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WORLD 8 UK BETTING SCANDAL NOW ENGULFS OPP LABOUR PARTY

MONEY 10 SENSEX, NIFTY SETTLE AT NEW ALL-TIME HIGH LEVELS

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INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES 12 SPORTS

INDIA GETS ITS SPEAKER AND LoP



Prime Minister Narendra Modi greets Om Birla after the latter was elected as the Speaker of the House during the first Session of the 18th Lok Sabha, in New Delhi, on Wednesday. Leader of the Opposition Rahul Gandhi and Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Kiren Rijiju are also seen

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

NDA nominee Om Birla was elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha for a second consecutive term by voice vote on Wednesday, facing a challenge from the Opposition-backed candidate, K Suresh. A few minutes later, Congress MP Rahul Gandhi was granted the position of Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, a status the Lower House has not witnessed for two terms, as the Congress had previously failed to secure enough seats to be accorded the LoP status.

Both sides, Treasury and Opposition benches had reasons for celebrations on Wednesday and in this milieu the rare occasion on the Floor of Parliament was noticed when Birla, Rahul and Prime Minister Narendra Modi exchanged greetings among each other. While the constitution of the 18th Lok Sabha was completed on Wednesday, President Droupadi Murmu is scheduled to address the joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament on Thursday and both — the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha — will be conducting proceedings during the day.

After fighting the Speaker's election, the Congress-led INDIA Bloc is now turning its attention to put pressure on Birla to announce the schedule for election of Deputy Speaker, which remained vacant for five years in the previous years. As a first step, sources said, there are plans to submit a "joint letter" to the Speaker asking him to immediately initiate the process for election of Deputy Speaker, a Constitutional position. Modi, who moved the motion for Birla's election as Speaker, lauded the balance he showed in maintaining decorum of the House during his previous term.

Several Opposition leaders, including Rahul Gandhi and Akhilesh Yadav, congratulated Birla too, stressing on "impartiality" and hoping he would allow them to raise the voice of the people and not apply his restraint orders only to Opposition benches. Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab made the announcement of Birla's election after the Opposition, which had forwarded the name of eight-term Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh as its candidate, did not press for votes to the motion. This is the fifth time that a Speaker will serve beyond the tenure of one Lok Sabha. It is also among the few occasions that an election became necessary for a post conventionally decided by consensus. As he assumed charge, Birla read out a resolution condemning the Emergency imposed by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in 1975 and asked members to observe a moment's silence, triggering a wave of protests by the Opposition. His first day in the chair saw the House being adjourned. While Opposition members vociferously protested inside, BJP members held a demonstration outside Parliament House, raising slogans and demanding an apology from the Congress for the Emergency.

Kejriwal incarcerated

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal was remanded to three-day custody of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), hours after he was arrested by the probe Central agency in connection with the money laundering probe into now-scrapped excise policy. Special Judge Amitabh Rawat passed the order on an application moved by the CBI which formally arrested Kejriwal after obtaining permission from the court. "The CBI's application is allowed for three days. The accused be produced before 7 pm," the judge said while passing the order on the CBI application. Kejriwal will be produced before the court on June 29. The CBI, earlier on Wednesday, formally arrested Kejriwal in the said case and had sought five-day custody. During the remand period, the court has also allowed Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal and his Lawyer to meet him for 30 minutes every day. Furthermore, the court also allowed them to carry his prescribed medicines and home-cook food during the remand period. Shortly after the arrest, Kejriwal withdrew the petition filed in the Supreme Court challenging the order



Delhi Chief Minister and AAP leader Arvind Kejriwal being produced before the Rouse Avenue Court in connection with a money laundering case related to the Delhi liquor policy, in New Delhi, on Wednesday

passed by the Delhi High Court staying his bail in the money laundering case. Appearing for the Delhi Chief Minister, senior advocate A M Singhvi made the request to withdraw the plea before a vacation bench of Justices Manoj Misra and S V N Bhatti and the bench allowed it and dismissed the plea as withdrawn. Notably, the Enforcement Directorate (ED) case investigated the alleged money trail, the CBI case will have to prove corruption and bribe-taking by public servants. The probe agency on Tuesday examined the AAP supreme in Tihar Jail and recorded his statement related to the Excise Policy case. Kejriwal will remain in the CBI's custody until his custodial interrogation in the corruption case comes to an end, which can go on for a

maximum of 15 days. If he fails to secure bail in both the cases being probed by the CBI and ED, he will go back to judicial custody once his police remand ends in the present case. The CBI in its application, seeking his remand for five days told the court that he was required to be quizzed to unearth the larger conspiracy in the matter. It also said the Delhi Chief Minister was required to be confronted with evidence and other people accused in the case. "We need his custodial interrogation... He is not even recognising that (co-accused) Vijay Nair was working under him. He says Nair was working under Atishi Marlena and Saurabh Bharadwaj. He puts the entire onus on Manish Sisodia (also accused in the case). He has to be confronted. He has to be shown documents," the CBI

said. The agency claimed that the "south lobby" visited Delhi when the COVID-19 wave was at its peak. The CBI counsel, however, said they had argued on facts and that no agency source had stated anything. To this, the judge said the media picks up one line. "It is very difficult to control media that way," he added. The CBI also accused Kejriwal of making "unnecessary allegation of malice." "Unnecessary allegation of malice are being made. We could have conducted these proceedings before the elections. I (CBI) am doing my job, satisfying every court," the counsel representing the CBI said. When the court asked why was Kejriwal being arrested now, the CBI counsel said the probe agency refrained from arresting him while the elections were going on. "The court was considering his interim bail for elections. If at that time, I (CBI) would have arrested... That shows my restraint that I did not arrest him when he was campaigning," the counsel said. During the hearing, Kejriwal's lawyers argued that the agency's move to arrest the AAP boss at this point showed it had acted "in a most biased manner". The reference was to the fact the CBI had already quizzed him in connection with this case - for nine hours in April last year.



WikiLeaks founder Assange returns to Australia a free man

AP ■ CANBERRA

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange returned to his homeland Australia aboard a charter jet on Wednesday, hours after pleading guilty to obtaining and publishing US military secrets in a deal with Justice Department prosecutors that concludes a drawn-out legal saga. The criminal case of international intrigue, which had played out for years, came to a surprise end in a most unusual setting with Assange, 52, entering his plea in a US district court in Saipan, the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands. The American commonwealth in the Pacific is relatively close to Assange's native Australia and accommodated his desire to avoid entering the continental United States. Assange was accused of receiving and publishing hundreds of thousands of war logs and diplomatic cables that included details of US military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. His activities drew an outpouring of support from press freedom advocates, who heralded his role in bringing to light military conduct that might otherwise have been concealed from view and warned of a chilling effect on journalists. Among the files published by WikiLeaks was a video of a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by American forces in Baghdad that killed 11 people, including two Reuters journalists. Assange raised his right fist as he emerged from the plane and his supporters at the Canberra airport cheered from a distance. Dressed in the same suit and tie he wore during his earlier court appearance, he embraced his wife Stella Assange and father John Shipton who were waiting on the tarmac. "He described it as a surreal and happy moment, his landing here in our national capital, Canberra," Prime Minister Anthony Albanese told reporters in Parliament House.

3 ultras killed ahead of Amarnath Yatra



Security personnel guard as vehicles leave the Amarnath yatra base camp Bhagwati Nagar during a 'dry run' conducted by the authorities ahead of annual Amarnath Yatra, in Jammu, on Wednesday

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The entire security grid has been kept on a state of high alert across Jammu and Kashmir after Punjab police late Tuesday night noticed the movement of two armed suspects moving closer to the forward areas bordering Kathua district in the run-up to the beginning of the 52-day-long Amarnath Yatra on June 29. Meanwhile, one terrorist was killed by the joint team of security forces in an ongoing encounter in a forest area of Gandoh in Doda district. According to ADGP, Anand Jain, "Two more terrorists have been neutralised in an ongoing joint operation in the Gandoh, Bhaderwah sector of district Doda. Arms and ammunition have been recovered from their possession." Separate searches were also conducted in the Reasi district after some locals reported the suspected movement of three armed persons in the Kanda area on Tuesday evening, prompting the Army, CRPF, and police to launch the search operation. Though elaborate security arrangements have been made in Lakhanpur — the gateway to Jammu and Kashmir and along the yatra route to prevent the movement of any suspected persons, the security forces are taking no chances to allow the Pakistan-based terrorists to target the Amarnath yatra. Quick Reaction Teams have been stationed along the highway at vantage locations while separate security checkpoints have been established along the border roads connecting the Jammu-Pathankot highway. To check the movement of suspected persons high-powered CCTV cameras have been installed along the yatra route. Security has been beefed up across the base camp in Jammu, Pahalgam and Baltal in the Kashmir valley to ensure an incident-free yatra. Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Romesh Kumar, along with ADGP, Anand Jain Wednesday supervised the

Dry Run of Shri Amarnathji Yatra 2024 amidst tight security and complete protocol from Yatri Niwas Bhagwati Nagar to Yatra camp Lamber at Banihal. Sharing information about the Doda encounter, Additional Director General of Police, Jammu Anand Jain in a post on X said one terrorist had been gunned down while the operation was still going on in the Bhaderwah area of Doda. Jain said the operation was launched in the Gandoh, Bhaderwah Sector of district Doda after receiving intelligence reports about the presence of terrorists in the area. Six security personnel were injured when terrorists attacked a joint check post at Chattargalla on June 11, while a policeman was injured in a gunfight with terrorists at Kota top in Gandoh area the next day. After the twin attacks, security forces intensified their anti-terrorist operations and announced a cash reward of Rs 5 lakhs each for four Pakistani terrorists believed to have infiltrated and operated in the district. In addition, Northern Army Commander Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar visited Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district and reviewed the security situation of the region on Tuesday. His visit to the area along with General Officer Commanding (GOC) of 16 Corps Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva and GoC Romeo Force became important to review the security setup in the wake of the terror attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in the area on June 9. Nine persons, including seven pilgrims from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, were killed and 41 injured in the attack when the terrorists opened fire on the bus carrying pilgrims returning from Shiv Khori shrine near Teryath village in the Pouni area. He was briefed on the prevailing security situation and the actions of the security forces, it said.

