the India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday.  
Several parts of the State are experiencing enhanced rainfall activities under its impact. There are also reports of heavy rainfall in some districts as well.  
"Squally weather with gusty surface wind speed reaching 40 to 50 kmph is likely over northwest Bay of Bengal off Odisha coast till June 30. Fishermen are advised not to venture into sea off Odisha coast and northwest Bay of Bengal till June 30," said the IMD.  
The weather office issued a Yellow warning and said heavy rainfall (7 to 11 cm) is very likely to occur in the districts of Sundargarh, Jharsuguda, Deogarh and Keonjhar and other places on Sunday.

# Aparajita BJD's speed-breaker in coastal Odisha

**BHUBANESWAR**  
Instrumental in turning Bhubaneswar a BJP stronghold



LALIT MOHAN MISHRA

The BJP's sweep in Odisha in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections shall continue to be an interesting subject for political analysts of the country. This has become more important as Odisha has become the second State after Telangana where a regional political party has been routed out of State power by a national party.  
It was the Congress which toppled the BRS government in Telangana and BJP which dismantled the 24-year-old BJD government in Odisha. It is the combination of anti-incumbency of BJD government, succession and ideological issues in BJD and Modi's wave that paved the way to BJP's unexpected massive win in Odisha, resulting in BJP winning 20 out of 21 Lok Sabha seats and 78 out of 147 Assembly seats.  
The important factor that led to

the sweep of the BJP in Odisha in last Lok Sabha poll was the coastal sweep. It is known that the BJP had set its foundation in the western region of Odisha since the Jana Sangha days. This foundation got consolidated during the BJD-BJP alliance period and later when the BJP penetrated into the minds of the voters of the western Odisha Lok Sabha seats like Sundergarh, Sambalpur, Bargarh, Balangir and Kalahandi, irrespective of win or loss of Lok Sabha or Assembly seats. One can add Dhenkanal Lok Sabha seat to this west Odisha zone as parts

of the undivided Dhenkanal district come under Sambalpur Lok Sabha seat.  
Similarly, the BJP entered into north Odisha Lok Sabha tribal seats like Mayurbhanja and Keonjhar during alliance days. One may add Baleswar here too as parts of Mayurbhanja district comes under Baleswar Lok Sabha seat. Similarly, Nabarangpur Lok Sabha seat which the BJP had bagged during BJD-BJP alliance days, had got a BJP's foundation. The BJP base in these regions was built on Hindutwa and backwardness issues.  
The BJP could not create a base in the minds of the coastal people who were tilted towards the BJD and even became anti-BJP after the breaking of BJD-BJP alliance in 2009. The coastal people were not attracted towards Hindutwa ideology and they were looking for development and welfare ideology which the BJP could not provide till 2019 and 2024.  
The BJP could bag only Bhubaneswar and Baleswar Lok Sabha coastal seats in 2019 election, though the fight against the BJD was notable in other eight coastal Lok Sabha seats like Brahmapur, Aska,



Puri, Cuttack, Kendrapada, Jagatsinghpur, Jajpur and Bhadrak. As the Congress became weaker, the BJP became the natural opposition choice of the voters of the coastal areas. But the tilt of the coastal people towards the BJP was final in 2024 poll. Was it a sudden or incremental tilt? I think it was the latter.  
The BJD-BJP alliance fought Lok Sabha poll three times in Odisha such as in 1998, 1999 and 2004. Baleswar Lok Sabha seat was won by the BJP. Once the BJP won the

Brahmapur Lok Sabha seat. Therefore, except Baleswar, no other coastal Lok Sabha seats tilted towards the BJP prior to the 2019 poll. In 2019, the BJP won Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha seat along with Baleswar, the capital and coastal heartland seat of Odisha for the first time.  
During the alliance days, the Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha seat was with the BJD. However, Bhubaneswar Assembly seat and its adjacent ones like Chilka and Cuttack Assembly seats were won by the BJP. After the fall of alliance, the BJP lost these seats.  
So what went right for the BJP in 2019 which led to the win of Bhubaneswar Lok Sabha seat, the first opening of coastal political corridor of the BJP? The Modi-wave, BJP's poll promise and the candidate's profile led to the win of the BJP.  
BJP's Lok Sabha candidate Aparajita Sarangi filled up the mental aspirations of the Bhubaneswar people in 2019 poll. As mentioned above, the people were looking for development and administrative alternative from the BJP and not just Hindutwa alone. The voters are Hin-

dus and they have a natural BJP-tilt but they were looking for alternative to the BJD administration model. Aparajita provided that. She had three important dimensions of her personality and one dimension of her political identity that attracted people. She is the daughter-in-law of a Puri Brahmin family, a former popular bureaucrat who worked in Bhubaneswar and an educated woman who is obviously the first choice of the women and girls as their leader. Her political identity at people's perception level is that she quit job and joined politics under the advice of Prime Minister Modi and she is Modi's selection.  
Thus the BJP's 2019 Lok Sabha win in Bhubaneswar was on the narrative of development and administrative alternative to the BJD. After the win, Aparajita continued to criticize the State government till 2024 poll, even when the State BJP was silent against the BJD government or when the BJD was sending BJP's Aswini babu to Rajya Sabha. Aparajita was filling up the vacuum of the opposition leader until Jayanarayan and Manmohan's team took charge. She was invited

by Party workers and social groups from different parts to address them. Thus she worked as a speed-breaker of the BJD in the coastal areas and created pro-BJP environment and mental infrastructure for the BJP during 2019-24. This became hyper when ex-BJD senior leaders like Pradeep Panigrahi, Bhartruhari Mahtab, Baijayant Panda became BJP's Lok Sabha candidates in prominent coastal points. Finally, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to go alone to the 2024 poll in Odisha proved correct one and the rest is history.  
There was an expectation from people that Aparajita Sarangi shall be given a ministerial berth by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Modi-3.0 government as she is two times MP from the prestigious Bhubaneswar seat. But this has not happened. As the BJP has given a woman Deputy CM in Odisha government, many still hope that Prime Minister Modi shall reward and give a chance to the Bhubaneswar's woman MP to serve in the Union Ministry in days ahead and bring pride to Odisha.

# CM Majhi pays homage to Gandhi in Delhi

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**  
Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Deputy Chief Ministers K V Singh Deo and Pravat Parida paid homage to Father of the Nation Mahatma Gandhi and former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Saturday.  
Speaking to reporters, Majhi said he was inspired by the leadership of Vajpayee from his childhood and later joined politics.  
Later, Majhi and his two deputies met Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar at his residence. They visited the Shree Jagannath temple at Tyagraj Nagar in the af-



ternoon and attended a felicitation programme organised by Prabasi Odias at the Hauz Khas Shree Jagannath temple in the evening.  
The Chief Minister has gone to New Delhi since July 26. On his first visit to Delhi after taking oath as Chief Minister, Majhi met President Droupadi Murmu, Vice-

# In Kendrapada Man gets 20-yr RI for raping minor girl

**PNS ■ KENDRAPADA**  
Fast Track Special Court Judge Tribikram Keshari Chinhara on Friday sentenced a person to 20 years' rigorous imprisonment (RI) for raping an eight-year-old girl under the Aul police station in Kendrapada district in September 2020.  
The court also directed the convict Chandan Mallik alias Sika to pay a fine of Rs 52,000 and in default to undergo another one year's RI, said POSCO Court Special Public Prosecutor Manoj Kumar Sahoo.  
On September 15, 2020, Sika dragged the minor girl to his house and raped her. He threatened the victim to kill her if she informed anybody about the incident. But the girl later told her parents about her ordeal, following which her family lodged a complaint with the Aul police.  
Based on the complaint, police registered a case under the relevant sections of the IPC and began a probe. Then, they managed to nab the accused and forwarded him to court. The court also asked the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA) to pay a compensation of Rs 5 lakh to the victim, said Sahoo.

# In B'pur Varsity Day against Drug Abuse observed



**PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR**  
The Berhampur University observed the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking on Wednesday. The event was organised by the PG Council in collaboration with the NSS PG units of the university.  
The event highlighted the importance of collective efforts in combating drug abuse and illicit trafficking, emphasising the role of education and community engagement in this global issue.  
University PG Council Chairman Prof Sukanta Kumar Tripathy and Registrar Sachidananda Nayak attended as guests.  
The programme saw enthusiastic participation from teachers, research scholars and students. The programme was coordinated by NSS Programme Officer Sankarsan Mallick. Itishree Gita Kumari, NSS Programme Officer led the pledge-taking session. The event concluded with a vote of thanks by NSS Programme Officer Sakti Ranjan Dash.

# In Gajapati 'No helmet, no salary' letter creates flutter

**PNS ■ PARALAKHEMUNDI**  
Wear a helmet while riding a bike or else salary would be withheld. Such a notification carrying the signature of Mohana Block Education Officer (BEO) in the Gajapati district has now created ripples among the teachers.  
In the letter issued on June 27, it has been mentioned that

# In MKCG Antibiotic injections of lakhs of rupees lying unused

Even as their expiry dates near  
**RAJEEV RATHAN ■ BRAHMAMPUR**  
A significant theft of antibiotic injections has occurred at the MKCG Medical College store, with 575 vials of Cefotaxime still lying unutilized and at risk of becoming unusable.  
Despite the police seizing these antibiotics, they have been lying in storage for a long time due to negligence from medical authorities, preventing their return to patient care.  
The antibiotics, which should be stored at specific temperatures, are now exposed to conditions that might render them ineffective. These



injections, valued at several lakhs of rupees, are set to expire in January 2025.  
Specialists warn that they might not be safe for use anymore, raising concerns about the significant financial and medical waste due to administrative oversight.  
The police investigation, which started after the incident on July 10, 2023, has seen little progress. The investigating officer, Bhargab Bhauyan, was transferred two months ago, and the case has since stagnated.  
Despite extensive inquiries, the police have not identified any suspects or made any arrests related to the theft.  
The stolen antibiotics, found behind an old indoor plastic storehouse during a police raid, were locally purchased and not part of the government supply. This has led to suspicions that an insider might have attempted the theft for personal gain.  
In response to the incident, MKCG Medical College authorities formed an investigation team led by Registrar

Sangram Shekhar Panda, with members including Dr Abhinav Panda, Accounts Officer S Sudhakar, and Hospital Manager Siddharth Pradhan. The investigation began on July 19, 2023, and involved questioning various store employees, security personnel, and attendants.  
"Patients like me depend on these medicines for our survival and quality of life. Despite these measures, no significant progress has been made in identifying the culprits, prompting demands for urgent and decisive action to prevent further loss of valuable medical resources," said Samir Kumar Nayak, a patient.

# Ganjam BJP observes 'Black Day'

**PNS ■ BRAHMAMPUR**  
Members of the Ganjam district BJP observed 'Black Day' at the Town Hall here on Tuesday veining to mark the anniversary of Emergency.  
On June 25, 1977, the Emergency was declared by late Prime Minister Indira Gandhi.  
The BJP members said the Congress murdered democracy on this day by declaring Emergency. The Congress government at the entire put opposition parties' leader be-

# Oram reviews State ST, SC Dept activities

Focus laid on skilling youths, ensuring livelihood, preserving linguistic identity  
**PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR**  
Union Tribal Affairs Minister Jual Oram emphasised implementation of more pro-people programmes across Odisha by the ST, SC Development, Minorities and Backward Classes Welfare Department and asked the officials to stress on vocational courses to ensure livelihood opportunities and preserving the unique tribal linguistic identity.



there should be equitable availability of the educational institutions for the disadvantaged groups and communities.  
Stressing on the upgradation of the senior secondary schools into degree colleges with +3 courses to enable the tribal students avail opportunity to have graduation so that they could compete with the other students for career-oriented examinations, he also asked to ensure coaching facilities in them for different job openings.  
He asked for inclusion of more vocational courses to enable students to opt for them after Class X or +2 so that those, who are interested to have professional courses, could choose their careers and grow independently as earning members of their families.  
"Let Odisha start such a skill related initiative in India as a pilot project so that we could implement it in a pan-Indian scenario," observed the Union Minister.  
The meeting was led by Commissioner-cum-Secretary ST, SC Development Minorities and Backward Classes

Welfare Department Roopa Roshan Sahoo. All the senior officials of the department were present and they briefed the Union Minister about their respective domains, projects and programmes.  
The Union Minister also asked the department officials to regularly monitor the execution of various infrastructure development works in Odisha. Regarding saturation of amenities of the various tribal and PVTG communities, the Minister directed to expedite the mapping and identify gaps.  
While reviewing the work of SCSTRTI (SC, ST Research and Training Institute) and ATLC (Academy of Tribal Languages and Culture) the Union Minister gave emphasis on the preservation, documentation and publication of multilingual books so that more and more persons from the original tribal communities and others from major language users could be benefitted.

# Ganjam foundation's hill reforestation drive begins



**As monsoon approaches**  
**KRUSHNA CHANDRA PANDA ■ BRAHMAMPUR**  
With the entry of monsoon, Aryabhata Environment and Nature Foundation (AENF) has begun its endeavor of the season to reforest the bald hills.  
To begin with, the foundation planted a banyan tree on the hillock near Ramchandra Palli in the Chikiti block of Ganjam district. After that the volunteers scattered 5,000 seed balls and sowed around 20 seeds on hoeing.  
The hill is the first one on which the mission to create greenery on bald hills by Aryabhata was initiated in 2017 after planting more than 60,000 trees on the plains, besides creating a Gramya Vana on 25 acres of barren and rugged land near Pitatali in Chikiti block with 10,000 saplings.  
When the Forest Department was approached by the foundation for the plantation of trees on the hill they rejected, citing the soil to be degraded. In 2017 Aryabhata Foundation started its endeavor by sowing 1.5 lakh seeds on it.  
Since then, every year with efforts and hard work, around 50,000 trees could be grown on the bald hill turning the grey bald hill into lush green with some biodiversity, said environmentalist and founder chairman of AENF Sudhir Kumar Raut.  
This year the foundation is planning to rework on 20 hills that it has worked on till last year with 6 lakh seeds and 2 lakh seed balls and to add a pair of more hills to its endeavor. In addition, the foundation has also begun plantation on the banks of river Rushikulya. It aims at planting 5,000 trees and use 10,000 seed balls for the purpose, Raut added.  
The Aryabhata Foundation has also tried to bring greenery on 20 bald and semi bald hills, created two village forests with 10,000 and 5,000 trees and has planted more than 80,000 trees on the plains. It also has been creating awareness through diverse means about climate change and environment degradation, and the consequent catastrophic effects through Sabuja Ratha, Parivesha Jatra, human chain, cycle rally, fastings and padyatras for about a decade and half.

# 2 poets to get Chandra Mohanty awards

**PNS ■ BALESWAR**  
An award ceremony in the memory of poet Chandra Kumar Mohanty would be held here on July 6 and two contemporary young poets of the State, Shakti Mohanty and Hemant Dalapati would be felicitated on the day, said Krishna Kumar Mohanty, a member of the jury committee.  
The other two members of the committee are Utpal Mohanty and Ranjan Baug. The award was instituted in the



memory of noted poet and advocate Chandra Kumar Mohanty in 2018; and every year, one young poet within the age of 50 is awarded.  
The two adjudged poets have registered a prominence in the field of Odia poetry and enriched Odia literature by their own style of presenting new ideas, said Mohanty.

# Let LS Speaker act fairly, not as PM's stooge

It has been clearly observed that PM Modi says one thing and does the opposite. He most often says he is there to uphold the Constitution of India and he minces no words to condemn the Congress party because it was Indira Gandhi who declared emergency and thereby she destroyed the Fundamental Rights of the Indian citizens.  
PM Modi is essentially an autocrat. Nobody in the BJP is allowed to criticize him. Whatever he says is hyped by media houses owned by his friends in the corporate world.  
PM Modi during the election to the Lok Sabha raked up the Katchatheevu issue that was well settled way back in 1974 by the Congress Government of Indira Gandhi in favour of the State of Sri Lanka. Modi did it to get more of



**B RAMCHANDRA CST VOLTAIRE**  
Tamil votes in the Lok Sabha election of 2024. BJP did not get a single seat out of 39 seats of the State of Tamil Nadu.  
He created an unwarranted controversy against a small nation, called Maldives, because its newly

elected President Dr Mohamed Muizzu chooses to visit first the Republic of China and PM Modi threatened to build romantic environments around Lakshadweep so that Indian visitors, newly married couples, would not go over to Maldives for honeymooning but would spend their happy time in Lakshadweep.  
Article 93 of the Constitution of India which speaks about appointment of Speaker and Deputy Speaker was not acted upon properly by Prime Minister Modi for the last 5 yrs of the 17th Lok Sabha. He had the Speaker of the Lok Sabha in Om Birla of his party, the BJP and did not bother to have any member as the Deputy Speaker of the House. He ought to have given this post to the Opposition, preferably, to the Congress.

Now in the 18th Lok Sabha, Modiji, has become PM of the NDA (National Democratic Alliance) on June 9 and his party's strength in the Lok Sabha has been reduced from 303 to 240. He is in a defiant mood not to give the post of Deputy Speaker to the Congress whose strength in the Lok Sabha has gone up from 52 to 99. It shows nothing but his total disrespect to the Constitution of India.  
On June 26 while welcoming Om Birla once again becoming the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, he said that the 17th Lok Sabha was quite "productive." Many vital laws have been enacted and mathematically he said that productivity of the House stood at 97%.  
The reality about the 17th Lok Sabha is this: Prime Minister Modi ignored the deliberation in the

House. Instead of remaining present in the House he was very often remaining absent. Bills were introduced and passed without any discussion. Two vital members of the Opposition, namely, Rahul Gandhi of the Congress and Mahua Moitra of the TMC who were very much critical of PM Modi for his close relationship with Gautam Adani, one of the Corporate giants, were wilfully and unfairly expelled from the House by Om Birla, the then Speaker of the Lok Sabha.  
Birla once expelled 150 members of the Lok Sabha for the benefit of PM Modi's authoritarian Government. On June 26 while he was greeting Birla for his re-election as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha he should have expressed his deep regrets for the harsh decisions which were taken in the 17th Lok Sabha.

It is quite good that the "resurgent" Opposition, that has now Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) is quite determined to compel the Prime Minister and other Ministers and the Speaker of the Lok Sabha to follow the Constitution of India in letter and spirit.  
Quite nice to see many of the Opposition members including Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav of SP were having the Constitution of India in their hands while they took the oath or affirmation of the membership of the House on June 24-25.  
The Freethought Party of India hopes that hereafter Speaker Birla would conduct himself as an impartial authority of the Lok Sabha giving scope to every member to voice the voice of the people freely

in the House.  
PM Modi in a way has been cut to size. The 2024 Lok Sabha poll results do say so. Modiji is no longer the "Boss" of the Union Cabinet that now stands on the shoulders of BJP, JDU, TDP etc. He cannot impose his decision as he used to do in 2019-2024.  
He must give reasonable space to the Opposition that now consists of 99 members of the Congress, 37 members of the SP, 29 members of the TMC, 22 members of the DMK, 9 members of the SS (UBT), 8 members of NCP (SP), 4 Members of the RJD etc. He can't use the Speaker of the Lok Sabha as his agent. The Speaker should function with honour and dignity.  
(General secretary, Freethought Party of India)

# Leaders condole death of five soldiers in Ladakh flash flood

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Saturday expressed sadness over the death of soldiers in a flash flood in Ladakh and said the entire country is with their families. Five Army personnel, including a junior commissioned officer, drowned when their T-72 tank sank due to flash floods in the Shyok River near the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in the Nyoma-Chushul area in Ladakh during an exercise early Saturday. "I am saddened by the news of the accident during the military exercise in Ladakh. I express my condolences to the families of the brave soldiers who lost their lives in this accident. The whole country is with the families of the brave soldiers," Shah said in a social media post in Hindi. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and party leaders Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra expressed sorrow at the death of five soldiers who



drowned when their T-72 tank sank due to a flash flood in the Shyok river in Ladakh on Saturday. "Deeply distressed at the loss of lives of five Indian Army brave hearts, including a JCO (junior commissioned officer), while getting a T-72 tank across a river in Ladakh," Kharge said in a social media post. "Our heartfelt condolences to the families of the Army personnel who fell victim to this

said the news of the soldiers' death was extremely sad. "The news of the martyrdom of five Indian Army soldiers in an accident during a military exercise of a tank crossing a river in Ladakh is extremely sad," he said in a post in Hindi on X. "While paying my humble tribute to all the martyred soldiers, I express my deepest condolences to the bereaved families. We stand with them in this hour of grief. The country will always remember their dedication, service and sacrifice," he said in a post. Priyanka Gandhi also expressed her condolences to the families of the five soldiers. "The news of the martyrdom of five army soldiers in the sudden flood ... in Ladakh is extremely sad. May God grant peace to the departed souls. My deepest condolences to the bereaved families," she said in social media post in Hindi. "The country will always remain indebted to our brave soldiers and their families for this supreme sacrifice," she added.

# PM greets Amarnath pilgrims

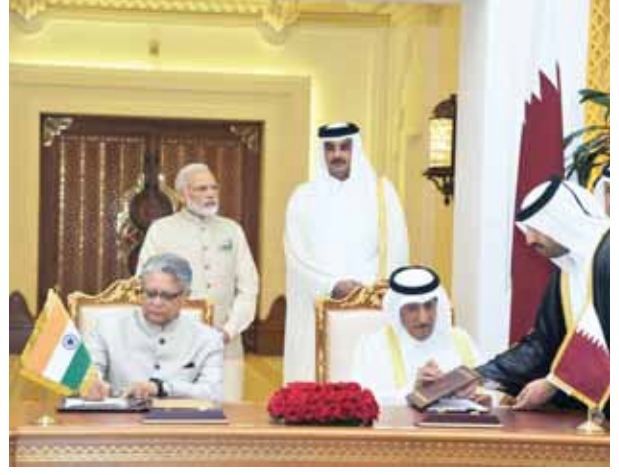
PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday greeted pilgrims on the start of the Amarnath Yatra, saying the 'darshan' of Lord Shiva is known to infuse immense energy in his followers. The annual Amarnath Yatra began early Saturday as the first batch of pilgrims left the twin base camps in Baltal and Nunwan to start their journey to the 3,880 metre-high cave shrine in the south Kashmir Himalayas, officials said. "My heartfelt best wishes to all pilgrims on the commencement of the holy Amarnath Yatra. This yatra associated with the darshan of Baba Barfani infuses immense energy in the devotees of Lord Shiva. May all devotees prosper with his blessings. Jai Baba Barfani," Modi said in a post on X in Hindi. The 52-day pilgrimage will conclude on August 19. In his message, added.

# India, Qatar to review bilateral ties during Jaishankar's visit

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India and Qatar will review the entire spectrum of their bilateral ties during External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's visit there on Sunday. He will meet Prime Minister and Foreign Minister of Qatar Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani, Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said here on Saturday. Incidentally, Jaishankar's visit comes four-and-half months after Qatar released eight former Indian Navy personnel, who were sentenced to death after being arrested in August 2022. India and Qatar share historic and friendly relations which are marked by regular exchange of high-level visits. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had visited Qatar on February 14-15 and held discussions with Qatar's Amir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, MEA said while giving details of Jaishankar's visit. Jaishankar's visit will enable both sides to review various



aspects of bilateral relations including political, trade, investment, energy, security, cultural and people-to-people as well as the regional and international issues of mutual interest. India and Qatar are looking at broadbasing trade basket with a view to link it to regional trade. It is expected that Jaishankar and Al Thani would also deliberate on the overall situation in West Asia against the backdrop of Israel's continuing military offensives in Gaza.

# India's Shivalik to take part in world largest naval exercise

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Indian multi-role stealth frigate INS Shivalik, mission deployed in South China Sea and North Pacific Ocean, has reached Pearl Harbour in Hawaii to take part in the Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) exercise, which is 'world's largest naval exercise,' navy said here on Saturday. It spans six weeks and navies from 26 countries will take part in the mega drill. Giving details, officials said the Indian warship sailed into Pearl Harbour on Thursday on completion of JIMEX 24, a bilateral exercise between India and Japan. The harbour phase of the exercise from June 27 to July 07 will see participation in multiple symposiums, exercise planning discussions, sports competitions and reciprocal deck visits. The sea phase of RIMPAC - 24, divided into three sub-phases



will witness ships undertaking basic and advanced level integration exercises during the first two sub-phases. The event will conclude with a theatre level large force tactical exercise\*. The exercise will witness the participation of an Aircraft Carrier Battle Group, submarines, maritime reconnaissance aircraft, unmanned aerial vehicles, remotely piloted surface ships and also an amphibious force landing operations including joint opera-

tions with special forces of multinational navies. RIMPAC-24, spanning over six weeks of intense operations and training is aimed at enhancing interoperability and building trust among the navies of friendly foreign countries. Led by the US Navy, approximately 29 countries are participating in the current edition of the multi-dimensional exercise. The world's largest international maritime exercise, RIMPAC-24 provides a unique training opportunity while fostering and sustaining cooperative relationships among participants, critical to ensuring the safety of sea lanes and security of world's oceans. INS Shivalik's participation in RIMPAC-24, 9,000 Nautical Miles away from Indian coast stands testimony to the Indian Navy's capability to operate in any part of the world. The ship is an indigenously designed and built 6,000 tonnes guided missile stealth frigate.

# Heavy to very heavy rainfall predicted for NW, NE India

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) on Saturday predicted heavy to very heavy rainfall in northwest and northeast India over the next four to five days. A low-pressure area is currently situated over the northwest Bay of Bengal, adjoining the north Odisha-Gangetic West Bengal coasts, the weather office said. Cyclonic circulations have formed over northeast Rajasthan, east Uttar Pradesh bordering Bihar, and northwest Uttar Pradesh at lower tropospheric levels, it added. An east-west trough extends from northwest Uttar Pradesh to the low-pressure area. Due to these weather systems, isolated heavy rainfall is expected in Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and



Rajasthan from June 29 to July 3, the IMD said. Chhattisgarh, Gangetic West Bengal, Jharkhand, and Odisha are likely to receive heavy rainfall on June 29-30, and Bihar from June 30 to July 2. The IMD has also predicted very heavy rainfall in isolated areas in Uttarakhand, Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Chandigarh, Uttar Pradesh, east Rajasthan, and west Madhya Pradesh during this period.

In the northeast, a cyclonic circulation over northeast Assam will bring light to moderate rainfall, thunderstorms, lightning, and isolated heavy to very heavy rainfall to Sub-Himalayan West Bengal, Sikkim, Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and Tripura over the next five days. Isolated extremely heavy rainfall is expected in Arunachal Pradesh on June 29-30 and in

Assam and Meghalaya on June 29. The Met office also predicted isolated heavy rainfall for Saurashtra, Kutch, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, and coastal and south interior Karnataka from June 29 to July 1. Gujarat, Goa, and central Maharashtra are expected to receive heavy rainfall from June 29 to July 3, with isolated very heavy rainfall in Konkan, Goa, and central Maharashtra from June 30 to July 3. The IMD also said the southwest monsoon has further advanced into the remaining parts of east Uttar Pradesh and some areas of west Uttar Pradesh on Saturday. Conditions are favourable for the monsoon to advance into more parts of west Rajasthan, Haryana, Chandigarh, Punjab, and the remaining areas of west Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Jammu over the next two to three days, it added.

# Canopy at Rajkot Airport collapses



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

After the tragic airport canopy collapse in Delhi that claimed a life and injured many, a canopy at the Rajkot International Airport in Gujarat has also collapsed due to heavy rain on Saturday. The canopy was placed at the passenger pickup and drop area outside the airport terminal. No injuries have been reported so far. A video on social media showed airport officials on the spot of the canopy collapse. This marks the third such occurrence in a short span, raising concerns over airport infrastructure resilience in extreme weather conditions. In a post on X, the Rajkot airport authorities said that water accumulation was observed on the city side of the canopy at the terminal building at 11.40 am due to heavy rains. "As we came to know about it we gave the information to the civil works department and the area beneath was cordoned off," said Rajkot International Airport in the post. The international airport is located at Hirasar, about 30 km from Rajkot city. "Around 11.55 am, more water accumulated on the canopy amid heavy rains, due to which the canopy fabric got torn and fell. No casualties were reported in the incident. The airport civil team is removing the (damaged) canopy," they added. Early Friday morning, heavy rains led to a canopy collapse at Delhi Airport's Terminal 1, injuring six individuals who were subsequently rescued and hospitalised, as reported by Delhi Fire Services. As a safety measure, all departures from Terminal 1 were temporarily suspended, and check-in counters closed. The Delhi Police also registered a first information report (FIR) under Sections 304A (death by negligence) and 337 (causing hurt by an act of endangering life or personal safety of others) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) in connection with the Terminal 1 collapse. In a separate incident, a section of the tensile roof canopy at Dumna Airport's newly expanded terminal in Jabalpur collapsed on Thursday following heavy rains. The incident, which damaged a parked government official's car, has led to allegations of corruption from the opposition Congress. The airport was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi just three months ago.