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Dhami meets Union ministers, seeks support for development of U'khand

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami met a number of union ministers on the second day of his New Delhi visit on Wednesday and sought their help for the development of Uttarakhand.

In his meeting with Defence minister Rajnath Singh, Dhami requested Singh that the land of defence estates department in Nainital should be handed over to the State for development of parking facilities for tourists and pilgrims. He said that in recent times Nainital which is famous with tourists has become an important religious and spiritual centre. Dhami said that the number of pilgrims visiting Neeb Karori Maharaj ashram has increased tremendously. Since this ashram is located near Nainital, people visiting it stay in Nainital. He said that parking is a major problem in Nainital. Dhami said that the defence estates department of the Ministry of Defence has a three



acre plot in Nainital. He said that the problem of parking in Nainital would be solved if this land is used for parking purposes. The CM said that if a multilevel parking is constructed in this plot located near Nainital Lake then 1500 to 2000 vehicles can be parked here. He also congratulated Singh for becoming the Defence minister of the country again. The defence minister assured every possible support to the State government. Dhami had a hectic day on

Wednesday as he also met Union minister and BJP president JP Nadra, union minister Bhupendra Yadav, Lok Sabha speaker Om Birla and member of 16th finance commission Arvind Pangadia. In his meeting with union minister for Forest and Environment Bhupendra Yadav, the CM requested that the process of transfer of 87.0815 hectare of forest land to the State government for expansion of Dehradun airport Jollygrant should be expedited.

DM finds 51 MCD officials and employees absent during inspection

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The Dehradun district magistrate Sonika found 51 officials and employees of the Municipal Corporation of Dehradun (MCD) absent from their desks during her surprise inspection on Wednesday. The DM directed the municipal commissioner Gaurav Kumar to mark the absence of all the absentees. She also ordered that the officials and employees must provide proper information about their whereabouts and what they do throughout the day rather than just vaguely mentioning field visits in the office. The DM also summoned the list of works done for source segregation and the file of MoUs and contracts signed with the agencies concerned. Besides this, the DM also found some financial irregularities in issuing funds to

an agency. The corporation was allegedly issuing an agency about Rs eight lakh every month for raising awareness and providing training to people regarding segregation and related issues under a central government programme.

The agency reportedly received the said amount for the past six months but its work is not being properly monitored by MCD. The officials could not present any proof that showed how the agency's work made any difference to the sanitation conditions in the city. She has sought a report from the officials regarding the issue. The DM also attached two senior officials to the additional municipal commissioner's office who failed to handle work related to the mutation of

properties causing issues to the public. Sonika also found irregularities in the door to door garbage collecting work of the corporation. She directed the officials to ensure ward-wise monitoring of garbage pickup every day and allocate roster-wise areas to vehicles for sanitation related works. She also instructed them to conduct a survey of the areas where garbage is being thrown at public places to find out the reason and make necessary arrangements accordingly. Besides this, the DM also asked the officials to set a target of planting one lakh trees in the city while ensuring they grow with proper care. She directed them to submit the list of approved and proposed parks in the city for plantation.

Bhatt condemns Congress for creating ruckus in Lok Sabha

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The president of BJP Mahendra Bhatt has condemned the ruckus created by the opposition in the parliament on Wednesday and said that it reflects the real face of those engaging in rhetoric of holding copies of constitution in their hands. He said that those who are talking about saving the constitution had stifled democracy 50 years ago by imposing an emergency in the country. Congratulating Om Birla for becoming the

Speaker of Lok Sabha for the second consecutive term, Bhatt said that his election is the victory of democracy in parliament. He also lauded the Lok Sabha speaker for bringing a resolution on emergency. Bhatt said that lakhs of people were jailed during democracy and the rights of people were snatched away. He said that the MPs of Congress party created commotion in Lok Sabha because the party was responsible for imposing emergency in the country.

Micro miniature cows from AP now in Haldwani

OP AGNIHOTRI ■ HALDWANI

A pair of 22-inch high cow and a bull has become a major novelty in Haldwani. A jeweller here has bought these micro miniature bovines of the Punganuru breed from Andhra Pradesh. Kaladhungi Road resident Ghanshyam Rastogi, who is the head of the local jewellers

association, got the bovines from the Nadipatti Gaushal of Krishnam Raju in Andhra Pradesh. Eventually the cow will give upto one and a half litres of milk. Rastogi said that he had gone with his family to Tirupati Balaji in June. His son Vendant's interest in cows and the micro miniature cows in Andhra Pradesh became the subject of



Considering the high temperatures being experienced in the Terai region, he has installed a cooler for the bovines. He said that both the bovines are now acclimatised to the local weather. Rastogi opined that the advent of these bovines in his home has created a positive ambience.

She said that the heinous crime in Bahadrabad was executed by the BJP leader and member of OBC commission Aditya Raj Saini. Dasauni said in the provisional State capital Dehradun also the crime against women is increasing unabatedly. She listed recent rape of a 15 year old, recovery of decom-

BJP using money, muscle power in Badrinath, Manglaur by elections : Cong

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

A delegation of Congress leaders led by Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) president Karan Mahara, met Additional Chief Electoral Officer (ACEO), V K Jogedande at his office on Wednesday and submitted a memorandum complaining about the misuse of money and muscle power and government machinery by the ruling party in the Badrinath and Manglaur Assembly by elections. The PCC president Karan Mahara said that the state government is putting pressure on the ration shop owners and the Anganwadi workers to campaign in favour of the BJP candidates. He said that it seems that the BJP state government wants to win the assembly by-election by mis-

using money, power, liquor and government machinery. Mahara added that the BJP is also openly violating the Model Code of Conduct (MCC). The Vice President of Uttarakhand Congress Mathuradutt Joshi said that the BJP is blatantly misusing the government machinery in the campaign. BJP is also distributing money and liquor in both the constituencies through outsiders to influence the voters. Joshi claimed that the vehicles of BJP leaders are not being checked by any officer in both the assembly constituencies and there is no restriction on the liquor and other material being distributed by the BJP through outsiders in the assembly constituencies. He added that in

many parts of Manglaur assembly constituency, BJP workers and leaders coming from outside are roaming in vehicles having registration numbers of states like Haryana, Rajasthan, Punjab and Uttar Pradesh and trying to influence voters by unfair means.

The Congress delegation asked the ACEO that in order to ensure fair and transparent elections, the allegations of the party should be investigated and action should be taken against the leaders and candidates BJP. The delegation included Congress MLAs Furkan Ahmed, Mamta Rakesh, Ravi Bahadur, Virendra Jati, Anupama Rawat and others.

Bahadrabad rape & murder case reflects law & order situation in State: Dasauni

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The chief spokesperson of Uttarakhand Congress Garima Dasauni has said that the gang rape of a minor girl in Bahadrabad in Haridwar and her subsequent murder shows the pathetic law and order condition in the State. Interacting with media persons at the headquarters of Uttarakhand Congress on Wednesday, Dasauni said that the crime against women is increasing in the State.

posed bodies of a six month old child and women and other incidents as indicative of the deteriorating law and order situation in Dehradun.

She said that it appears that the administration is in slumber and in absence of any fear from Police and

authorities; the criminals are having a free run.

The Congress leader said that CM Dhami should come out of his narcissistic attitude and take cognizance of the law and order situation and the increasing cases of crime against women.

उत्तराखण्ड पावर कॉर्पोरेशन लि.
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Under mounting pressure, MDDA postpones demolition drive for 2nd consecutive day

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Due to continuous pressure from slum dwellers and political parties, the Mussoorie Dehradun Development Authority (MDDA) postponed its demolition drive in the Rajpur area along the Rispana riverbed for the second consecutive day on Wednesday. The slum dwellers have claimed that MDDA did not properly check their documents before marking their houses for demolition. In response, the teams rechecked documents

like electricity bills and water bills on Wednesday to verify the construction dates of the structures. These documents are being used by MDDA to determine whether the structures were built before 2016. The outgoing councillor of the area Urmila Thapa said that the locals have claimed that the MDDA officials marked their houses for demolition without properly checking their documents. Many said that their houses were demolished on Monday despite having valid docu-

ments that showed that the structures were built before 2016, she said. She stated that the MDDA teams on Wednesday thoroughly checked the documents of slum dwellers. "They visited several houses and checked each document presented to them properly since Wednesday morning. The locals also appeared satisfied with the team's conduct," she said. The officials said that MDDA will possibly resume the demolition drive within two days.