# Modi to release three books on Venkaiah today



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will release three books on former Vice President M Venkaiah Naidu on his 75th birthday on Sunday. The event is scheduled to take place at the Anvaya Convention Centre in Gachibowli, Hyderabad, and Modi will release the books via videoconferencing, a statement said. Among the books the Prime Minister will release are a biography of the former Vice President titled "Venkaiah Naidu - Life in Service", authored by S Nagesh Kumar, former Resident Editor of The Hindu's Hyderabad edition, and "Celebrating Bharat - The Mission and Message of Shri M Venkaiah Naidu as 13th Vice-President of India" -- a photo chronicle compiled by his former secretary IV Subba Rao. The third book is a pictorial biography in Telugu titled "Mahaneta - Life and Journey of Shri M Venkaiah Naidu", authored by Sanjay Kishore, the statement said.

# Air connectivity to Andaman and Nicobar gets boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to air connectivity to Andaman and Nicobar, an Air India flight made a successful night landing at Port Blair Airport, an official statement said. The Air India Airbus A321 with 68 passengers on board landed at INS Utkrosh on Friday evening. INS Utkrosh is under Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and it is located on the same premises

of Veer Savarkar International Airport in Port Blair. A statement issued by the Andaman and Nicobar Command said, "The aircraft left Kolkata around 5.40 pm and landed successfully in Port Blair at 7.34 pm. The aircraft proceeded towards Veer Savarkar International Terminal to disembark passengers." "This successful night landing marks a significant step towards enhancing air con-



nectivity to Andaman and Nicobar Islands, benefiting islanders and boosting tourism. This landmark event was made

possible through consistent efforts by the Indian Navy, Andaman and Nicobar Command (ANC) and the Airports Authority of India (AAI) over the past few years," it said. The statement said AAI upgraded the Instrument Landing System (ILS) to CAT-1 in Veer Savarkar International Airport to accommodate the anticipated increase in tourist inflow. "Utkrosh Airfield is fully capable of handling both day and

night operations. Apart from its strategic importance, these developments mark a crucial step in improving regional connectivity and strengthening the 'Ude Desh ka Aam Naagrik' (UDAN) scheme," said a senior Andaman and Nicobar Command official. He urged private airline operators to avail maximum utilisation of the night landing and takeoff facility at the Port Blair airport.

# 40% risk allowance for NDRF rescuers

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Union government has approved a 40 per cent hardship and risk allowance for National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) rescuers, keeping in mind the tough operations undertaken by them, Union Home Minister Amit Shah announced on Saturday. He said this while welcoming a 35-member expedition team of the NDRF that recently scaled the 21,625-foot-high Mt Manirang in Himachal Pradesh. "The government has approved a 40 per cent risk and hardship allowance for NDRF personnel only yesterday. This has been a long pending demand... All the 16,000 personnel of the force will benefit from this," Shah said after welcoming the expedition named 'Vijay'. Officials said this allowance would be granted over and above salaries. Special forces like the National Security Guard (NSG) and the Special Protection Group (SPG) get a 25 per cent hardship allowance owing to the special charter of



their duties. This is the second mountaineering expedition undertaken by the federal contingency force. The team was flagged off on June 1 from here. Mt Manirang is located along the border of Kinnaur and Spiti districts of Himachal Pradesh. Shah said the government has also decided to make sports a "culture" for the various Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs) and special organisations like the NDRF. It has been decided that at least one team from these forces will mandatorily participate in international and

national tournaments, he added. "A committee under the chairmanship of the director of the Intelligence Bureau has been constituted and a roadmap has been prepared. We will soon present a new model," the minister said. Shah also underlined that forces like the NDRF should ensure that the policy of "zero casualty" during disasters is followed and no lives are lost during calamities. "We have come a long way... The government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been working on the concept of zero casualties during disasters for the last 10 years," he said. Shah said his government has allocated higher funds for capacity building and training of the NDRF and state disaster response forces by allocating Rs 2 lakh crore during 2014-24 as compared to Rs 66,000 crore during 2004-14. He complimented the NDRF team for the successful expedition, saying such exercises will boost the force's capabilities and morale and it will be able to do better during disasters and accident operations. Shah cautioned the rescuers that they should not rest on their laurels but keep improving. The NDRF was raised in 2006 as a federal contingency and disaster response force and at present, has a strength of more than 18,000 men and women rescuers deployed across the country as part of 16 battalions and 28 RRCs. It undertakes operations to mitigate and combat man-made and natural disasters like earthquakes, floods and train accidents among others.

# India presents action plan at Colombo Process

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

India has presented an action plan focusing on several of its priority areas for regional cooperation under the Colombo Process, a regional consultative forum comprising 12 Asian nations. India rolled out the plan while chairing a meeting of the grouping in Geneva on Friday. In the meeting, India listed a range of its priorities that included reviewing the financial sustainability of the Colombo Process and broadening the grouping's membership by including new nations as members and observers. Muktesh Pardeshi, Secretary (Consular-Passport-Visa Division) in Ministry of External Affairs, delivered the special address at the meeting. "He emphasised India's commitment to advancing the objectives of the Colombo Process and enhancing collaboration among member states," the ministry said. "India presented an outline of



an action plan for the next two years, focusing on key priorities and initiatives to further strengthen the Colombo Process," it said. In May, India assumed the chair of the Colombo Process for the first time since its inception. "The Process continues to play a pivotal role in enhancing regional cooperation on migration issues, and with India's leading role, there is a renewed commitment to engaging all member states actively, improving migration governance, and fostering safe, orderly, and regular migration for organised overseas employment," the ministry said in a statement.

# Iran goes to a runoff election between reformist Pezeshkian, hard-liner Jalili

AP ■ DUBAI

Iran will hold a runoff presidential election to replace the late hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi, an official said Saturday, after an initial vote saw the top candidates not securing an outright win. The election this coming Friday will pit reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian against the hard-line former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili. Mohsen Eslami, an election spokesman, announced the result in a news conference carried by Iranian state television. He said of 24.5 million votes cast, Pezeshkian got 10.4 million while Jalili received 9.4 million. Parliament speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf got 3.3 million. Shiite cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi had

over 206,000 votes. Iranian law requires that a winner gets more than 50% of all votes cast. If not, the race's top two candidates will advance to a runoff a week later. There's been only one runoff presidential election in Iran's history: in 2005, when hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bested former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani. Eslami acknowledged the country's Guardian Council would need to offer formal approval, but the result did not draw any immediate challenge from contenders in the race. As has been the case since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women and those calling for radical change have been barred from running, while the vote itself will have no oversight from internationally recog-

nized monitors. There had been calls for a boycott, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi. Mir Hossein Mousavi, one of the leaders of the 2009 Green Movement protests who remains under house arrest, has also refused to vote along with his wife, his daughter said. There's also been criticism that Pezeshkian represents just another government-approved candidate. In a documentary aired by state TV, one woman said her generation was "moving toward the same level" of animosity with the government that Pezeshkian's generation had in the 1979 revolution. Raisi, 63, died in the May 19 helicopter crash that also killed

the country's foreign minister and others. He was seen as a protégé of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and a potential successor. Still, many knew him for his involvement in the mass executions that Iran conducted in 1988, and for his role in the bloody crackdowns on dissent that followed protests over the death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman detained by police over allegedly improperly wearing the mandatory headscarf, or hijab. The voting came as wider tensions have gripped the Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. In April, Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel over the war in Gaza, while militia groups that Tehran arms in the region — such as the

Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels — are engaged in the fighting and have escalated their attacks. Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic continues to enrich uranium at near weapons-grade levels and maintains a stockpile large enough to build — should it choose to do so — several nuclear weapons. Despite the recent unrest, there was only one reported attack around the election. Gunmen opened fire on a van transporting ballot boxes in the restive southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, killing two police officers and wounding others, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. The province regularly sees violence between security forces and the militant group Jaish al-Adl, as well as drug traffickers.

# US media expects Biden to withdraw from Pres race

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

A day after Joe Biden's dismal showing at the first presidential debate against Donald Trump, leading US media outlets have commented that the incumbent US President should leave the race for the White House for the future of American democracy and prevent a second innings for his Republican rival. Biden, seeking a second term in the White House, stumbled and fumbled during the televised presidential debate with his predecessor Trump on Thursday night in Atlanta, setting off alarm bells among top Democrats about whether the 81-year-old president can stay atop the gruelling months ahead of the elections on November 5. The 78-year-old Trump, who is the presumptive Republican Party candidate for the presidential election, clashed right from the start with Biden and by the end of the 90 minutes debate, gave enough fodder for serious editorials and opinions as well as memes on social media. The New York Times Editorial Board on Friday went on to say how President Biden has repeatedly and rightfully described the stakes in this November's presidential election as "nothing less than the future of American democracy" and how Trump has proved himself to be a significant jeopardy to that democracy and someone who has "systematically attempted to undermine the integrity of elections."

"Mr. Biden has been an admirable president. Under his leadership, the nation has prospered and begun to address a range of long-term challenges, and the wounds ripped open by Mr. Trump have begun to heal. But the greatest public service Mr. Biden can now perform is to announce that he will not continue to run for re-election," it said. The Washington Post editorial, 'How Biden and the Democrats should think through what to do now' said it's incumbent on this incumbent (President Biden) to determine, "whether continuing to seek re-election is in the best interests of the country" as it continued: "Former president Donald Trump proved emphatically on Thursday why preventing another Trump presidency is the paramount consideration."

The Los Angeles Times editorial 'For the sake of the nation, Biden must reassure Americans he is up to a second term' presented a gloomy picture but with a ray of hope. "If all one was confronted with was a transcript of the debate, Biden's performance would look better. He effectively confronted Trump on the former president's complicity in the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and scored several policy points. Alas, for many viewers, especially those who don't follow politics carefully, that mattered less than the fact that Biden confirmed Trump's caricature of 'Sleepy Joe,'" it said. But it also added: "Nor, despite the visible jitters of many Democrats, does the disappointing debate performance mean that Biden should step aside from running for reelection — a scenario fraught with its own problems for the Democratic Party. However, it does mean that the president has to reassure Americans who might now have doubts about his fitness for another term."



Elton John speaks as President Joe Biden listens at the grand opening ceremony for the Stonewall National Monument Visitor Center in New York. AP/PTI

## Attacker wounds guard at Israeli embassy in Serbia, before being shot dead

AP ■ BELGRADE (SERBIA)

An attacker with a crossbow wounded a Serbian police officer guarding the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade on Saturday, Serbia's interior ministry said. The officer responded by fatally shooting the assailant. Interior Minister Ivica Dacic said in a statement that the attacker fired a bolt at the officer, hitting him in the neck. He said the officer then "used a weapon in self-defense to shoot the attacker, who died as a result of his injuries." The policeman was conscious when he was transported to Belgrade's main emergency hospital, where an operation to remove the bolt from his neck will be performed, the statement added. A spokesman with the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that "today there was an attempted terrorist attack in the vicinity of the Israeli Embassy in Belgrade." The spokesman said the embassy is closed and no employee of the embassy was injured. The identity of the attacker was still being determined. "All the circumstances of the attack and possible motives are being investigated," Dacic said. Israel's Embassy is located not far from the US Embassy in an upscale Belgrade district. It has been guarded by an elite police unit with officers armed with automatic weapons. Serbia has maintained close relations with Israel during the war in Gaza.

## 10 Ukrainians held prisoner for years in Russia return home

AP ■ KYIV (UKRAINE)

Ten Ukrainian civilians held prisoner for years by Russia arrived in Kyiv overnight Saturday after the mediation of the Vatican, Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said. They were freed Friday. Some had been captured years before Russia's full-scale invasion. Among those freed was Nariman Dzheylal, deputy head of the Mejlis, a representative body of Crimean Tatars that was relocated to Kyiv after Russia seized the peninsula in 2014. He was taken from Crimea, where he lived despite the annexation, one year before the war. The chief of Mejlis, Refat Chubarov, and Crimean Tatar leader Mustafa Dzhemilev embraced him after nearly three years of captivity. Dzheylal said many Ukrainians remain in captivity: "We cannot leave them there because the conditions, both psychological and physical, are very frightening there." The former prisoners, wrapped in blue and yellow flags, reunited with families in Kyiv and called those who couldn't be there. For some, the separation had lasted many years. "I really want to hug you. I'll be with you soon, Mommy," said Isabella Pekh, the daughter of freed art historian Olena Pekh, through a video call. "I'm so sorry I couldn't meet you." For almost six years, Isabella Pekh spoke at international conferences and appealed to ambassadors for help in freeing her mother, who was detained in the occupied part of the Donetsk region. "It was six years of hell that words cannot describe. But I knew I had my homeland, I had people who loved me, I had my daughter," Olena Pekh said. Two Ukrainian Greek Catholic priests were among those freed. One, Bohdan Heleta, was detained in 2022 in his church in the occupied city of Berdiansk in the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia. "There are a lot of our men and women there," Heleta said of those who remain imprisoned. "They need help, concrete help. They are waiting for it." Pope Francis in an address on Saturday called for the release of all prisoners in the war, and thanked God for the liberation of the two priests. Zelenskyy in a post on X wrote that "I am grateful to everyone who helped. I thank our team working to free the prisoners. I also want to acknowledge the efforts of the Holy See in bringing these people home." According to Ukraine's Coordination Headquarters for the Treatment of Prisoners of War, 3,310 Ukrainians have already been released from Russian captivity since Russia's full-scale invasion.