Police looking into digital footprints of ATC found dead in Pantnagar

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

The police said that they are looking into the digital footprints and social media activities of the air traffic controller (ATC) in charge of Pantnagar Airport Ashish Chausali (35) who was found dead in his room on Monday wearing women's clothes and make-up. The police have ruled out the murder angle as the post-mortem report clearly shows that Chausali died from hanging, the superintendent of police (City) of Rudrapur Manoj Katyal said. He told

that he was involved in some online games like Blue Whale that pushed people to do strange activities and instigated them to commit suicide a few years ago. We are investigating all possibilities," the SP said.

He further informed that the police have also been checking his bank transactions and questioning people who used to interact with him daily. "The police have found some unusual transactions by the deceased which we are investigating further. We have also found some other confidential information. We will soon interrogate his colleagues again who first found his body. They are currently in Pithoragarh where the deceased's family is carrying out his final rituals. We will recreate the scene to know exactly how they found the body which will help us to understand the situation better," the SP added.

Met dept issues heavy rainfall alert for next three days

PNS ■ DEHRADUN

Predicting heavy rainfall in many parts of the State in the next three days, the meteorological department has said that the conditions are favourable for the advance of the South West monsoon in the State. The monsoon may officially arrive in the State in the next two-three days.

said that thunderstorms accompanied with lightning, very intense to extremely intense spells and gusty winds (30 to 40 KMPH) are likely to occur at isolated places in the State in the next three days.

Many parts of the State, including provisional State capital Dehradun, witnessed good pre-monsoon showers on Wednesday. The weathermen have issued an alert of heavy to very heavy rainfall at isolated places in some districts of Uttarakhand from June 27 to 29 and then from July 2 and 3.

The heavy rains can induce medium landslides and rockfall at isolated places in vulnerable areas that can result in blocking/washout of highways and link roads in the State.

The meteorology department has also advised state government authorities to take necessary precautionary measures especially along Chardham Yatra routes in the coming three to five days.

The department has also

TEMPORARY CANCELLATION / RE - SCHEDULING / PARTIAL CANCELLATION / REGULATION & DIVERSION OF TRAINS

In order to upgrade the infrastructure & enhance safety standards, Northern Railway will undertake Pre-Non-Interlocking & Non-Interlocking work between Roorkee - Deoband section of Moradabad Division. To execute this work, Northern Railway will take traffic blocks upto 03.07.2024. During this period the following trains will be affected on the dates as shown under:-

| CANCELLATION OF TRAINS | | |
|------------------------|---|---|
| Train No. | Train Name | Date of Cancellation (from originating station) |
| 04374/04373 | Dehradun - Saharanpur - Dehradun Special Express | 27.06.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 04301/04302 | Moradabad - Saharanpur - Moradabad MEMU Special Express | 27.06.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 14304/14303 | Haridwar Jn - Delhi Jn - Haridwar Jn Special Express | 01.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 14306/14305 | Haridwar Jn - Delhi Jn - Haridwar Jn Special Express | 01.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 22458/22457 | Dehradun - Anand Vihar Terminal - Dehradun Vande Bharat Express | 01.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 19031 | Ahmedabad Jn - Yog Nagari Rishikesh Express | 30.06.24 to 02.07.24 |
| 19032 | Yog Nagari Rishikesh - Ahmedabad Jn Express | 01.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 14310 | Yog Nagari Rishikesh - Lakshmbai Nagar (Indore) Ujjaini Express | 02.07.24, 03.07.24 |
| 14309 | Lakshmbai Nagar (Indore) - Yog Nagari Rishikesh Ujjaini Express | 03.07.24, 04.07.24 |
| 12054/12053 | Amritsar Jn - Haridwar Jn - Amritsar Jn Janshatbadi Express | 28.06.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 19020 | Haridwar Jn - Banda Terminus Express | on 01.07.24 |
| 19019 | Banda Terminus - Haridwar Jn Express | on 30.06.24 |
| 14815/14816 | Shri Ganganagar - Rishikesh - Shri Ganganagar Special Express | 27.06.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 22660 | Yog Nagari Rishikesh - Kochuveli Express | on 01.07.24 |
| 22659 | Kochuveli - Yog Nagari Rishikesh Express | on 28.06.24 |

| RESCHEDULING OF TRAINS | |
|--|--|
| Train No. & Name | Rescheduled of Trains |
| 14618 Amritsar Jn - Banmankhi Jn Jansewa Express | Train will be Rescheduled to depart from Amritsar Jn at 08:35 hrs. instead of 06:35 hrs. (120 minutes late) on 27.06.24 to 30.06.24 |
| 19020 Haridwar Jn - Banda Terminus Express | Train will be Rescheduled to depart from Haridwar Jn at 14:15 hrs. instead of 13:30 hrs. (45 minutes late) on 27.06.24, 29.06.24, 30.06.24 |
| 14718 Haridwar Jn - Bikaner Jn Express | Train will be Rescheduled to depart from Haridwar Jn at 18:00 hrs. instead of 16:45 hrs. (75 minutes late) on 27.06.24, 29.06.24 |
| 04212 Chandigarh - Varanasi Jn Express | Train will be Rescheduled to depart from Chandigarh at 11:30 hrs. instead of 09:30 hrs. (120 minutes late) on 30.06.24 |

| PARTIAL CANCELLATION OF TRAINS | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|---|
| Train No. & Name | Short Terminate at/Short Originate from | Partially Cancelled between Station | Date of partially cancellation (from the Originating Station) |
| 12018/12017 Dehradun - New Delhi - Dehradun Express | at/from Saharanpur | Dehradun - Saharanpur - Dehradun | 01.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 04502 Una Himachal - Haridwar Express | at Ambala Cant Jn | Ambala Cant Jn - Haridwar | upto 02.07.24 |
| 04501 Haridwar - Una Himachal Express | from Ambala Cant Jn | Haridwar - Ambala Cant Jn | 27.06.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 12171 Lokmanya Tilak - Haridwar Express | at Meerut City | Meerut City - Haridwar | 27.06.24, 01.07.24 |
| 12172 Haridwar - Lokmanya Tilak Express | from Meerut City | Haridwar - Meerut City | 28.06.24, 02.07.24 |
| 22918 Haridwar - Banda Terminus Express | from Meerut City | Haridwar - Meerut City | on 27.06.24 |

| REGULATION OF TRAINS | |
|---|--|
| Train No. & Name | Regulation of Train at Station |
| 14717 Bikaner - Haridwar Express | Train will be Regulated for 75 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 28.06.24 |
| 14616 Amritsar - Lal Kuan Express | Train will be Regulated for 60 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 29.06.24 |
| 14717 Bikaner - Haridwar Express | Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 01.07.24 |
| 14618 Amritsar Jn - Banmankhi Jn Exp. | Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 02.07.24 to 03.07.24 |
| 19565 Okha - Dehradun Express | Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes at Delhi Jn on 28.06.24 |
| 12911 Valsad - Haridwar Express | Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes at Delhi Jn on 02.07.24 |
| 12358 Amritsar Jn - Kolkata Express | Train will be Regulated for 15 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 01.07.24 |
| 22552 Jalandhar City - Darbhanga Jn | Train will be Regulated for 30 minutes at Ambala Cant Jn on 30.06.24 |
| 14317 Lakshmbai Nagar (Indore) - Yog Nagari Rishikesh Express | Train will be Regulated for 45 minutes at Delhi Jn on 29.06.24 |

| DIVERSION OF TRAINS | | |
|---|--|----------------------|
| Train No. & Train Name | Diversion Route | Date of passing |
| 15011 Lucknow - Chandigarh Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | upto 02.07.24 |
| 04517 Gorakhpur - Chandigarh Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 28.06.24 |
| 14617 Banmankhi Jn - Amritsar Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | 30.06.24 to 02.07.24 |
| 14673 Jaynagar - Amritsar Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 01.07.24 |
| 14649 Jaynagar - Amritsar Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | 30.06.24, 02.07.24 |
| 15903 Dibrugarh - Chandigarh Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 01.07.24 |
| 04624 Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra - Varanasi | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Moradabad | on 30.06.24 |
| 12326 Nangal Dam - Kolkata Express | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Moradabad | on 29.06.24 |
| 12358 Amritsar - Kolkata Express | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Moradabad | on 27.06.24 |
| 12318 Amritsar - Kolkata Express | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Moradabad | 28.06.24, 02.07.24 |
| 15015 Amritsar - Lal Kuan Express | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Moradabad | on 03.07.24 |
| 12527 Ramnagar - Chandigarh Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 01.07.24 |
| 12317 Kolkata - Amritsar Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 30.06.24 |
| 04529 Varanasi - Bhatinda Jn Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 29.06.24 |
| 04679 Guwahati - Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra | Diverted via Saharanpur - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 01.07.24 |
| 22355 Patliputra - Chandigarh Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 30.06.24 |
| 05656 Guwahati - Jammu Tawi Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 01.07.24 |
| 12357 Kolkata - Amritsar Express | Diverted via Moradabad - Meerut City - Saharanpur | on 02.07.24 |

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Modi lauds Birla for condemning Emergency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for his condemnation of the Emergency in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday and said it was a wonderful gesture to stand in silence in honour of all those who suffered during those days. Birla read out a resolution condemning the Emergency in the Lok Sabha, shortly after he was elected speaker, and flayed the then-government headed by prime minister Indira Gandhi. A large number of MPs stood in silence for a few moments amid protests by Congress MPs and some other opposition members. Modi said in a social media post, "I am glad that the Honourable Speaker strongly condemned the Emergency, highlighted the excesses committed during that time and also mentioned the manner in which democracy was strangled." The Emergency was imposed 50 years ago but it is important for today's youth to know about it because it remains a fitting example of what happens when the Constitution is trampled over, public opinion is stifled and institutions are destroyed, he added. The happenings during the Emergency exemplified what a dictatorship looks like, Modi said. Speaker Om Birla read out the

resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and termed the decision by then prime minister Indira Gandhi an attack on the Constitution, triggering a wave of protests by the opposition in the House. Birla's reference to the Emergency, shortly after his election as Lok Sabha speaker, also saw a face-off between the government and the opposition in the first session of the lower house. "This House strongly condemns the decision to impose Emergency in 1975. We appreciate the determination of all those people who opposed the Emergency, fought and fulfilled the responsibility of protecting India's democracy," Birla said amid vociferous protests by opposition parties. Opposition MPs, including from the Congress, were on their feet, raising slogans against the reference to the Emergency. "June 25, 1975 will always be known as a black chapter in the history of India. On this day, then prime minister Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency in the country and attacked the Constitution made by Babasaheb Ambedkar," the speaker said. Birla said India was known all over the world as the mother of democracy. "Democratic values and debate have always been supported in India. Democratic values have always been protected, they have always been encouraged.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Speaker Om Birla during a meeting at the Parliament House in New Delhi

Indira Gandhi imposed dictatorship on such an India. The democratic values of India were crushed and freedom of expression was strangled," Birla said. He said the rights of Indian citizens were crushed and their freedom snatched away. "Those were the times when opposition leaders were jailed, the entire nation was turned into a prison. The then dictatorial government had put several restrictions on the media

and there was restraint on the autonomy of judiciary," Birla said. The Speaker urged members to observe silence for a while and later adjourned the proceedings for the day. Soon after the House was adjourned for the day, BJP members staged protests by waving placards and raising slogans outside Parliament. BJP MPs, including Union ministers demanded an apology from Congress over the imposition

of Emergency in 1975 and violating the Constitution. With the Congress and its allies in the INDIA bloc persistently targeting the Narendra Modi government for its alleged attack on constitutional values, the ruling alliance has sought to turn the tables by launching a frontal counterattack over the Emergency issue against the backdrop of its 49th anniversary on June 25. Soon after Lok Sabha Speaker Om

Birla adjourned the House after reading out a resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and flaying then prime minister Indira Gandhi for her attack on the Constitution, a large number of BJP-led NDA MPs assembled outside, carrying placards and raising slogans. "Emergency ke liye Congress sharm karo" and "emergency ke liye maafi mango" were among the slogans raised by them. Union ministers Ashwini Vaishnaw, Pralhad Joshi, Kiren Rijiju and Lalan Singh joined other MPs in attacking the Congress. BJP MP and the party's national spokesperson Sambit Patra said, "It is necessary to show the mirror to those who are talking about saving the Constitution and holding its copies in their hands. They were those who tried to erase the Constitution." "That's why we are hearing the slogan: Rahul Gandhi 'maafi mango' (apologise)," Patra said. JD(U) MP and Union Minister Lalan Singh slammed the Congress, saying the party, which had "ripped" the Constitution to shreds by imposing Emergency, does not have the right to talk about protecting its values. "Indira Gandhi, grandmother of the Leader of Opposition (Rahul Gandhi), had imposed the Emergency. What is their right today to talk about the Constitution? Do they have the

right to even discuss about the Constitution," he asked. Union ministers Arjun Ram Meghwal and Gajendra Singh Sekhawat also joined the protest. BJP MP and former Union minister Ravi Shankar Prasad hailed Birla for bringing the resolution on Emergency, saying "it was necessary". The Congress government under then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had imposed Emergency just to hold on to power, he said. Union minister Giriraj Singh took a swipe at the Congress' allies such as the Samajwadi Party, saying Akhilesh Yadav's father and socialist stalwart Mulayam Singh Yadav was among the leaders arrested during the Emergency. BJP MP Bansuri Swaraj said the Congress should apologise to the country for "murdering" democracy 50 years ago. "How bizarre it is that the Congress flashes the Constitution in Parliament but never looks within. The Congress has forgotten its own history that 50 years ago it had murdered democracy by imposing Emergency to serve its selfish political motive and lust for power," she said. Thousands of people were arrested overnight, the BJP MP added. Since Tuesday, the BJP held a large number of events across the country to mark the Emergency's anniversary and the exercise will continue for a week.

Not enough internal demand for satellite launch market in India yet: ISRO chairman



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ISRO Chairman Somanath on Wednesday said there is not enough internal demand for the satellite launch market in India but it can be created through more work on the application of satellite technology. Addressing the India Space Congress 2024, he said big companies are willing to enter the space sector but they are concerned about the timeline for breaking even and securing orders. "When I talk to many of those industries who are willing to come and set up facilities, they are all very ready to do it. But they are asking when they are going to break even and where the orders are so that they can safely invest in this. I think this is a big question. "It is the bigger challenge of convincing investors to come in a big way in big state projects," the leading space scientist said. At a press conference on the sidelines of the Space Congress, he said, "We need

to create more internal demand. That implies internal demand is not enough. All of us are working towards that. The demand will come from the user side, from the communication segment, which, of course, includes big satellite builders." "We would like to find orbital slots and frequencies which can be given to industry to build satellites and launchers. This is the first step towards creating internal demand. InSpace has already announced a funding plan to create a new earth observation constellation. That's again another step towards creating internal demand." Somanath also said although the cost of accessing space has decreased significantly globally, largely due to SpaceX, India's rocket costs have not seen similar reductions. Reducing costs could boost small satellite launches and attract new participants in the space sector, he said. Somanath mentioned that Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision for Amrit Kaal includes extending human space activity beyond the Gaganyaan mission, with the goal of landing on the moon by 2040. However, he said India's current rockets are not sufficient for round trips to the moon. Developing rockets with higher payload capacity is essential for both bringing back samples and future human missions, the ISRO chairman said.

Three new criminal laws to be rolled out from next week

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Union Home Ministry is gearing up to roll out the three new criminal laws from next week with 40 lakh grassroots level functionaries trained to ensure that people are aware about the legislations and the impact these will have on everyone, particularly women and children, official sources said Wednesday. Over 5.65 lakh police, prison, forensics, judicial and prosecution officials have also been trained about the new laws — the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam 2023 — enacted last year. These laws, which will come into effect from July 1, are set to replace the British-era Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act respectively. As the new criminal laws laid emphasis on technology in investigation, trial and court proceedings, the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) has made 23 functional modifications in the existing Crime and Criminal Tracking Networks and Systems (CCTNS) application under which all cases are registered now in every police station in the country, the sources said. The NCRB is also providing technical assistance to the states and Union territories for seamless transition to the new system. Further, the NCRB formed 36



support teams and call centres for constant review and handholding of the states and Union territories for implementation of the new criminal laws. For capacity building, Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed training modules and shared with all the stakeholders. The BPR&D also conducted 250 training courses, organised webinars and seminars in which 40,317 officers and personnel have been trained. Under its handholding, the states and Union territories have also undertaken capacity building of 5,84,174, including 5,65,746 police officers and personnel from prison, forensics, judicial and prosecution, the sources said. IGOT-Karmayogi Bharat and BPR&D are offering three training courses each on the new criminal laws for which 2,17,985 officials have enrolled so far. In order to ensure that citizens are aware about the transformative reforms and

the positive impact it will have on the citizens particularly women and children, the ministries of women and child development, rural development and panchayati raj have undertaken dissemination of the new laws through webinars in which nearly 40 lakh grassroots level functionaries participated, the sources said. The Department of Legal Affairs has also organised four conferences in state capitals in which delegates from diverse array of fields, including the Chief Justice of India, judges of the Supreme Court and high courts and domain experts have taken part. Under the guidance of Department of Higher Education, the UGC has circulated informative flyers on new laws to 1,200 universities and 40,000 colleges and AICTE to approximately 9,000 institutions for sensitisation among faculties and students about the new laws. The National Informatics

Centre (NIC) has developed Applications, eSakshya, NyayShruti & eSummon Apps, for facilitating videography and photography of crime scenes, judicial hearings and delivery court summons electronically under the new criminal laws. In order to give wider publicity and spread awareness among the public about three new criminal laws, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has taken up various initiatives. The Press Information Bureau (PIB) has conducted 17 nationwide 'Vartalaps', a media workshop, primarily with the regional media, in states capitals about the benefits of new criminal laws. Public broadcasters Doordarshan and Akashvani have also organised special programmes across the country to highlight significant provisions and benefits of new laws. MyGov has uploaded the informative flyers on the new criminal laws on MyGov social media handles and sent an e-mailer to over seven crore citizens on February 19 through eSampark. The sources said the states and Union territories are fully geared up in terms of technology, capacity building and awareness generation to implement the new laws. The legislations were passed by Parliament in its winter session in 2023. They were assented to by the President and notified in the Gazette of India on December 25, 2023.