# Pak court asks PMO to restrain intelligence agencies from interfering in judicial matters

PTI ■ LAHORE

A top Pakistani court on Saturday directed the Prime Minister's Office to issue directives to the country's powerful intelligence agencies, including Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), from approaching any judge or member of their staff to obtain favourable verdicts. The intelligence agencies especially ISI, Military Intelligence (MI) and Intelligence Bureau (IB) have been accused by several judges of pressuring them through different means to get desired verdicts, especially in the cases of the former prime minister and founder of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan, his party leaders and supporters. Almost all — six of eight judges of the Islamabad High Court — and a couple of judges of the anti-terrorism courts in Punjab

have written to the chief justice of Pakistan and chief justice of the Lahore High Court (LHC), respectively, drawing their attention towards the intelligence agencies' open interference in judicial matters forcing them to get desired verdicts. Some of them had complained that their family members were picked up (by intelligence agencies) to put pressure on them (judges). The Lahore High Court Justice Shahid Karim on Saturday issued written directions to the Prime Minister's Office on the complaint of an ATC judge in the Sargodha district of Punjab against harassment by the personnel of ISI. "The prime minister is responsible and answerable for the actions of intelligence agencies as they come under his command. Instructions shall go out by the Prime Minister's

Office to all civil or military agencies, including the ISI and IB, regarding strict directions not to approach or contact any judge whether of the superior judiciary or subordinate judiciary or any member of their staff for any purpose in the future," the judge said in his written order. Similar directions have also been issued for the Punjab police. The court said the inspector general and police chief would be held personally responsible and contempt proceedings would be initiated in case of non-implementation of its order. The LHC also directed ATC judges across Punjab to "download call-recording applications on their mobile phones to have the record of all such calls (from intelligence agencies) made to influence judicial proceedings." The Sargodha ATC judge was scheduled to hear the cases of

some PTI leaders including opposition leader in the National Assembly Omar Ayub when he was told that a senior ISI officer wanted to meet him at his chamber. As the judge refused, several harassment incidents targeted at his family took place in the following days. PTI spokesperson Raouf Hasan said as part of a malicious and well-thought-out plot the mandate-thief government and its handlers are coercing the judiciary into making decisions of their choice. "The trend of holding judges and their family members hostage and occupying the courts are being used as new tactics to prevent the courts from delivering justice, as such brazen interference in judicial affairs has already been described by six judges of the Islamabad High Court in their letter," he said.

# Pakistan seeks small arms from US for 'Operation Azm-i-Istehkam'

PTI ■ WASHINGTON / ISLAMABAD

Pakistan's ambassador to the US has urged the US to provide small arms and modern equipment to his country to ensure the success of Operation Azm-i-Istehkam, Islamabad's newly approved counter-terrorism initiative. The decision to launch the 'Azm-i-Istehkam' operation was taken on June 22 at the apex committee meeting of the National Action Plan, a strategy approved in 2014 to eliminate militancy from the country. The federal government recently approved the reinvigorated national counter-terrorism drive. "Pakistan has launched Azm-i-Istehkam (...) to oppose and dismantle terrorist networks. For that, we need sophisticated small arms and communi-

equipment," Ambassador Masood Khan was quoted as saying by the Dawn newspaper. He made these remarks while addressing US policymakers, scholars, intelligence, and corporate leaders at a Washington think tank, the Wilson Centre, earlier this week. Khan elaborated that 'Azm-i-Istehkam' comprises three components: doctrinal, societal, and operational. He noted that work on the first two phases has already begun, with the third phase set to be implemented soon. The decision to launch a new anti-terror operation was taken when the country faced a new onslaught by the Tehreek-i-Taliban militants who, according to officials, are based in Afghanistan. Khan emphasised that Pakistan and the US should maintain

strong security links, enhance intelligence cooperation, resume sales of advanced military platforms, and work on "the sustainment of US-origin defence equipment." "This is crucial for regional security and opposing the rising tide of terrorism that also threatens the interests of the US and its allies," he added. Khan argued that the bilateral relationship should be based on ground realities and not be hindered by a few issues. "Secondly, one or two issues should not hold the entire relationship hostage," he noted. He pointed to high-level defence talks, frequent meetings, and joint military exercises like Inspired Union-2024, Falcon Talon, and Red Flag as examples of robust defence cooperation between Pakistan and the US.

Khan also suggested that the US should consider Pakistan as a partner in its diplomatic efforts in Kabul and collaborate on counterterrorism and the rights of women and girls in Afghanistan. "In this era of renewed strategic competition, the US and Pakistan should build on existing partnerships and explore new horizons to establish the parameters of mutual interests," the envoy said. "We should not base our engagement on the incongruity of expectations. Our ties should be anchored in ground realities, even as we aim for stronger security and economic partnerships. Secondly, one or two issues should not hold the entire relationship hostage," he said. Meanwhile, the US State Department expressed support to Pakistan.

## 9 dead in Nepal landslide

AP ■ KATHMANDU

Landslides triggered by heavy rainfall on Saturday killed at least nine people including an entire family while they were sleeping in Nepal's mountainous districts, officials said. The landslides buried houses in three separate areas in the country's mountainous region, about 250 kilometers (156 miles) west of the capital, Kathmandu, according to Nepal's National Disaster Rescue and Reduction Management Authority. Five members of the same family were killed when their house was swallowed by a landslide while they were asleep at Malika village in Gulmi district. The victims included a couple, their daughter-in-law and two grandchildren including an 8-month-old girl. Two more people were killed in neighbouring Baglung district and another two in Syangja districts, officials said. The monsoon season that brings heavy rainfall in Nepal began earlier this month. It generally triggers landslides in the mountainous areas that cover most part of this Himalayan nation, causing deaths and damage until September.

## Russia reports 5 dead in Ukrainian drone strike

AP ■ KYIV

A Ukrainian drone strike killed at least five people in Russia's Kursk region, local officials said Saturday, while rescuers in the Ukrainian city of Dnipro dug through rubble after a Russian attack ripped through a nine-story residential building, leaving one dead. Two children were among the victims of the Ukrainian attack in the village of Gorodishche on the Russian-Ukrainian border, Gov. Alexey Smirnov said on social media. In Dnipro, at least one person died and 12 were injured, including a 7-month-old girl, after a Russian strike destroyed the top four floors of the apartment bloc Friday evening, regional head Serhii Lysak said. The attacks came as Russia continues to stretch out Ukrainian forces in several areas along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front. Moscow has stepped

## UNESCO finds IS-era bombs in Mosul mosque walls

AP ■ BAGHDAD

The UN cultural agency has discovered five bombs hidden within the walls of the historic al-Nouri Mosque in the city of Mosul in northern Iraq, a remnant of the Islamic State militant group's rule over the area, UNESCO said in a statement on Saturday. The mosque, famous for its 12th-century leaning minaret, was destroyed by IS in 2017 and has been a focal point of UNESCO's restoration efforts since 2020. The UN agency said that five large-scale explosive devices, designed for significant destruction, were found inside the southern wall of the Prayer Hall on Tuesday. "These explosive devices were concealed within a specially rebuilt section of the wall," the statement said. "Iraqi authorities were promptly notified, secured the area, and the situation is now fully under control." It added that "one bomb has been defused and removed, while the remaining four are interconnected and will be safely disposed of in the coming days." Iraqi authorities have requested that UNESCO halt all reconstruction operations at al-Nouri mosque and evacuate the entire complex until the devices are

## UNESCO finds IS-era bombs in Mosul mosque walls

disarmed. IS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared an Islamic caliphate from the mosque a decade ago on June 29, 2014, leading to its destruction when extremists blew it up during the battle to liberate Mosul in 2017. The discovery of these bombs underscores ongoing challenges in clearing Mosul of explosives and revitalising its devastated urban areas.

# UP to promote rooftop solar subsidy scheme

**PTI ■ LUCKNOW**  
The Uttar Pradesh government will launch an awareness campaign to promote the Centre's 'PM Surya Ghar Yojana' a rooftop solar subsidy scheme in Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Gorakhpur. The new initiative will add to the state's ongoing programmes and schemes to boost generation and use of solar energy. The campaign will be based on the Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) module. In line with Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's vision, the Uttar Pradesh New and Renewable Energy Agency (UPNEDA) has begun implementing the



action plan, according to an official statement. The state government has allocated Rs 2 crore for the two months long campaign and started the process of roping in an agency to manage and execute the initiative. Initially, UPNEDA will run the campaign in three major cities, including Ayodhya, Varanasi, and Gorakhpur, to increase public awareness and acceptance of the Pradhan Mantri Surya Ghar Yojana and boost the number of beneficiaries under this scheme, the statement said. The promotional activities

will include displaying banners, installing billboards at strategic locations, setting up booth camps, and distributing pamphlets during various events at universities, colleges, and schools. Besides, UPNEDA will also use radio and newspaper advertisements in Ayodhya, Gorakhpur, and Varanasi. Ayodhya and Varanasi are already being developed as solar cities, and this comprehensive campaign will now pave the way for increased awareness and promotion of solar energy in Gorakhpur as well, the statement said. According to officials, a solar city could fulfil at least 10 per cent of its energy demand through solar power.

# MVN Aero One pre-leases 3 lakh sq ft to co-working operator in Gurugram

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Realty firm MVN Aero One has pre-leased 3 lakh square feet office space to co-working operator Spring House in its upcoming project in Gurugram. The office space has been given in the upcoming project 'MVN Aero One Mall' located in Sector-37 D, Dwarka Expressway, Gurugram, Haryana. The company will develop 15 lakh square feet area over the next 4 years in the first phase of this mixed-use project comprising retail and workspaces.



"Today's workforce seeks more than just a workspace; they desire an environment that inspires creativity, enhances productivity, and

integrates seamlessly with lifestyle amenities. By integrating Spring House Co-Working with our luxury retail experience, we're meeting this demand head-on..." said Varun Sharma, Founder and Managing Director, MVN Aero One. This concept not only redefines the traditional office space but also sets a new standard for integrated, upscale commercial environments, he added. The company expects an annual rental income of Rs 40-45 crore from this 3 lakh square feet area. The company, which develops luxury projects, is building a housing project in Bengaluru. According to real estate consultant Vestian, there are around 50 major flexible space operators in the country. The top 10 players hold more than 80 per cent of the total flexible office space portfolio. A Vestian report mentioned that flexible office spaces broadly include dedicated desks, hot desking, co-working spaces, and serviced and managed office spaces. While co-working centres are at the most flexible end of the spectrum, managed offices would be at the less flexible end, Vestian noted.

# European jewellers using services of Mega CFC for quality testing

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
The services of a modern common facility centre developed at a special economic zone (SEZ) here are now being used by European jewellers for quality testing, an industry official said. The Bharat Ratnam Mega CFC (Common Facility Centre) at the SEEPZ (Santacruz Electronic Export Processing Zone) SEZ in Mumbai was inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in January. The centre has been operational since March 15. Ravi Menon, CEO, Mega CFC, said that the CFC has state-of-the-art machines and technology and it is helping improve the output in terms of quality, productivity and yield of the finished jewellery and further boosting gem and jewellery exports. "Besides Indian players using this facility, now European jewellers have also started using the services of the CFC for quality testing," Menon said. He said that a team of senior officials of certain European jewellery firms has visited the



centre earlier this month. Their lab managers have also visited the CFC, Menon added. SEEPZ accounts for 10.26 per cent of total gem and jewellery exports from India and 85 per cent of studded jewellery exports. Colin Shah, Head - Working Group, Bharat Ratnam Mega CFC said that the centre houses modern equipment, including Asia's first 3D metal printer, and smaller units can use these machines at a nominal fee which helps

# Confident of over USD 800 bn exports in goods, services this fiscal: Goyal

**PTI ■ MUMBAI**  
India's goods and services exports are expected to cross USD 800 billion this fiscal despite global challenges, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Saturday. In 2023-24, the shipments stood at USD 778.2 billion (goods USD 437.1 billion and services USD 341 billion). He said that the global situation is serious as war is still ongoing between Ukraine-Russia and Israel-Hamas, and the Red sea crisis. The minister added that there are also elections in some of the major democracies like in Europe. "In such a situation it's a positive sign that our exports are growing (9 per cent growth in May) and ... This also reflects that the world wants to do trade and investments with India. We are confident that this year we will have over USD 800 billion exports and it will be a historic record," Goyal told reporters here. He was here to participate in a programme of gems and jewellery exporters.



Goyal added that for the USD 800 billion exports, the ministry is working on specifics with Indian missions abroad and export promotion councils. He added that last year the current account deficit (CAD) has also reduced... Our exports will increase, manufacturing will get a boost. India recorded a current account surplus of USD 5.7 billion or 0.6 per cent of GDP in the March quarter. This is the first time in ten quarters

that the crucial metric of the country's external strength has turned into surplus mode. In the year-ago period, the current account deficit stood at USD 1.3 billion or 0.2 per cent of GDP, and the same was USD 8.7 billion or 1 per cent of GDP in the preceding quarter ending December 2023. India's merchandise exports rose by 9.1 per cent to USD 38.13 billion in May even as the trade deficit widened to a seven-month high of USD 23.78 billion during the

month, according to the latest government data. He added that focus on electric vehicles will help in reducing oil imports. The ministry is also holding a series of meetings with plantation boards, including spices, rubber, tobacco, tea and coffee, to promote exports especially those of value added goods. Further, he said that India has taken up on priority the issue of ban on imports of Russian-origin unpolished diamonds by the European Union (EU) and G7 nations to protect the interest of the domestic diamond polishing industry. "Our ministry and the gems and jewellery export promotion council are continuously in touch with the European Union and G7 nations," Goyal said, adding in the last meeting, India took up the matter strongly. "Still we are in touch with them to ensure that Indian industry does not have an impact," the minister said. G7 countries — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the UK, and the US — are major markets for Indian diamond exports.