Hope suspension of MPs will not be repeated in LS: Rahul

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Congratulating Om Birla for being elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha for a second term, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition MPs on Wednesday hoped they would be allowed to raise the voice of people in the House and incidents like the suspension of MPs will not be repeated. They also urged Speaker to ensure impartiality. Rahul Gandhi said the Opposition wanted the House to function "often and well" and added that it was very important that cooperation happened with trust. Countering the government's claim that the previous Lok Sabha clocked high productivity, the Congress leader also said running the House by silencing the opposition is an undemocratic idea. "I'd like to congratulate you for your successful election... I congratulate you on behalf of the entire INDIA alliance. "This House represents the voice of people of India... Of course, the government has political power, but the opposition also represents the voice of India's people," Rahul Gandhi said. He said the opposition would like to assist the Speaker in his work. "I am confident you will allow us to speak in House," he said. Pointing out that this time the opposition represents



significantly more voices of the Indian people than last time, Rahul Gandhi stressed that it is very important that the voice of opposition is allowed to be represented in the House. "I am confident that you will allow us to represent our voice, allow us to speak, to represent voice of people of India," the leader of Opposition said. The question, he said, is not how efficiently the House is run, but the question is how much of India's voice is allowed to be heard in the House. "The idea that you can run the House efficiently by silencing the voice of opposition is a non-democratic idea. "This election has shown that the people of India expect the opposition to defend the Constitution of this country and we are confident that by allowing opposition to speak, you will do your duty of defending the Constitution of India," the Congress MP said.

Division of votes not allowed in Speaker's election: TMC

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee said on Wednesday the pro-tem speaker did not allow voting in the election for the Lok Sabha speaker even as several opposition MPs sought a division of votes, adding that it showed the government did not have the numbers. He told reporters outside Parliament that, according to the rules, division of votes has to be allowed even if a single member demands it. "The rule says that if any member of the House asks for division, the pro-tem Speaker has to allow it. You can clearly see and hear from the footage of the Lok Sabha that several members of the Opposition sought and asked for a division," Banerjee said. "The motion was adopted without putting it to vote. This is a clear testament to the fact that the ruling dispensation, the BJP, does not have the numbers... This Government is running without the numbers. It's illegal, immoral, unethical and unconstitutional and the people of the country have already shown them the door. It's just a matter of time before they're shown the door again," the Trinamool Congress (TMC) MP said. National Democratic Alliance (NDA) nominee Om Birla was elected Lok Sabha speaker after a motion moved by Prime Minister Narendra Modi was adopted through voice vote, capping intense debate on the issue with the opposition



in a rare move proposing its own candidate. Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab made the announcement after the Opposition, which had forwarded the name of eight-term Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh as its candidate, did not press for votes to the motion. Responding to a question that the Opposition did not press for a division of votes, Banerjee said, "The question is not about how strongly the division (of votes) was sought. The rule says that even if one out of 500 people ask for division, it has to be allowed." "Only the Pro-tem Speaker can clarify why the division wasn't allowed. He was sitting in the chair and hence he can answer," he added. Another TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee also said the Speaker's election was not conducted in accordance with the law.

Self-reliance in defence manufacturing gets boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Wednesday here handed over the Medium Range-Microwave Obscured Chaff Rocket (MR-MOCR) to the Indian Navy, Defence Ministry said. Giving details, officials said Microwave Obscured Chaff (MOC), a niche technology developed by DRDO's Defence Laboratory, Jodhpur, obscures radar signals and creates a microwave shield around platforms and assets, thus reducing radar detection. Special type of fibres, with diameter of few microns and unique microwave obscuration properties, has been assembled in the medium range chaff rocket. The rocket, when fired, forms microwave obscuring cloud in space spreading over a sufficient area, with adequate persistence time, thus creating an effective shield against hostile threats having Radio Frequency

seekers. The Phase-I trials of MR-MOCR were successfully conducted from Indian Navy ships, demonstrating the MOC cloud blooming and being persistent in space. In Phase-II trials, the Radar Cross Section (RCS) reduction of an aerial target to the extent of 90 per cent has been demonstrated and cleared by the Indian Navy. The number of MR-MOCR, meeting all the qualification requirements, has been successfully handed over to the Indian Navy. Defence Minister Rajnath Singh complimented DRDO and the Indian Navy on the successful development of MR-MOCR. He termed the MOC technology as another step towards achieving Aatmanirbharta in defence. The MR-MOCR was handed over by DRDO chief Samir V Kamat to Director General of Naval Armament Inspection, Indian Navy Rear Admiral Brijesh Vashista. The DRDO Chairman congratulated the Defence Laboratory, Jodhpur team for this significant achievement.

Trainees of King Fahad Naval Academy join 1TS of Indian Navy

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further enhance bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia, 76 trainees of King Fahad Naval Academy of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) joined the First Training Squadron, ITS of the Indian Navy at Southern Naval Command, Kochi on Monday, navy said here on Wednesday. Giving details, officials said this is the second batch of trainees who would be undergoing training with ITS, the first batch having undergone similar training in May-June 2023. The trainees were extended a warm welcome by Senior Officer ITS, Captain Anshul Kishore during the inaugural address outlining the four weeks long training programme. The training curriculum ranges from basic seamanship activities to

simulator based training during the harbour phase, whereas the sea phase focuses on practical exposure to nuances of life at sea. The trainees would also be familiarised with sail training onboard sail training ship of ITS. The afloat attachment of RSNF trainees is being conducted alongside Indian Naval trainees of 107 Integrated Officers Training Course (IOTC) fostering camaraderie and mutual understanding between the trainees of both maritime nations. It may be recalled that Admiral Fahad Abdullah S Al-Ghofaily, Chief of Staff, RSNF had visited Southern Naval Command in January during his official visit to India. The bilateral training cooperation between the two Navies is a testimony to longstanding friendship and shared commitment between India and Saudi Arabia.

Ex-Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey dies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey died at a hospital here on Wednesday due to health complications. He was 90. He was not keeping well for the past few weeks and had been admitted to hospital in Delhi earlier this month. Dubey is survived by his wife and two daughters. His funeral is planned for Thursday at Lodhi Road crematorium, it was learnt. The veteran diplomat served as India's foreign secretary during 1990-91. He was also India's High Commissioner to Bangladesh and the Permanent Representative to UN Organisations in Geneva. After retirement from foreign service, Dubey also served as the president of New Delhi-based Council for Social Development (CSD), he said. The former foreign secretary was also considered an expert on disarmament.

Congress-led UDF slams Kerala Govt in Assembly over price rise

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The Congress-led UDF Opposition in Kerala on Wednesday slammed the ruling Left in the assembly over the issue of rise in prices of vegetables, fish and poultry in the state, accusing it of being 'oblivious' to the plight of the common people.

The Opposition made the allegation in its motion seeking adjournment of the House proceedings to discuss the issue of rise in prices of vegetables and other food items in the state.

UDF MLA Roji M John said that last week the government said in the House that it was not aware about the rise in prices, which indicates that it was oblivious to what was happening and how people were being affected.

The allegations by the UDF were rejected by state Minister for Food and Civil Supplies G R Anil claiming that the government has carried out effective market interventions to control the rise in prices.

The minister also contended that the rise in prices of such items and inflation were much higher in the neighbouring states than in Kerala.

He also said that adverse weather conditions and reduced supply of vegetables from neighbouring states also



contributed to a decrease in their availability and a resultant rise in prices. Besides that, the financial restrictions imposed on Kerala by the Centre were also a reason for the rise in prices of commodities in the state, he claimed.

Anil said the government was carrying out effective market interventions and therefore, there was no need to adjourn the House to discuss the matter.

In view of the explanation given by the minister, Speaker A N Shamseer denied permission for the notice to adjourn the House.

In response, Leader of Opposition in the state

assembly V D Sathesnan said that the government appeared to have no answers as to what steps it has taken to address the issue of price rise as the minister primarily spoke about the public distribution system and ration shops.

He alleged that the government, its agencies and departments have seriously failed to address the issue of price rise.

"When you (government) talk of making corrections, this is where you should correct yourself. In view of the serious failure on the part of the government, its agencies and departments to address the issue of price rise,

we are staging a walkout," he said. The prices of vegetables and fish are soaring in Kerala, with vendors attributing it to the extreme summer and untimely rains in Tamil Nadu, the major vegetable supplier to Kerala.