# Setty to become new chairman of SBI; FSIB recommends him as successor of Khara

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Government appointment selection panel FSIB on Saturday selected senior-most managing director Challa Sreenivasulu Setty for the position of Chairman of country's largest lender State Bank of India (SBI). Setty, who was appointed managing director in January 2020, currently looks after International Banking, Global Markets and Technology verticals. He will succeed Dinesh Kumar Khara, who will be superannuating on August 28, when he turns 63, the upper age limit for the position of SBI Chairman. Financial Services Institutions Bureau (FSIB), the headhunter for directors of state-owned banks and financial institutions, interviewed three candidates on June 29, 2024 for the position. "Keeping in view their performance in the interface, their overall experience and the extant parameters, the Bureau recommends Challa Sreenivasulu Setty for the position of Chairman in SBI," FSIB said in a statement. As per the convention, the chairman is appointed from a pool of serving managing directors of SBI. Usually, senior-most managing director becomes chairman of the bank. The final decision on FSIB recommendation would be taken by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Setty, who also headed various task forces/committees formed by the Government of India, had earlier looked after the retail and digital banking portfolio of the bank. A Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and also, a Certified Associate of Indian Institute of Bankers, he started his career with SBI in 1988 as a Probationary Officer. Across a career spanning over three decades, he has rich experience in corporate credit, retail, digital and international banking and banking in developed markets. Setty has held key assignments in State Bank of India, including Deputy Managing Director - Stressed Assets Resolution Group, Chief General Manager and General Manager in Corporate Accounts Group, Deputy General Manager in Commercial Branch, Indore and VP & Head (Syndications) in SBI, New York Branch. FSIB is headed by Bhanu Pratap Sharma, former secretary of Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT). The members of the government-appointed selection panel are Financial Services Secretary, Department of Public Enterprises Secretary and an RBI Deputy Governor. Other members of the headhunter are Animesh Chauhan, former chairman and MD of erstwhile Oriental Bank of Commerce, RBI's ex-executive director Deepak Singhal, and others.

# Gujarat Govt signs MoUs with IBM, Microsoft for enhancing AI capabilities

**PTI ■ GANDHINAGAR**  
The Gujarat government on Saturday signed memorandums of understanding with software giants IBM and Microsoft, and the National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) for promoting the use of Artificial Intelligence technologies in the state. The MoUs were signed in the presence of Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel, a government release said. IBM and the Department of Science and Technology, Government of Gujarat, entered into an MoU to establish and promote an "AI Cluster" to foster innovation and collaboration among financial institutions at Gujarat International Finance Tec (GIFT) City, it said. Microsoft and the Department of Science and Technology signed an MoU to establish an Artificial Intelligence Center of Excellence in GIFT City. The



AI Center will focus on key technologies such as machine learning, cognitive services and bot services. The department also signed another MoU with NASSCOM to enhance AI capabilities in the state. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritized futuristic technology to propel India towards becoming the world's third-largest economy, chief minister Patel said. "Our aim is to keep Gujarat among the

top industrial states by promoting futuristic technology such as AI," he said. "Gujarat has emerged as a global gateway to the future. In response to the growing demand for skilled workforce in emerging industries leveraging advanced technologies, the state government has launched the Up Skilling Industry Ready Talent Program under the IT and ITES policy," the CM added. Sandeep Patel, Managing Director of IBM

# Exporters' body urges Minister to restore IES benefits for all

**PTI ■ KOLKATA**  
A body of exporters has written to Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal, expressing concerns over the extension of the Interest Equalisation Scheme (IES) for only two months and exclusively for MSMEs. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) president Ashwani Kumar highlighted that the scheme has so far benefitted not only MSMEs but also merchant exporters and large manufacturing companies at a lower rate of two per cent for 410 tariff lines, covering labour-intensive products. The current scheme, valid till June, provides pre and post-shipment rupee export credit, offers a two per cent interest equalisation rate for manufacturers and merchant exporters dealing with specified 410 export items, and a higher rate of three per cent for MSME manufacturers exporting under any of these items.



Kumar pointed out that the exclusion of these categories from the extended scheme will severely impact labour-intensive exports, which have already been struggling in recent years. He urged the minister to intervene and restore the status quo, citing the export sector's challenges, including increased freight rates, longer voyage times, and rising interest rates.

Kumar warned that the withdrawal of IES benefits will blunt the competitive edge of exporters and hinder growth momentum. In contrast to FIEO's demand for an extension of the scheme benefits at a higher rate, the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) restricted the benefits to MSMEs and capped the total outlay of the scheme at Rs 750 crore.



Bollywood actress Deepshikha Nagwal, along with Dr HBS Lamba MD Welcome New Wembley products LLP, Sanjay Aggarwal, MD Sirca Paints India Ltd during the signature agreement of both the company at Aerocity in New Delhi on Saturday. PTI

# Titan launches jewellery brand Tanishq in Bangladesh

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Titan Company on Saturday said it is launching its jewellery brand Tanishq in Bangladesh as part of expansion plans in the international market. On Friday, the Tata Group-managed firm signed a JV agreement to this effect with Rhythm Group which will make Tanishq available across the Bangladesh market, according to a joint statement. The joint venture will commence with the opening of the manufacturing facility in Narayanganj, in Bangladesh, it added. Besides the domestic market, Titan is expanding Tanishq's presence in the international



market and operates 17 stores across the UAE, US, Qatar, Singapore and Oman. Its watch business has a presence in SAARC, MENA (Middle East and North Africa), Southeast Asian regions. In the last few years, it has focused on growing its

flagship jewellery brand Tanishq overseas. Rhythm Group is a prominent entity in Bangladesh that was established in 1972 to produce desi textile fabrics and since then it has expanded into several verticals. "Through this joint venture

Titan aims to combine Tanishq's unparalleled artisanship and brand legacy with Rhythm Group's strong market presence and local expertise in Bangladesh, to manufacture and sell jewellery to discerning Bangladeshi consumers," it said. Titan Company MD C K Venkataraman said: "Together, we will leverage our combined strengths to elevate the jewellery industry in Bangladesh and make Bangladesh the hub for making Tanishq Exquisite Jewellery for the world." Titan Company is a joint venture between Tata Group and Tamil Nadu Industrial Development Corporation (TIDCO).



T20 WORLD CUP ON COURSE TO BECOME MOST IMPORTANT ICC EVENT, REVEALS PLAYER SURVEY

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

A player survey has revealed that the T20 World Cup is closing the gap in the race to become the "most important" ICC event to players around the world...

Compared to 2019 when 82 percent of players picked Test cricket as the most important format, it's only 48 percent right now. As many as 30 percent of the players picked T20 as the most important format.

Players from India, Pakistan and Afghanistan are among those who are not represented by the WCA since they are not unionised.

Responses were sought from players of other major cricket nations, including Australia, England, New Zealand, South Africa, Bangladesh and West Indies.

According to the WCA, the sample size for this year's survey was around 330 professional players from 13 different countries, with the majority of them being current internationals.

There is a higher proportion of female respondents in 2024.

In the current edition of the T20 World Cup, the much-awaited clash between arch-rivals India and Pakistan garnered a staggering 256 million viewing hours in India alone.



Gayle attributes low-scoring matches in US to jet-lagged and tired wickets

PTI ■ BRIDGETOWN (BARBADOS)

Chris Gayle, the West Indies batting great and T20 World Cup ambassador, attributed the numerous low-scoring games in the USA leg of the tournament to "jet-lagged and tired" pitches.

The drop-in pitches prepared for the tournament were transported from Florida to New York in semi-trailer trucks for installation at Nassau County International Cricket Stadium, which proved to be one of the most difficult wickets for batting during the tournament.

"It's been a low-scoring World Cup without a doubt, and the wicket is on the slower side sometime. It's a batting format... Going to give bowlers edge from time to time, bowlers pretty much in control of T20 World Cup," Gayle said during a press conference on Friday.

The tournament will conclude with the final between India and South Africa at Kensington Oval in Barbados. "Barbados has been one of the best for batting, hope batters are going to get some runs tomorrow."



led by renowned Adelaide Oval head curator Damian Hough. The drop-in square - the type used around the world including at Adelaide Oval and Eden Park - was curated in Florida and transported by road to New York via a convoy of more than 20 semi-trailer trucks in April.

The matches in New York took place at a state-of-the-art 34,000-seat modular stadium located at Eisenhower Park in Nassau County, east of Manhattan. The former West Indies captain lauded the ICC for efforts to promote the game in mainland America.

India record highest-ever team total in women Test cricket

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India on Saturday recorded the highest team total in women's Test cricket, amassing 603 for six declared on day two of the one-off match against South Africa here.

India surpassed that mark when Richa Ghosh hammered a four in the first ball of the 109th over bowled by Annerie Dercksen. Eventually, India declared at 603 for six in 115.1 over following the dismissal of Ghosh for 86.



opening partnership in women's cricket. India were also well served by Jemimah Rodrigues (55) and skipper Harmanpreet Kaur (69). On Day 1, India had finished on 525 for four, having posted the highest-ever single-day total in a Test match. They broke the previous record held by the Sri Lankan men's team - 509 for nine - against Bangladesh in Colombo in 2002.



12-time National champion Muddappa begins season on winning note

PTI ■ CHENNAI

India's fastest rider Hemanth Muddappa began his 2024 campaign on a positive note with a double win at the opening round of the MMSC-FMCSI Indian National Motorcycle Drag Racing Championship at the Madras International Circuit (MIC) at Irungattukottai on Saturday.

The Bengaluru-based rider then took the start for the 851 to 1050cc Super Sport final run, but lost to Mumbai's Anvay Patil by eight hundredths of a second. Mantra Racing's Muddappa clocked 8.294 seconds to Patil's 8.286. Muddappa's teammate Sujan Prasad SP came third in 8.448s.

Sharma lies tied seventh in Italian Open golf

PTI ■ ROME

Indian golfer Shubhankar Sharma fired identical 68s in his first two rounds to be tied seventh in the Italian Open on the DP World Tour here. The Indian star, who is headed to the Olympic Games in August, had five birdies against two bogeys in the second round.



with a bogey on the 17th, cancelling out a gain on the 15th. He made his second birdie of the day on the first hole, his tenth, and then birdied the par four fifth to move to two under on the day.

The 35-year-old parred his final four holes to sign for a nine under par total after 36 holes, one stroke ahead of Germany's Jannik de Bruyn, who got a last minute spot into the event. One stroke further back on seven under are last week's KLM Open runner-up Marcus Kinhult, Denmark's Sebastian Friedrichsen, Adrian Otaegui of Spain and South African Brandon Stone.

Malvika shocks Kristy to enter semifinals of US Open

PTI ■ FORT WORTH (US)

India's Malvika Bansod stunned Scotland's Kristy Gilmour in a thrilling three-game match to advance to the women's singles semifinals of the US Open Super 300 badminton tournament here.

The 22-year-old from Nagpur, ranked 49th, registered a 10-21 21-15 21-10 win over Kristy, a 2014 Commonwealth Games silver medalist. Malvika had defeated Kristy at the Hylo Open in 2022 when the Scot shuttler had retired in the second game due to an injury. The Indian had lost



twice to Kristy in the past. The Indian, who had won the Azerbaijan International challenge this year, will face sixth seeded Japanese Natsuki Nidaira next. In men's singles, Priyanshu Rajawat produced a good show but couldn't get past fourth seed Lei Lan Xi of China, losing 21-15 11-21 21-21 in a quarterfinal match that lasted just over an hour.

Verstappen holds off McLaren challenge to take 3rd sprint race victory of season at Austrian GP

AP ■ SPIELBERG (AUSTRIA)

Max Verstappen held off a nearly attack by Lando Norris before pulling away from the two McLarens to comfortably secure his third sprint race victory of the year Saturday at the Austrian Grand Prix.



Verstappen finished 4.616 seconds ahead of McLaren's Oscar Piastri to make it three wins out of three in sprint races this season, with Norris another 0.732 seconds back in third. Norris started second behind Verstappen and stayed glued to the Red Bull for the first few laps, using his DRS to attack the championships leader.

Iga Swiatek calls herself a perfectionist and now she wants to improve on grass

AP ■ WIMBLEDON (ENGLAND)

Shortly after Iga Swiatek completed the most lopsided French Open final in 17 years, ceding a grand total of three games against an overmatched opponent to claim a third consecutive title in Paris, she was asked whether that represented a perfect performance.

"Overall, tennis is different on grass," said Swiatek, who was a junior champion at the All England Club in 2018. "I'll just see and I'll work hard to play better there." The 23-year-old from Poland has won four of the past five trophies on the red clay at Roland Garros, capped by a 6-2, 6-1 victory against Jasmine Paolini for the championship on June 8.



Open and made it to the Australian Open semifinals on that surface earlier that season. But she is just 9-4 on the grass of the All England Club, by far her worst winning percentage at a Slam. For someone who talks a lot about wanting to get "better and better," not to mention someone who wants to do things perfectly on and off the court, it would

"competing every year at Wimbledon and practicing these couple of weeks makes you progress" on grass, and noted that while she at one point considered a training block on it during the offseason, her coach put a stop to that. During the victory against Paolini for the championship at Roland Garros, Swiatek won 5 of 11 points when she went to the net. "You saw my one volley today that I was supposed get in - and it went out," Swiatek said. "So this will, for sure, stay in my head."

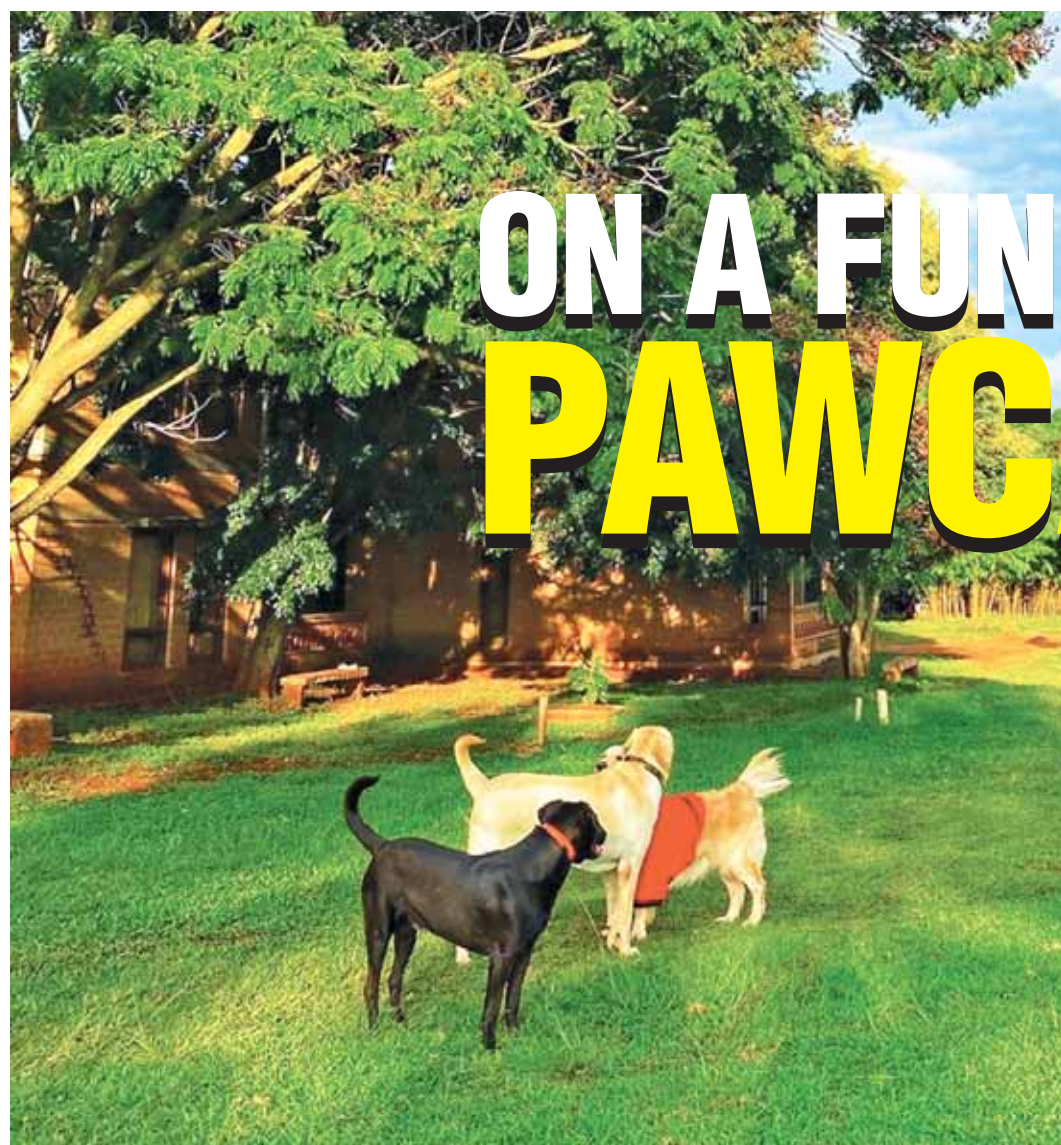
on it, and this is a tricky thing, because, for sure, it helps you to be better, but sometimes it can be huge baggage, as well. So it's good to manage it properly." When a reporter followed up by asking for an example or two of ways in which Swiatek finds herself wanting to be perfect away from tennis, she smiled and replied: "We're not (in) therapy, so, sorry."

Government of Odisha "e" procurement Notice. OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE ENGINEER, RURAL WORKS ELECTRICAL DIVISION, SAMBALPUR. E-mail - eerwelectricaldivn.sambalpur@gmail.com. Bid Identification No. EE /RWELECT/SBP/02/2024-25. 1. Name of the work :- Shifting of 11KV HT Line (Telipali Feeder) Crossing over the left approach of the newly constructed H.L. Bridge (Under PMGSY package Number OR-29-163)5/380KM on Kardapal to Kenjerharpali Road Under ESCO Birmaharajpur under RWES Sonenpur. 2. Estimated Cost :- Rs. 15,11,751.00/- 3. Availability of bid document in the website :- 11.30 Hours of 01.07.2024 to 17:00 Hours of 08.07.2024 4. Date of Opening of Tenders :- 11:30 Hours on 02.09.2024. Further details and any corrigendum/Addendum/cancellation of tender can be seen from the Web Site www.tendersodisha.gov.in only. Executive Engineer R.W Electrical Division Sambalpur



# the pioneer agenda

"Disease is an experience of a so-called mortal mind. It is fear made manifest on the body"  
— Mary Baker Eddy



## ON A FUN FILLED PAWCATION!

Indulge in exciting activities with your pets and make a holiday with them truly special, writes SHARMILA CHAND

Whether indulging in gourmet cuisine for your pets, celebrating their birthdays, pampering them with grooming sessions or participating in fun activities, there's something to enrich every experience during a vacation with furry members. There are a range of pet-friendly hotels and resorts that are more than happy to welcome you and your loyal companion. From luxury resorts to cozy retreats, these properties ensure complete comfort and are a haven both for you and your four-legged buddy.

### COMFORT MEETS LUXURY AT PRESIDENT, MUMBAI - IHCL SELEQIONS

Looking to celebrate your pet's birthday? Go for a Pawcation at President, Mumbai - IHCL SeleQions.

"We have curated a well thought out pet-friendly vacation concept known as Pawcations," says Afzal Khan, General Manager. "We understand that pets are cherished members of the family, and we strive to create a comfortable and enriching environment for them during their stay. Hence we provide pet-friendly amenities like plush pet beds and bedding, engaging toys, and a gourmet pet menu crafted by our culinary experts." Embracing a pet-friendly policy, the hotel team makes sure the guests' comfort is enhanced by offering the services of on-call pet caretakers, as per specific requirements. Moreover, if there is any health related issue, there is a specialist veterinarian on call. Not to forget pet grooming services with prior appointments, exclusive pet toiletries, and designated pet-friendly zones. "We not only organize elaborate party with delightful high tea and fun outdoor activities for furry birthday boys and girls but also make sure the service is professional with warmth and care. Our team undergoes regular comprehensive training programs to understand animal behavior, hygiene protocols, and proper handling procedures. We also invite external pet trainers and behaviorists to train our staff regularly, ensuring they are well-equipped to interact with pets and provide top-notch service. Hence, we take great pride in being a pet-friendly destination," concludes Khan with a smile.



### PAMPERING PETS AT 'OUR NATIVE VILLAGE ECO RESORT', BENGALURU

At 'Our Native Village Eco Resort', nestled in the serene village of Hesaraghatta, guests can indulge in a memorable vacay with the joy of bonding with their beloved pets amidst nature's embrace. "Whether exploring our sprawling grounds or immersing yourself in our cultural experiences, every moment promises a harmonious blend of luxury, responsible tourism and eco-conscious living, adhering to our pet-friendly policy," tells Antharaj A, The Operations Manager. He adds, "We get repeat guests who have enjoyed their staycation in seamless harmony with their furry companions. As a proud pet-friendly establishment, the retreat provides essential amenities, including a variety of dog foods, water bowls, leashes, floor mats, and cozy blankets. The sprawling grounds offer ample space for pets to roam freely amidst lush lawns and village paths, perfect for leisurely strolls and bonding moments." Designed with meticulous care, the dedicated pet bathing area combines comfort with rustic charm, ensuring a refreshing bath experience for furry companions. Specially prepared food ensures pets receive nutritious meals, supporting the commitment to sustainability by minimizing environmental impact. "Complete with all necessary amenities, the resort's natural charm

reflects our dedication to pampering pets just as we do for our human guests. While the guests rediscover childhood joys playing village games like gilli danda and kite flying, their pets act as best cheerleaders!" Antharaj says with a smile.

### DISCOVER PET-FRIENDLY RETREAT AT MYSA ZINC JOURNEY BY THE FERN

Pet parents looking to take a break and hit the road with their fur babies, look no further than MYSA Zinc Journey by The Fern, a premier resort located in Nani Devati, Gujarat. Renowned for its serene ambiance and top-notch amenities, this resort stands out as a haven for pet lovers, offering an exceptional blend of comfort, luxury, and pet-friendly hospitality. Naveen Vaishnav, Squad Champion at the Resort says, "Committed to pampering four legged guests, at MYSA Zinc Journey by The Fern, pets are warmly welcomed and cherished. Furthermore, the property offers a range of facilities, making this resort the ideal choice for travellers with pets. The resort offers 24 elegantly designed rooms and villas, each providing ample space for you and your pets to relax." Spread across 9 acres within the scenic Glade One Golf Resort, the resort features beautifully landscaped gardens and open spaces perfect for the four legged to explore and enjoy. For a leisurely stroll or a brisk walk, the serene pathways and green expanses offer a perfect retreat for their owners.

"At the resort we offer dedicated services and facilities that include comfortable bedding and special dietary options for your furry friends. Our chefs cook as per pets' liking and specifications, we don't have printed menus as we believe in curating for them. While your pets enjoy the outdoors, you can indulge in a variety of resort activities. From the challenging 9-hole Gary Player-designed golf course to rejuvenating spa treatments and a sparkling swimming pool, here is the unique blend of luxury and pet-friendly hospitality. Located just a short drive from Ahmedabad, this resort provides a tranquil retreat where you and your pets can relax and rejuvenate," adds Vaishnav.

### BONDING IN A NURTURING ENVIRONMENT

Nestled amidst the serene landscapes of Taj Fort Aguada Resort & Spa, Taj Holiday Village Resort & Spa and The Yellow House, lies a haven not just for humans but also for their beloved furry companions. Embracing the bond between pets and their owners, we proudly declare ourselves a pet-friendly resort, where wagging tails and happy barks are as much a part of the atmosphere as the rustling of leaves and gentle lapping of waves. "As the pet's comfort is paramount, we provide cozy & comfortable beddings to ensure their good night's sleep. Offering a range of soothing amenities such as gentle shampoo, conditioner, and nourishing paw and nose butter - these products are carefully chosen to keep your pet looking and feeling their best throughout their stay. Beyond physical comfort, we cultivate a nurturing environment where every aspect of your pet's experience is thoughtfully considered. Our dedicated staff is trained to provide attentive care and ensure that all pets receive personalized attention and affection, says Sanchita Banerjee Rodrigues, MarCom for North Goa Resorts. Fitness is of utmost importance. Whether it's a leisurely morning walk or an evening romp under the setting sun, the scenic surroundings provide the perfect backdrop for the pets to stay active and happy. "Understanding that pets thrive when they can engage in physical activities, we offer a variety of opportunities for them to stay active and happy amidst our scenic

surroundings. Whether it's a leisurely morning walk along our lush trails or an energetic romp during the enchanting sunset hours, every moment outdoors is tailored to keep pets healthy and stimulated. Providing designated areas where they can engage in interactive play and socialize with other furry companions under the watchful eye of our attentive staff. These supervised activities not only keep pets physically fit but also mentally stimulated, ensuring a well-rounded experience during their stay." When it comes to pets' dining, Chef Nishant Diwakar Executive Sous Chef of Taj Fort Aguada being a pet parent himself takes keen interest in designing and planning of the pet menus of Taj North Goa Resorts. He firmly believes as important a balanced diet is to us humans, our furry friends require the same amount of attention. We provide specially curated menu for them to get the perfect amount of nutrient & a tasty treat. From dishes made with bacon & chicken bones to drool over to waffles made of yoghurt, banana & pumpkin. The team goes beyond basic sustenance to provide culinary experiences that enhance their stay and contribute to their overall enjoyment.

### A PERFECT GETAWAY WITH PETS!

At Bengaluru Marriott Hotel Whitefield, there are special pet fiestas and brunches that create memorable moments for pets and owners alike. For long-staying guests, there is a unique touch of companionship—a small fish in a pot to keep them company. "At our hotel, we pride ourselves on providing an immersive experience with cozy beds, engaging toys, and meticulously sanitized play areas, creating a haven for our four-legged guests," tells Anjali Naik, Director of Sales and Marketing. She adds, "Pets have access to our dining outlets and lush lawns, where they can relax and play freely. Our exclusive pet menu offers health-centric, salt-free options for their dining pleasure. Our commitment to creating a pet-friendly environment goes beyond mere accommodation, offering a truly immersive and delightful experience for both you and your beloved companion." —Sharmila Chand is an author and independent journalist who writes on Travel, Food and Lifestyle



# FROM THE PEN OF A GROUNDED POET

It is important to note that Neerada is as much a Nature poet as she is a people's poet, says SWATI PAL

How many of us have had to be admonished for things not being aligned? The books in our book case in the days when books were bought and read? The clothes in our cupboard? The shoes in the closet? How many of us were ticked off at school perhaps for the tie being askew or the pair of socks not climbing up at the same place on each leg? Or the writing in our notebooks being asymmetrical? For the better part of my childhood and those of my friends, there was a constant, relentless push and shove towards alignment and well, we certainly rebelled at it as young people! A part of me still does and thus when I chance upon a poppy flower for example, in a neat bed of chrysanthemums in the college gardens, I cannot deny that my heart lights up with joy at this break in the order of things!

So when I was invited to read and speak on this utterly delightful collection of poems called 'Alignment' by Neerada Suresh, I cannot deny that my interest was instantly piqued by the title and I immediately read the title poem. Rohan Kaul's home and his partner, Promilla simply came alive by the word picture painted by Neerada Suresh in her rib tickling comparisons between the state of the house in the absence and presence of Rohan. There is a certain glee in the air when Rohan is away as things lie unaligned and unfettered; the same things, to quote, *But when Rohan Kaul is in, Newspapers stand stacked, Compressed, breathing in. Shoes align themselves Awed, open mouthed.*

Paintings, curtains, Cushions, sofas All tell a tamed tale. The fact is that while alignment is not only, politically speaking an important credo that nations strive for and while it may have its merits, alignment can often come at great cost. It may be the cost of freedom, it may be about being 'tamed' as Neerada put it; it may leave us in gaping fear and thus 'open mouthed'. The hope perhaps lies in Promilla who, as the poem ends with *defies A certain kind of alignment.*

Don't let the light and bubbling language deceive you, this poem has far greater implications if we read it closely and it is this deceptive mirth that the

poem has which makes the poem, like many others by her, such a joy to read. Neerada is a grounded soul. Her poems reflect that and she makes poetry out of the ordinary quirky eccentricities and foibles that fill all of our lives. A poem that really clicked with me is *Of Lists*. It has that elegant humour that seems to be a characteristic trait of Neerada's, the wonderful ability to laugh at one's self. It begins with the declaration *I am one For lists.*

And then, with great good humour she narrates how fishing out her list from her bag full of things makes the list redundant as she involuntarily lists from memory and then she swears, *Under my breath Now to list down A set of instructions How not to forget Getting across The list you make.*

I cannot recall the uncountable times that I have had to strip my entire bag to find a list and then found it much later. It is such a relatable experience and that is what endears the reader to Neerada's poetry, the sheer relatability of the experiences.