Fish prices are skyrocketing due to the shortage of landings caused by the 52-day annual trawling ban which came into effect from June 9. Sardines, which are considered the common man's fish and usually sold at Rs 100 and below, are now sold for Rs 300 to 400 per kg, a point which was also raised in the House by UDF MLA John during the proceedings, community members.

Assam flood situation improves, nearly 1.5 lakh still affected



PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam's flood situation improved on Wednesday with the water level of major rivers and their tributaries receding even as nearly 1.50 lakh people in seven districts were reeling under the deluge, a bulletin said.

The flood-hit districts witnessed light to moderate rainfall, leading to a fall in the water level of all major rivers flowing below the danger mark, except the Kushiya river in Karimganj, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority (ASDMA).

Nearly 1.50 lakh people were reeling under the deluge in Barpeta, Cachar, Darrang, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Kamrup and Karimganj.

The number of affected people was 1.53 lakh on Tuesday.

The toll in this year's flood, landslide and storm has risen

to 41 with one death due to drowning reported from Cachar district on Tuesday, the bulletin said. Karimganj is the worst hit with nearly 84,000 people suffering, followed by Cachar with 52,400 and Darrang with 6,500, it said.

Altogether, 149 camps and relief distribution centres have been set up by the district administrations with over 26,000 people taking shelter there.

At present, 556 villages are currently underwater and 1,547.35 hectares of crop areas have been damaged, according to the bulletin of the Assam State Disaster Management Authority.

Embankments, roads, bridges and other infrastructure have been damaged by floodwater in Chirang, Darrang, Goalpara, Golaghat, Kamrup, Kokrajhar, Nagaon, Nalbari, Tamulpur, Udalguri, Golaghat, Hojai and Sonitpur.



Incessant rain causes extensive damage in Kerala

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Houses were damaged, trees uprooted, and water levels rose steadily in rivers and dams across Kerala after heavy rains accompanied by strong winds continued to lash several parts of the state on Wednesday.

High tides and sea incursions were reported in districts like Thrissur and Ernakulam, and landslides wrecked havoc in the high ranges of Kozhikode. Several houses have been damaged in Alappuzha, Kannur and Idukki districts following heavy downpour and winds since on Tuesday night, authorities said.

A portion of the "annadana mandapam" (dining hall) at the famed Ochira Parabrahma Temple in Kollam district collapsed in incessant rains. A number of trees reportedly got uprooted on the banks of Periyar River in Aluva near Ernakulam. Shutters at a number of dams, like Malankara, Pambala, and

Kallarkutty, were raised to release excess water. The District Administration of Ernakulam urged people living on the banks of the Muvattupuzha and Thodupuzha rivers to maintain extra vigil as three shutters of Malankara Dam were raised by one metre each. In view of continuing rains, a holiday was declared for educational institutions in Kottayam district on Wednesday. As per the latest radar imagery, moderate to intense rainfall with winds gusting up to 40 kmph is expected in Kollam, Pathanamthitta, Kottayam, Idukki, Ernakulam, and Thrissur districts in the coming hours. The state Disaster Management Authority warned that water logging on major roads and poor visibility may lead to traffic congestion. It suggested regulating traffic effectively and restricting non-essential movements of people.



No order from Raj Thackeray to support any party in council polls: MNS leader

PTI ■ MUMBAI

MNS leader Sandeep Deshpande on Wednesday said there was no order for them from party chief Raj Thackeray to vote for any particular party in the polls underway on Wednesday for four seats of the Maharashtra legislative council.

Notably, the Maharashtra Navnirman Sena (MNS) supported the ruling Mahayuti in the state, comprising the BJP, Shiv Sena led by Chief Minister Eknath Shinde and the NCP headed by Deputy CM Ajit Pawar, in the recently-concluded Lok Sabha elections.

Polling was being held on Wednesday in the Mumbai Graduates, Mumbai Teachers, Nashik Teachers and Konkan Graduates constituencies of the state



legislative council, as the terms of their sitting members are expiring in July. In the Konkan Graduates constituency, there is a direct fight between sitting BJP MLC Niranjan Davkhare and Congress candidate Ramesh Keer. Last month, the MNS fielded filmmaker Abhijit Panse for the Konkan Graduates seat but he later withdrew from the fray.

Asked about the MNS stand for the MLC polls after it supported the Mahayuti in the Lok Sabha elections, Deshpande told reporters here, "We are free to vote today for any candidate of our choice. There is no order from our leader Raj Thackeray to vote for a particular party or candidate."

The MNS electors will vote as per their individual choice, he added.

Drug trafficking has declined in Manipur with people's support: CM

PTI ■ IMPHAL

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh on Wednesday said drug trafficking cases have declined in the state to some extent as people from the hills and valley and security forces have supported the administration in its effort to address the issue.

He also claimed that poppy plantations in the state have also decreased by 50-60 per cent as per satellite data mapping. Singh called for the eradication of drug menace in the state.

"With the active support of the hill village chiefs, valley-based civil societies and security personnel, drug trafficking in the state has declined to some extent. Even poppy plantations have decreased by 50-60 per cent as per satellite data mapping," he said at an event organised here on the occasion of International Day against Drug Abuse and Illegal

Trafficking. Manipur in the 1990s was badly affected by the drug menace, and the rate of HIV-positive cases was then one of the highest in the country, he said.

Singh also said his government had launched a war against drug abuse, and many smugglers and individuals associated with international cartels were arrested.

The chief minister flagged off a bike rally to observe the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illegal Trafficking from his secretariat.

"More than a hundred officers and security personnel, who are taking part in the rally, will carry the message of the importance of war against cross-border illegal trafficking in the state. With support from the masses, the government will remain committed to uproot the drug menace from the state," he added

Impasse over swearing-in: 2 newly elected TMC MLAs on sit-in, awaiting Guv's arrival in House

PTI ■ KOLKATA

Amid an impasse over their swearing-in, two newly elected Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLAs started a sit-in on Wednesday on the premises of the West Bengal assembly, awaiting Governor C V Ananda Bose's arrival by 4 pm to administer their oath of office or authorise the Speaker to do it.

The two MLAs, Sayantika Bandyopadhyay and Rayat Hossain Sarkar were elected from Baranagar near Kolkata and Bhagwangola in Murshidabad district, respectively.

Raj Bhavan has maintained that the oath-taking ceremony should occur before Bose at the Governor's House.

"We have requested the Honourable Governor to come to the assembly and administer the oath of office or delegate it to the Speaker. However, he has



declined both options. Therefore, we are waiting on the assembly staircase," Sarkar told reporters.

Sarkar and Bandyopadhyay were seen carrying placards requesting the governor to allow them to fulfil their duties as elected representatives.

"Until we take the oath, we cannot function as MLAs. The people of our constituencies are suffering," Bandyopadhyay said.

Sarkar also mentioned that he and Bandyopadhyay will wait until 4 pm for the Governor to conduct the oath-taking ceremony or give his consent for the swearing-in to take place in the presence of the Speaker and Deputy Speaker.

Speaker Biman Banerjee stated, "The oath-taking ceremony is a constitutional protocol, and it is very unfortunate that we are facing this situation. If the Governor is willing, he can come to the Assembly and administer the oath. We will make all necessary arrangements. We have no objection. But there should not be an impasse."

The Governor had invited both MLAs to attend the oath-taking ceremony at Raj Bhavan on June 26.

According to constitutional norms, the Governor can administer the oath to an MLA. However, conventionally in the case of by-polls, he assigns the Speaker or the Deputy Speaker to perform this duty in the Assembly.

4.37 lakh girl students enroll for 2 financial aid schemes in Gujarat

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Nearly 4.37 lakh girls have registered to avail benefits under two schemes launched by the Gujarat government in March to provide financial assistance to eligible female students from Classes 9 to 12, officials said.

While 4.03 lakh girl students have registered for the 'Namo Lakshmi Yojana', nearly 37,000 have enrolled for the 'Namo Saraswati Vigyan Sadhana Yojana' as part of the 'Shala Praveshotsav - Kanya Kelavni Mahotsav 2024', an annual drive to enlist students in Class 1 in Gujarat, an official release said on Tuesday.

Under the 'Namo Lakshmi Yojana', the government will provide Rs 50,000 over a period of four years to girls wanting to take admission in Classes 9 to 12 for the academic year 2024-25. This scheme is applicable to girls whose family income is less than Rs 6 lakh per annum, said the release.

The beneficiary students, after securing admission in Class 9, will receive Rs 500 per month for 10 months each year, and the remaining Rs 10,000 will be disbursed after they pass the Class 10 board exam, it said.

Students in Classes 11 and 12 will receive Rs 750 per month for 10 months each year, and Rs 15,000 will be given after



they clear the Class 12 board exam, the release said.

The scheme will cover girls studying in government, aided and private schools.

The 'Namo Saraswati Vigyan Sadhana Yojana' aims to encourage students to opt for the science stream and excel in it, said the release.

Students in Classes 11 and 12 who have opted for science will receive Rs 1,000 per month for 10 months, totalling Rs 20,000 over two years, and the remaining Rs 5,000 will be disbursed after they pass the Class 12 board exam.