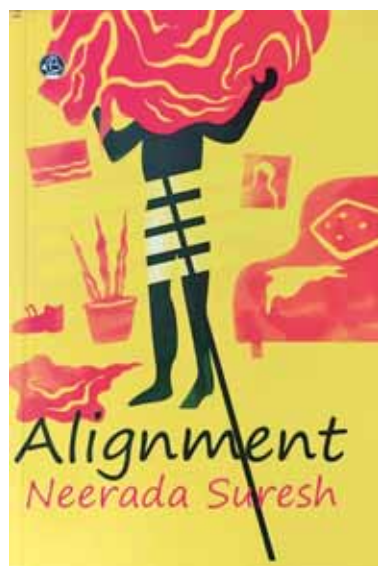
Life and the times as we live them are the focus of Neerada's poetry. We talk for example about how communication between people now is held ransom by the cell phone. Neerada converts our trite conversations into a poem which she entitles, *The New Normal.*

*New normal is Sitting side by side On a sofa With no eye contact Chatting of this and that* These are the first few lines and the poem ends with the sad fact that the new normal is:

*And at all times Not facing each other But thumb twitching On the mobile through Inane vicarious clips Of far and near ones And total strangers Never once glancing Directly or even sideways Smiling at each other.*

Modes of communication or rather the language of communication comes up again in another poem called *Version 3.0* where the poet talks about her journey from the deep south up north 'travelling light with nothing/more than

**ALIGNMENT**  
Author:  
Neerada Suresh  
Publisher: DC Books  
Price: ₹199



a bilingual tongue'. Subtly yet strongly commenting upon the Rashtrabhasha issue, she says, *At the workplace, monolingual, mute Biding time mastering a language National though notional, Opening floodgates of ecstasy mouthing My own tongue, my mother tongue, At regional gatherings.* This is such striking comment upon the way in which so much in our relationships with people, so much of our identity, so many of our needs, are determined by the fluency with which we speak different languages. But are we accepted because we speak the required language or do we remain strangers divided by our regional differences, not explicitly stated but always there? Do we, in turn, become one with the region of our profession or adoption or do we still dream of lands we associate most with the tongue that comes easiest and naturally to us, our mother tongue? These are questions to think about. Neerada makes you think.

She makes you laugh and cry as well, sometimes together. One such poem is *When my brother fell sick* in which the poet describes her brother who was bedridden after a botched up eye surgery. She writes about his courage, *He still smiles as always.*

*Not once did he Lament this plight, foul mouth The surgeon or contemplate Suing. Resigned at once To a possible, partial vision In his bad eye, pacified His wife, my raging sisier in law. His expressive eyes Now inscrutable Behind the dark glasses. But his smile had the same texture and tinge Of the smile he sported When Mother died And he lingered by her one last time.* The poem is such a beautiful reminder that warriors are not found only on the battlefield; there are many who soldier on heroically confronted by the vicissitudes of life. The brother you read about will surely capture your heart and become your hero.

One of the characteristics of Neerada's poems in 'Alignment' is that there is a lot said through implication which is sometimes sensuous and can get your heart beating a bit faster. For example, in the poem *Delete*, the poet writes about

*Your unsolicited Picture on FB And she goes on to say, The familiar contours Of your face Traced out a trillion times Through summer and winter Stood out embossed On my finger tips. The best option now For the photo shopped version, Press delete To wipe out that sting Of dormant memories Off my fingertips.* This is a brilliant use of synesthetic imagery and one can literally feel the tingling in the tips of one's fingers. A poem that ends with a delightful twist is *Chrysanthemums* where the unnamed 'he' always came when the chrysanthemums bloomed and he always asked if they were dahlias or marigolds, and the poet says *Too polite to correct She'd smile- a wide smile*

*Her lashes lowered and The chrysanthemums paled Into insignificance. The evening Stretched to its elastic limits Catapulted into night. What she didn't know was That he had always known They were chrysanthemums.* There is the sweetness of romance in these lines that is unmistakable and so appealing; one can almost imagine the whole scene played out in one's head. Tea I carries the same fragrance of romance very delicately framed, implied through such lines as *While I made tea On a rusty stove He stood watching Leaning by the door When Mother died, I like the cut of your dress As though it were a cue To turn the stove on to sim And let the simmering within Come to a boil.*

Coming back to the pictorial quality of the poems, a reason why many of the poems in fact can be almost dramatically played out in the imagination is the kind of detailing that Neerada works into her poems. Take the poem *Of Haystacks*. This entire poem is literally painted with an eye for the minutest of details and it reads

*The cotton tree stood In its slender trunk With its bursting pods Of parachuting blobs As the turbaned, earth hued Cart man, cushioned On bales and bales Of golden yellow straw Came swaying, swinging Whistling to the orchestra of The hoof clicking clap dance Of the ambling bullocks.* Colour, sound, movement all seemed fused almost like a motion picture being played out on the printed page. And of course the symbolism, the personification is discernible, as is the use of alliteration in the swaying swinging, cart cushioned, clicking clap. This lends a wonderful rhythmic motion to the scene and has been really cleverly used. Again, in *The Breadfruit Tree*, the poet describes the tree, *We didn't make much Of the breadfruit tree That stood sentry like*

*By the boundary wall Spilling its bickering spread Over the neighbour's roof Dropping yellow leaves Plopping crow eaten messy fruits* Like I said, the tree, pretty much like the haystacks in the previous poem, comes to life in the mind's eye.

If brevity is the soul of wit, Neerada really aces it in her short poems, two of which are *Absence* and *Sorrows*.

*Absence, Distance Were surefire Terminators Of whatever was Between us I thought, But they Like rings in trees Add girth, depth Linking the past With the present, Casting shadows Of decay Into the future*

Direct and simple, the simile is so apt and new- the rings on the trees and the passage of time. It's important to note that Neerada is as much a Nature poet as she is a people's poet. In *Sorrows* she says, *Sorrows Like a newborn Arranged itself In my arms Purring in content As if to say Never let me go For the reward Of great truths To be reaped And revealed In the future.*

Those who carry their sorrows with them will feel that the poem is made for them. But that's the magic of Neerada's pen, she will make her readers feel that the people, places, thoughts and experiences are theirs that she writes about. Read her, you will feel at home.

— Swati Pal, Professor and Principal, Janki Devi Memorial College, University of Delhi, has been a Charles Wallace; John McGrath Theatre Studies and Fulbright Nehru fellowship, scholar. She has published on theatre, creative and academic writing, education and translates from Hindi to English. In *Absentia* is a collection of her poems

# Journey to an expanded self awareness

The book opens in the present-day scenario, where a rather unsure Loveena of mid-thirties is boarding a train to Pathankot.

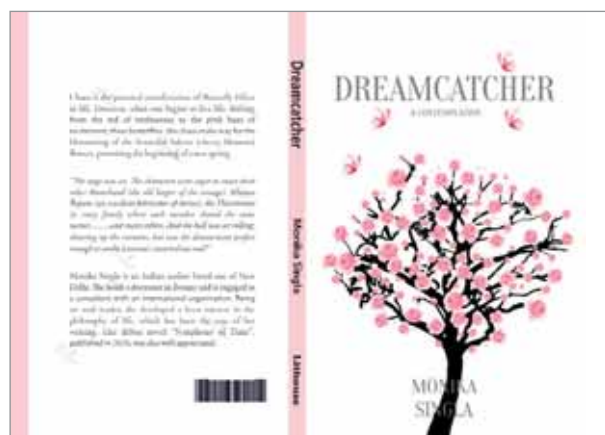
Her already raw senses are over burdened by the onslaught of experience of a train station environment.

Yet her insecurities are deep seated in her psyche and are result of the generational trauma she endured during her growing up years by the hands of her equally tormented mother Neena, reviews **DEEPAK KUMAR JHA**

The ("Dreamcatcher") is the story of Loveena, the protagonist of the book who is a sensitive soul. It beautifully narrates the journey through her trials and tribulations, her realisations, her pains and her metamorphosis and an ultimate 'coming of age' which leaves her in a state of expanded awareness of self as well as her surroundings and people there in. Author Monika has orchestrated her sound knowledge of literature, language and the subject & object to bring on paper the story of a child Loveena, till she finds solace passing through life's labyrinth, unfortunately all nurtured in close walls of her family. The just published book revolves around Loveena's mother Neena who attained motherhood through Loveena after a long wait of ten years. Neena's intensity

thus shifted to being extra protective about her daughter from the negativities of the world. Having brought up in a rather affluent and rich family, she desires nothing less for her daughter. And even though Loveena had both her parents-Neena and her father Dev, it was her mother and mother's stories which were to carve her life and make her the person that she would become. And the story's trajectory thus turns to Loveena's mother Neena's life.

Neena's husband Dev was a victim of his own sense of helplessness for his lack of understanding the business of Neena's father and inability to take it up for posterity, even though he was the sole son-in-law the family had. His job as an assistant professor of history in the university projected him as most suitable boy for Neena, when a friend of Neena's



father told him about Dev and his docile nature. Quite obviously Neena's father believed it to be the significant trait suitable for her pampered daughter. As Neena entered Dev's life and his house after her wedding, it was bustling with Dev's family. Neena was immediately overwhelmed by the sheer number

**DREAMCATCHER**  
Author:  
Monika Singla  
Publisher: ISPCK  
Price: ₹295



of people and was unable to adjust to this new environment which was totally unlike her solitary and exclusive upbringing in an affluent household. Sensing Neena's hesitation and reservations, Dev's family too accepted her into their family but without completely absorbing her into their lives. So, even though

Neena was married into Dev's family she could never truly become a part of it. Dev's detachment or lack of desire to correct this situation further acerbated the relationships. Troubled relations with in-laws, Dev's indifference clubbed with an anguishing wait of ten years to attain motherhood further fed Neena's sense of mistrust and suspicions and her belief that the world was a dangerously bad place. Loveena who was born as a happy child with a calm, pleasing, innocent disposition was always eager to embrace everybody, never earned approval for her behaviour from her mother. Neena always dismissed these traits as incompatible with the ways of world. Thus, growing up, Loveena's world protected by her mother, remained confined within the four walls of the palatial house with the house help Babli as a constant companion who

too gets married leaving behind a void in Loveena's life. Finally, Loveena finds her suitor in Sanand and her engagement to him was greeted as the most welcome news by everyone later on which did not worked due to triggers of Neena's fears. For Loveena this incident proved to be the one which augmented her belief in Neena's words that world is a bad place. Her father Dev too gone followed by passing of Neena. Loveena finally married, not to start a family but only to drown the haunting hollowness of her soul into joys and laughter. Vikram was a colleague of Loveena and the only thing she knew about him was that he was a divorcee with two grown up kids. Soon this too developed a marital conflict. Unable to handle this situation any longer Loveena decides that she needs to get

respite from her choppy life that and decides to leave the house and Vikram. She goes looking for solitude in a place away from all her life challenges a long time back. Her tumultuous relationship with Vikram's place was when she had shunned everything to cross over into next phase of her life. She was now ready to go meet Vikram as a new person. But this time she isn't running away. This time she is running towards meeting life head-on.

# TANGRA TALES

Kolkata, Bengalis the world over, and Tangra, share a very special culinary heritage and culture, going far back in history. **SHOBORI GANGULI** got to relive the bond at the Westin Gurgaon recently



Most people familiar with the trademark Chinese cuisine of Kolkata would know about Tangra. An erstwhile tannery on the eastern outskirts of then British Calcutta, soon to become famous as the city's Chinatown, this tiny colony was populated by Hakka origin Chinese folk who came to India to work in the tanneries, their craft and art soon to become synonymous with the finest leather accessories in the subcontinent. The womenfolk worked home kitchens to supplement meager household incomes. Today, the tanneries are all gone but Tangra has left its signature on a cuisine now globally known as Hakka Chinese. Recently, I had the fortune to relive some childhood memories of anniversaries and birthdays most often spent at some restaurant or the other in Tangra, wolfing down Golden Fried Prawns, Chicken dimsums, Hakka noodles, prawns sauted in garlic and red chillies, the list goes on. The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi, hosted a



CHEF HO CHI MING

nine day culinary pop up aptly called Tales of Tangra which promised an "explosion of flavours" from Kolkata's Chinatown. The event featured a specially curated menu by Guest Chef Ho Chi Ming from The Westin Pune Koregaon Park. By sheer geography, one can easily identify the unique Kolkata-Chinese culinary bond, the two regions in such close physical proximity, underlining the very special nature of the food not be found anywhere else in the world despite Tangra's journey as an Oriental cuisine beyond the frontiers of Bengal. The menu at Westin was indeed meticulously planned by the Chef to capture the essence of this legendary fusion cuisine, tracing its roots back to an era long ago when Chinese immigrants in then Calcutta, blending their traditions with Indian culture to script and create Chinatown's culinary

proress. Unfortunately, none of that history now remains, except in the hands of home and professional chefs, who still keep the history of Chinatown resonating with contemporary approaches, and of course, special twists given to recipes long lost. While Chef Ho did put up a great show with his Scallion Crepes, Homestyle Taro Cakes, Kari Fish Dumplings, Sweet and Sour Prawns, Four Season Green Beans, Crispy Chilli Garlic Potatoes, Tangra style authentic Hakka noodles, the menu had a huge vegetarian accent. With the world turning to vegetarianism each passing day, this is only understandable. But one fervently hopes that Hakka Chinese seafood will always have its patrons surviving in some corner or the other in the world. Chef Ho's passion for Asian cuisine was apparent in the innovations he brought to each dish. His approach, affability and commitment to authenticity were truly welcome. Chef Amit Dash, Multi Property Executive Chef for The Westin Gurgaon, New Delhi said, "We are



excited to host Chef Ho Chi Ming and present Tales of Tangra to our patrons. This pop-up is a tribute to the rich cultural tapestry and culinary excellence of Tangra and a testament to our commitment to continue offering our guests diverse and exceptional dining experiences." The soups ranged from Manchow, Assorted Vegetables, Ginger, Cilantro Broth, Hot and Sour soup, non vegetarian bits like prawns and chickens were only add-ons. Personally, I feel a soup or broth must stew in its original juices and not be relegated to add-ons for a vegetable broth. It makes a critical culinary difference in terms of taste, texture and aromas. All in all, it felt good to taste a bit of Tangra far away from its original shores of Kolkata right in the heart of Delhi. Long live Tangra's signature Hakka cuisine.



## Disappointing Service Mars Fine Dining Experiences



**PAWAN SONI** ventures to The China Kitchen at Hyatt Regency, New Delhi, famed for its peking Duck. While the star dish impressed, but the experience is marred by inattentive services

I recently visited The China Kitchen at Hyatt Regency New Delhi, renowned for its exquisite Peking Duck, which I consider among the best in the National Capital Region. Some might argue that Hakkasan in Mumbai outshines it, but my personal experiences at Hakkasan in Abu Dhabi and a pop-up at Shangri-La Delhi didn't include the duck, so I can't compare. Nonetheless, my recent dining experience at The China Kitchen, despite the superb duck, left me dissatisfied, primarily due to subpar service. The evening began on a sour note with a lackluster welcome. We received no warm greetings or guidance to our table, and no one offered us menus or water, despite the sweltering Delhi summer. The absence of hospitality was in stark contrast to the standards one expects at a 5-star property. When we ordered our first dish, a gomaï salad, I specifically requested extra sesame dressing on the side, a preference I had made clear to the server. However, the salad arrived without the extra dressing and was neither cold nor flavorful, lacking the acidity and vibrant tastes I anticipated. The China Kitchen could learn a thing or two from China Garden, which excels at this dish in the city. Fortunately, the other dishes like chicken shao mai dumplings, edamame dim sum, and honey chilli lotus roots were much better. Yet, the service remained mechanical and impersonal. There were no smiles, no proactive plate changes, and no clearing of the



table. Even the chef who came to carve the duck remained silent, possibly due to a language barrier, but a smile would have gone a long way. The hostess who prepared the pancake rolls also wore a stony expression while she stood near our table for some time preparing the pancakes. Despite enjoying most of our meal, we quickly finished and left, paying over Rs18,000 (including a 10% service charge) without any drinks. I contemplated asking for the service charge to be waived but refrained, considering how dependent the staff might be on these tips. I was particularly disappointed when my request for duck salt and pepper was denied because we had ordered only half a duck, a decision that seemed unnecessarily rigid. A little more flexibility and hospitality could have made all the difference, especially when very few order it. Attentive and friendly



service could have transformed our dining experience. Even though the food was largely enjoyable, the lack of warmth and attention overshadowed it. Similar was our experience just a day prior at Pullman hotel where a friend hosted his daughter's



birthday party at their all-day dining restaurant Pluck. Orders were mixed up, a sparkling wine cork flew in the air missing the patrons without any apology from the server, prawns vanished from the buffet spread, and orders either took a lot of time or were

completely missed. Something has happened to that smiley and polite star hotel service, especially after COVID. Fresh batches are seeing fewer takers, most experienced staff have either left the industry or are moving abroad for better wages and work



conditions. What remains is the new service levels. Either we will get used to it or start paying them the wages they truly deserve to retain deserving candidates. — Author is a food critic and founder of the Big F Awards. He can be reached at Pawan.Soni@indianfoodfreak.com



**YOUR WEEK AHEAD**

MADHU KOTIYA



**ARIES** March 21-April 19

This week, you'll find yourself in a cheerful state of mind, enjoying a sense of fulfillment and contentment. Expect a swift victory of some kind, such as a successful outcome in a competition or interview, where your dedication and strategic planning will be rewarded. You'll experience a surge of prosperity coupled with spiritual growth. Any previous limitations or obstacles you faced will start to fade away, enhancing your sense of liberation and tranquility. There's a hint of upcoming travel, possibly international, that could enrich your experiences. Midweek brings a period of relaxation; you may choose to step back from certain activities during this reflective phase. In the coming weeks or months, you'll find opportunities to resolve disputes or engage in significant discussions.

**Lucky number** 4 | **Lucky colour** Maroon  
**Lucky day** Friday



**LEO** July 23-Aug 22

Last week was a whirlwind of activity for you, balancing both home and work with remarkable determination. Your methodical approach ensured that everything was handled without compromising the quality, allowing you now to step back and enjoy a well-deserved break. It's a time to savor the results of your diligence. As you've managed to uphold both your professional and personal commitments successfully, you find your environment more supportive and harmonious. Your capabilities in handling relationships and business matters have not only strengthened your stature but have also set you as an inspiration for others. This period marks a significant opportunity for growth in your ventures, and any work-related travel could bring back rewarding outcomes, boosting both your professional standing and familial pride.

**Lucky number** 16 | **Lucky colour** Mint  
**Lucky day** Thursday



**SAGITTARIUS** Nov 22-Dec 21

This week, you may find yourself on a quest for fairness in various areas of your life. However, the journey won't be straightforward, as it is marked by conflicts and confrontations. You might experience feelings of restriction, both mentally and physically, leading to a sense of demoralization and irritation. Amidst this chaos, with opposing forces at play, it becomes crucial to focus on maintaining balanced health habits and making discerning choices that favor personal well-being. Assume accountability for your actions and interactions, thoughtfully considering the advantages and disadvantages. Despite these obstacles, a sense of triumph is within reach. You'll navigate through this tough phase, emerging better equipped to handle future challenges. As the week concludes, opportunities for new beginnings or travel may arise, promising resolution to issues related to relationships or personal assets.

**Lucky number** 12 | **Lucky colour** Ivory  
**Lucky day** Friday



**TAURUS** April 20-May 20

This week brings a focus on emotional expression and deep connections. You naturally wear your heart on your sleeve, showcasing your emotions openly, which will enhance the bonds in your relationship. Expect a surge of closeness and mutual understanding with your partner, reinforcing your emotional ties. Additionally, this period is marked by potential gains in wisdom and the possibility of influential learning opportunities or mentorships that can guide you through significant life decisions. Your ability to articulate your thoughts impressively will serve you well, making you feel effective and acknowledged in your endeavors. High-ranking professionals can anticipate recognition and accolades. It's a pivotal time where your choices will significantly shape your journey, emphasizing the importance of focused decision-making.

**Lucky number** 14 | **Lucky colour** Magenta  
**Lucky day** Monday



**VIRGO** Aug 23-Sep 22

At this moment, you stand at a pivotal juncture, faced with the need to make an important decision quickly. This period proves favorable for professionals like doctors and judges, who are likely to achieve recognition in their fields. A disciplined approach is essential to master the challenges ahead. You might face some health concerns and feelings of frustration; however, remember to appreciate the positives in your life. As the week progresses, expect a subtle shift that brings equilibrium. You'll experience renewed energy and a brighter outlook. Peace and joy will follow, enhancing your personal achievements. Support from others will play a key role in your accomplishments, leading to tangible rewards. Expect to receive what is rightfully yours, reinforcing a sense of justice and fulfillment.

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



**CAPRICORN** Dec 22-Jan 19

You are entering a phase that calls for relaxation and recuperation. Embrace the serenity and strength this period offers. If you've recently experienced physical or emotional challenges, this is a time for healing. Soon, you may encounter a scenario requiring critical thinking, where clarity and understanding will emerge. Stay observant, as resolving such matters can be complex, possibly leading to confusion or a standstill. However, the latter part of the week promises a shift towards positivity. You may find yourself contemplating a new endeavor that demands quick action and courage. This is your moment to shine—step forward confidently and tap into your innate ability to navigate exciting challenges. There may also be joyful personal developments, possibly related to family expansion. Harness this burst of creativity and enthusiasm to maximize your opportunities.

**Lucky number** 1 | **Lucky colour** Mustard  
**Lucky day** Monday



**GEMINI** May 21-June 20

This week, your emotions may feel overwhelming, potentially overshadowing your usual judgment. Minor household issues could escalate, causing significant stress and leading you to seek solace away from worldly concerns. You might find yourself pondering drastic changes in your personal life, which could divert your focus from day-to-day duties. However, this period of turmoil is only temporary. As the week progresses, your previous endeavors will start to bear fruit. Recent investments are likely to yield substantial rewards. It's crucial to shake off any lingering confusion and gain a clearer perspective on your life's direction. This might involve stepping back from your typical patterns of thought and behavior to explore new ideas and perspectives. Such shifts will not only enhance your performance but also guide you toward a more balanced and impartial outlook.

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



**LIBRA** Sep 23-Oct 22

You often seek harmony, elegance, and the finer things in life, yet sometimes these seem just out of reach. Recently, you may find yourself overwhelmed by fears and worries, grappling with sleep disturbances, feelings of guilt, and emotional distress. Despite these challenges, it's important to remember that not all is lost. There's a gleam of hope, a fresh perspective or opportunity on the horizon that can help you emerge from this phase. Around the middle of the week, expect a surge of positive news—perhaps a heartfelt gesture or a new opening that could enhance your relationships and bring you emotional and physical strength. Stay patient; with time, the clouds will clear, and stability will return.

**Lucky number** 8 | **Lucky colour** Indigo  
**Lucky day** Wednesday



**AQUARIUS** Jan 20-Feb 18

This week presents a mix of challenges and opportunities, weaving through periods of emotional intensity and conflicting desires. You might start the week feeling a dip in financial stability, as incoming resources could be inconsistent. It's essential to navigate this time with patience, recognizing that this phase is only temporary. Engaging in meditation, yoga, or creative pursuits could prove beneficial in restoring your balance and helping you navigate through these turbulent times. Adopting a measured approach in your interactions, especially with those in senior positions, will be crucial. Avoid letting impulsive reactions disrupt the harmony and progress you've achieved thus far. Stay grounded and cautious, steering clear of misguided beliefs, and consider refreshing your perspective to better face the challenges ahead.

**Lucky number** 15 | **Lucky colour** Forest Green  
**Lucky day** Friday



**CANCER** June 21-July 22

This week, you may notice a significant shift in your demeanor, transitioning from a reflective and intense state to a more affectionate and nurturing one. Those in leadership roles, particularly at the helm of large organizations, might find their natural empathy tested as they encourage independence in others. Your loyalty remains unwavering to those you hold dear, yet it's wise to remain cautious with boundaries. By mid-week, your creativity and imagination could soar, allowing you to delight in a blend of fantasy and reality. This inner transformation will likely bring you a sense of fulfillment, enriching both your material and spiritual life, leaving you feeling content and joyful. Embrace these changes as they come, viewing them as opportunities for personal growth and deeper connections.

**Lucky number** 11 | **Lucky colour** Peach  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**SCORPIO** Oct 23-Nov 21

A shift in location or a new beginning is on the horizon, bringing with it a rise in your current standing or role. You're prepared to embrace challenges to achieve your goals, driven by a restless desire for progress and excitement. A new, intense romantic or artistic connection might soon make its way into your life. As the week progresses, expect an influx of joy, achievements, and possibly some thoughtful gifts, enhancing friendships and personal contentment. A sense of nostalgia may wash over you, prompting reunions with old friends and family members. A positive energy surrounds you, rejuvenating your spirit. Signs point towards harmonious domestic life, with potential celebrations like home renovations or family gatherings, allowing for meaningful moments with those you cherish.

**Lucky number** 10 | **Lucky colour** Rust  
**Lucky day** Sunday



**PISCES** Feb 19-March 20

This week marks a transition as you move away from a challenging phase, feeling a sense of relief and lightness. Family matters will take precedence, demanding more attention amidst less than ideal circumstances. You might find yourself at a crossroads, having held on to a situation that no longer serves your well-being, and it's time to embrace change. This moment holds considerable weight in determining your future; the decisions you make now are crucial. Challenges may arise from unresolved issues or lingering negative feelings towards someone. The coming days offer a chance to address and settle these conflicts, paving the way for healing and growth. Embrace your natural instincts and creativity to navigate through this. By week's end, a significant breakthrough promises to reignite your enthusiasm and determination, bolstering your spirit to pursue your aspirations boldly.

**Lucky number** 3 | **Lucky colour** Cherry Red  
**Lucky day** Thursday

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**GURUSPEAK**  
SRI SRI RAVI SHANKAR

# Do you pray?



where you are. Unless you are lit in devotion to the Divine, your life will remain restless. In devotion, longing will arise in you. And when there is longing, true prayer happens by itself. Be sincere in your prayers. Do not try to outsmart the Divine. The mind has the tendency to forget the Divine. What type of time do you give the Divine? Usually, you give the leftover time; when you have nothing else to do, no guests to attend to, no parties to attend to, you go to the Divine. This is not quality time. Give prime time to the Divine. You will be rewarded. If your prayers are not answered, it is because you have never given quality time. Four types of people go to God. One, is those who seek the truth (knowledge and freedom). Two, the wise ones (gyanis). Three, the ones who seek material comforts (wealth). Four, the ones who are in misery. The wise one does not pray for something. His life itself is a prayer. If at all you have to pray for something, pray for the happiness of all the people in the world. 'Loka Samastha Sukhinou Bhavantu' (May Everybody Be Happy). — He is a Spiritual Guru

Prayer is a vital tool to improve your life. Wherever you can put your effort, put it. Where you cannot, pray for it! Whatever you do, know that a Higher Power has the final say and you can tap that power through your prayers. You don't need any special qualifications or abilities to pray. Whether a fool or a wise person, whether rich or poor, anybody can pray. Prayer doesn't mean just sitting and chanting some words. It's about being in that serene, calm, and meditative state. That is why, in the Vedic tradition, dhyana (meditation) is done before prayer as well as afterward. When the mind is focused, the prayer becomes far more powerful. Prayer is the cry of a soul. To whom you pray is not important. Whereas religion puts words to the prayer, and adds symbols and rituals to it, the prayer itself transcends them. It happens on the subtle level of feelings; and feelings transcend words and religion. The act of praying itself has the power to bring transformation. When you pray there should be total

involvement. If the mind is preoccupied elsewhere then that is no prayer at all. When there is pain, there is more involvement. That's why people turn to prayer when they are in pain. Prayer happens when you feel grateful or when you feel utterly helpless. In either case, your prayers will be answered. When you feel helpless, prayer happens by itself. That's why in Hindi we say 'Nirbal toh Balram'. If you are weak, God is your strength. Prayer is that moment when you come in touch with your limitations and your boundaries. In today's fast-paced world, people often pray out of fear and greed. Usually, when you love something, you want to possess it and you pray for it. True prayer, however, is just the opposite of wanting to possess. It's about honouring and offering everything to the Divine. Honouring brings devotion and leads to surrender. Devotion brings a healing touch to life. Devotion and faith are at the core of a sincere prayer. A true prayer can't happen without devotion and faith. Having faith is to realize that God's protection is there for you. Devotion is inner flowering. Devotion starts from