The aid amount under both the schemes for June and July months will be credited to the bank account of the student's mother or the pupil's own account through DBT (Direct Benefit Transfer), said the release.

House partially razed in Goa village: CM Sawant orders high-level probe

PTI ■ PANAJI

Goa Chief Minister Pramod Sawant has met the family whose house in Assagao village has been partially demolished by some persons allegedly over a property dispute and ordered a high-level inquiry into the incident.

After meeting the Agarwadekar family late Tuesday night, Sawant also assured them the government would rebuild their house and the expenses would be recovered from the culprits.

The incident took place at the one-storey house in Assagao village of North Goa at around 11.30 am Saturday. Some persons allegedly kidnapped a man and his son living in the house and later



dumped them in the village, an official said on Tuesday.

Police have arrested two persons, including one who claims to be the property owner, and are searching for more suspects in connection with incident, he said.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday said no

family, Sawant told reporters that the state government will rebuild the house and all the expenses would be recovered from the accused in the case. Prinsha Agarwadekar, a member of the affected family, told the chief minister that police were reluctant to act against the accused though she personally rushed to a local police station on Saturday when the demolition was being carried out and her husband and son were kidnapped.

Sawant assured that a high-level inquiry committee led by state Chief Secretary Puneet Kumar Goel would conduct a probe into the incident and all those found guilty of shielding the offenders would be taken to task.

HC refuses to interfere in hijab ban decision of Mumbai college

PTI ■ MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday refused to interfere in a decision taken by a city-based college to impose a ban on hijab, burka and naqab in its premises.

A division bench of Justices A S Chandurkar and Rajesh Patil said it was not inclined to interfere in the decision taken by the college and dismissed a petition filed against it by nine girl students, who are in the second and third year of a science degree course.

The students moved the HC earlier this month, challenging a directive issued by the Chembur Trombay Education Society's NG Acharya and DK Marathe College imposing a dress code under which students cannot



wear a hijab, naqab, burka, stoles, caps and badges inside the premises.

The petitioners claimed such a directive was against their fundamental rights to practice their religion, right to privacy and right to choice.

The plea termed the college action as "arbitrary, unreasonable, bad-in-law and perverse".

The petitioner's advocate, Altaf Khan, last week submitted before the HC certain verses from the Quran to support their claim that wearing hijab was an essential part of Islam.

Apart from the right to practice their religion, the petitioners were also relying on their right to choice and privacy while opposing the college's decision, he said.

The college had claimed the decision to ban hijab, naqab and burka in its premises was merely a disciplinary action for uniform dress code and was not against the Muslim community.

Senior counsel Anil Anturkar, appearing for the college management, said the dress code was for all students belonging to every religion and caste.

The girls, however, claimed in their plea that such a directive was "nothing but colourable exercise of power". They initially requested the college management and principal to withdraw the restriction on naqab, burka and hijab and allow it "as a matter of right of choice, dignity and privacy in the classroom".

The girls also raised their grievance against the notice with the chancellor, vice chancellor of the Mumbai University and the University Grants Commission, requesting their intervention "to upkeep the spirit of imparting education to all citizens without discrimination".

However, when the students did not get any response, they filed a petition in the HC.



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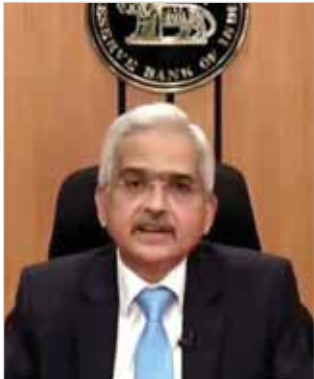
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Optimistic outlook

Indian economy continues to grow despite facing hurdles like inflation and unemployment

In his second term, Prime Minister Modi had given a call to make India a 'five trillion economy.' Though the dream is still to be realised, it gave a sense of direction and hope to India's entrepreneurs and stakeholders. But every goal has a meandering path one must negotiate to reach it. Indeed, as the world's fifth-largest economy, India continues to capture the attention of global investors and economists alike. It is a key player in the global economic landscape. However, several impediments need to be done away with to reach the goal. Recently, Shaktikanta Das, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI), expressed confidence in India achieving a 7.2 per cent GDP growth rate for the current fiscal year. This assertion is significant from the policy point of view and needs scrutiny of the factors contributing to this optimistic outlook. No doubt, India's economy has shown resilience in the face of various challenges, including the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and global geopolitical tensions. Several economic indicators reveal a mixed yet promising picture. In recent years, the Indian economy has been touted as the fastest-growing economy in the world. The Indian economy has demonstrated robust growth in recent years, recovering from the pandemic. Its GDP grew by 7.8 per cent in the first quarter of FY 2023-24, indicating a strong economic momentum.



But on the downside, price rise and inflation are a big cause of concern. Right now, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) inflation stood at 4.6 per cent in May 2024, within the RBI's comfort zone of 4%±2% which could be counted as a positive indication for the growth. Another grey area of the economy has been unemployment.

The unemployment rate remains a critical issue, with urban unemployment at 7.8 per cent and rural unemployment at 7.4 per cent in June 2024. Despite improvements, job creation in key sectors like manufacturing and services remains low. Jobs are essential for sustaining growth which is a red flag for growth right now. Sincere efforts need to be made to tackle this menace as it can mitigate all the positive indicators. On positive side, India continues to attract significant FDI, which totalled \$55.3 billion in the first half of 2024. Besides, the growth of the digital economy has had a good impact on the ease of doing business. India's digital economy is booming, with a projected value of \$1 trillion by 2025. Not to forget the contribution of India's young population which presents a significant demographic advantage. With over 50 per cent of its population under the age of 25, India has a large and dynamic workforce that can drive consumption and innovation. The confidence expressed by RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das in achieving a 7.2 per cent growth rate this year highlights the resilience and potential of the Indian economy. However, addressing the challenges of inflation, global economic uncertainties, and climate change will be crucial in ensuring sustainable and inclusive growth.

PICTALK



Devotees visit the Kamakhya temple that opened for prayers after the four days of Ambubachi Mela, in Guwahati

The dark days of India's Emergency

This period saw the suspension of civil liberties and the censoring of the press leaving an indelible mark on the nation's political landscape



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

Vinashakale Viparith Budhi (Sanskrit for 'as doom approaches mind reverses') is what Lok Nayak

Jayaprakash Narayan told his friends when he was arrested and was being led off by the cops on 25th June 1975 after the proclamation of internal emergency across the nation by the then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. Even members of her cabinet came to know about the proclamation of emergency from the next day's newspapers and the Akashwani bulletins. Jagmohan Lal Sinha, a judge of Allahabad High Court heard the election petition filed by socialist party leader Raj Narayan against Indira Gandhi alleging that she had violated all rules specified in the statute book while fighting the 1971 Lok Sabha election from Rae Bareilly. There was a nationwide belief among the leaders of the opposition parties that chemically treated ballot papers were used in the election. These ballot papers were supplied by the then USSR and they bore the symbol of Congress (Indira) but remained invisible at the time of voting. It was said that the voter's original mark would disappear after voting, and the Congress mark would appear. (Ref: Courting Destiny, A Memoir by Shanti Bhushan, who appeared for Raj Narayan in the case). But Shanti Bhushan decided not to go ahead with the charge of the fake ballot paper and preferred the allegation that Indira had misused government machinery in fighting the poll. The court was convinced of the charge that she had misused her position and power while fighting the poll. Justice Sinha set aside Indira's election and disqualified her for six years. But Sinha stayed his judgment to enable Indira Gandhi to appeal to the Supreme Court. Shanti Bhushan says in his memoirs that there had been several precedents before in which the election of sitting chief ministers had been set aside and they stood disqualified for the commission of corrupt practices and the Courts had never granted a stay to them during the pendency of their appeals. V R Krishna Iyer, the vacation judge



of the Supreme Court who heard Indira Gandhi's appeal challenging the High Court verdict ruled that she could continue as Prime Minister though she was not permitted to her exercise her right to vote in Parliament. The decision of Justice Iyer was seen as an attempt by him to help Indira Gandhi come out of her predicament. Iyer was known for her servility to the then Prime Minister, having served as minister of home and jail in the first elected Communist government in Kerala under E M S Nambudirippadu. In his autobiography 'Wandering in Many Worlds' Iyer has disclosed how EMS was instrumental in getting him appointed as a judge in Kerala High Court. The Communist infiltration of the Indian judiciary and other constitutional establishments is nothing new. Immediately after the proclamation of the emergency, the Constitution was amended by both houses of Parliament to put the election of the Prime Minister and President of India beyond the powers of Courts with retrospective effect.

This was the infamous 39th Amendment of the Constitution (which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). What happened during the Emergency is known to most of the literate people. State Governments not friendly to



TO DATE, INDIA HAS NOT EXPERIENCED THE KIND OF DICTATORSHIP THAT WAS IN FORCE DURING THE DAYS OF INTERNAL EMERGENCY. THE CONSTITUTION WAS DISTORTED AND MISINTERPRETED WHILE COURTS OF LAW WERE STERILISED

the Centre were summarily dismissed making use of the provisions under Article 356 of the Constitution. Press Censorship was imposed which made newspapers get prior sanction from censoring officers to publish news. To date, India has not experienced the kind of dictatorship that was in force during the days of internal emergency. The Constitution was distorted and misinterpreted while Courts of law were sterilised. The Preamble of the Constitution itself was amended unconstitutionally and terms like Socialism, secularism and unity of the Nation were inserted in it.

This was done after putting all opposition members of parliament in prison under the DIR (Defense of India Rule 1962) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1974, the statutes that gave power to the government to jail anyone daring to question Indira Gandhi's superiority. Lalu Prasad Yadav named his daughter Misa Bharati to commemorate his arrest under the said Act during the emergency.

Now Lalu and his family members are singing a paean to the Nehru-Gandhi clan! Indira Gandhi and the Congress failed to learn anything from the drubbing they got for subverting the Constitution. In 1984, the Congress again derailed peo-

ple's mandate by getting the N T Rama Rao-led TDP government in Andhra Pradesh dismissed and anointing a faction led by Bhaskara Rao as chief minister. But NTR succeeded in getting his chair back thanks to the initiative by the opposition parties that included Janata Party, BJP and anti-Indira forces. Rajiv Gandhi during his tenure as Prime Minister tried in vain to muzzle the media by attempting to enact a legislation "Defamation Bill" to curb any kind of reports against the Government. This had to be dropped midway through due to massive protests against the same.

One has lost count of the number of times State governments were dismissed by the Congress-led Government at the Centre misusing the provisions of the Constitutions. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was against the terms socialism and secularism for obvious reasons. Though we claim in the preamble of the Constitution that it was adopted on 26th November 1949, what we cover-up is the date on which it was amended by including the terms socialism and secularism in 1976. Congress pontificating the Constitution could be described as the devil quoting the scripture.

(The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUBSTANCE OVER SPECTACLE

Madam — The Prime Minister's call for consensus underscores his commitment to respecting the people's mandate. It is now imperative for the Opposition, especially the INDIA bloc, to collaborate with the Prime Minister. In the previous Lok Sabha, minimal opposition hindered effective governance due to disarray among opposing parties. The unity demonstrated by the INDIA alliance resonated with voters, who expect them to serve as a robust check-and-balance in Parliament. Despite ideological differences and occasional conflicts, their parliamentary performance should mirror the electorate's expectations. The Prime Minister rightly stresses the need for decisive actions over theatrics, aligning with the public's demand for effective governance amidst concerns like unemployment and inflation. Despite ambitious promises such as curbing black money and promoting initiatives like Make-in-India and Viksit Bharat, tangible improvements in people's lives remain scarce. The central government must prioritize substance over spectacle to effectively address these pressing challenges.

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE

Madam — Drug abuse and the illegal drug trade have grown into serious, intractable problems. Substance use disorder affects all age groups, but it is particularly prevalent among the youth. The United Nations observes the International Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking (IDADAIT) on June 26 to highlight the grave dangers posed by drugs. Drug awareness campaigns are central to addressing these issues. A society's socioeconomic status cannot be improved with unhealthy and unproductive members, which is why the dangers of drug abuse are numerous. Drugs bring hazardous diseases and are

Record crop but prices rising



Every year, food grain production in India reaches new record levels, yet retail prices continue to climb. In the 2023-24 period, rice production reached a record high of 1,367 lakh tonnes, and wheat production also hit a record

with 1,129 lakh tonnes. Despite these increases, the government's Department of Consumer Affairs reports that retail wheat prices have risen by about 6%, with rice prices increasing even more sharply. Additionally, the prices of pulses have seen a significant spike over the past year. This paradox of high production and rising prices is largely due to low procurement. As of June 2024, the wheat stock in the central pool stood at 299.05 lakh tonnes, a 5% decrease from June 2023, when it was 313.88 lakh tonnes. This year, the wheat procurement target was set at 310 lakh tonnes, but only 260.71 lakh tonnes were procured. This shortfall threatens to destabilize the entire government-run procurement system, which could lead to cascading effects on the Public Distribution System (PDS) and ultimately cause further escalation in market prices of food items.

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

often linked to crime. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) monitors global drug addiction trends. Making healthy choices and valuing oneself can significantly reduce the risk of drug abuse, which has been a recurring theme of the UN on IDADAIT. Unfortunately, substances like cannabis, cocaine, and heroin are easily accessible in many countries due to lax laws, and their medicinal and recreational benefits are often overstated, overshadowing the harmful consequences of their use. A strong bond between parents and children can help mitigate the risk of drug abuse in the younger generation.

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

ROOF LEAKAGE AT RAM TEMPLE

Madam — It's disheartening to note that just five months after the inauguration of the Shri Ram Janmabhoomi Temple in Ayodhya, the newly constructed Ram Mandir experienced leaking from its roof following heavy rainfall. Head priest Acharya Satyendra Das men-

tioned that the temple's roof lacks adequate drainage, exacerbating the issue. It raises questions about the rush to inaugurate the temple before completion, possibly driven by electoral considerations.

This incident echoes a trend where everything, from examination papers to infrastructure like the Pragati Maidan underpass, seems to suffer under the Modi-led NDA government. Unlike ancient Indian temples that stood for centuries due to devotion rather than political expediency, the Modi government's haste in inaugurating the temple without ensuring its readiness for the monsoon season is evident. The leaking roof of a globally renowned temple raises serious concerns. Fortunately, after senior officials were alerted, Nripendra Mishra, chairman of the temple construction committee, promptly instructed repairs.

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

India will be a true welfare state when it eliminates discrimination

India's genuine progress will be reflected in its dedication to inclusivity, especially in upholding the dignity of individuals with disabilities



AKSHAY JAIN

In the vibrant tapestry of India's democracy, the concept of a welfare state has been a cornerstone since its establishment. Embedded in the Constitution, the commitment to justice, equality, and the promotion of general welfare forms the foundation of India's identity. However, within this grand vision lies a harsh truth often neglected - the challenges faced by persons with disabilities.

Despite the existence of legal frameworks like the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016, and international obligations such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the everyday experiences of disabled individuals paint a different picture. In India, disability is not merely a physical or mental condition; it is a complex barrier that impedes access to basic rights and opportunities. From systemic discrimination to inadequate infrastructure, persons with disabilities face obstacles in every aspect of life. Essential areas like edu-



cation, employment, and healthcare - the pillars of a welfare state - often remain inaccessible dreams for them. Education is frequently highlighted as a key to progress and empowerment. However, for many disabled students in India, quality education is an elusive reality. Despite the National Education Policy and the Right to Education Act, educational institutions often lack the necessary support systems and infrastructure to accommodate diverse needs. The disparity in the national enrolment average between disabled and non-disabled students is stark, with the national average for non-disabled students at 28.4% and less than 2% for disabled students. Government data from UDISE+ shows a dropout rate exceeding 75% for students with disabilities in higher education.

Similarly, the employment scenario for persons with disabilities is bleak. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, the private sector remains largely indifferent, often citing concerns about productivity, costs, and a perceived lack of talented resources. Consequently, unemployment rates among the disabled population are disproportionately high, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and reliance on social welfare schemes.

Healthcare, another critical aspect of a welfare state, presents its own set of challenges for persons with disabilities. Limited access to specialized care, the high cost of assistive devices, and stigma within healthcare settings contribute to their marginalized status. Amidst these challenges, the notion of India as a welfare state falls short for millions of disabled citizens. The true measure of a welfare state lies not in lofty ideals or legislative frameworks alone but in tangible improvements in the lives of its most vulnerable members. It is crucial for the government, civil society, and the private sector to bridge the gap between rhetoric and

reality and ensure the inclusion and empowerment of persons with disabilities. Firstly, disability should be viewed not as a deficit but as a diversity that enriches the social fabric. Secondly, significant investment is needed in accessible infrastructure and services across sectors. From barrier-free buildings to inclusive technology, creating an environment that accommodates diverse abilities is essential for fostering equal participation. Proactive measures such as affirmative action policies, vocational training programs, and sensitization initiatives for employers are necessary. To achieve a truly inclusive society, concerted efforts are needed on multiple fronts. India's journey towards becoming a welfare state must prioritize the rights and dignity of persons with disabilities. Disability should not be an afterthought but an integral part of policy and decision-making processes.

(The writer is the assistant program manager at the National Centre for Promotion of Employment for Disabled People; views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

BENEFITS OF REMAINING IN SHELTER OF GOD

By seeking refuge in the divine, we can navigate the complexities of life with ease



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

All of us wish for a pleasant life ('theek chale'). But we don't know how. We try different things, but something or other keeps on going wrong. Is it an impossible dream? No, it is not. God, being very merciful, has indicated how this can be done. Lord Krishna guides, "This 'maya' (illusory energy) of Mine is divine and very difficult to overcome. Only those, who take shelter in Me, they are able to transcend this maya." (7.14) We get in trouble repeatedly because we are naturally attracted to harmful sense objects. Useful sense objections are fine but how do you know which these are? God gives this intelligence if we remain in His shelter, just like a mother stops her little child from harming himself. God is that eternal mother for us.

Lord Krishna informs, "After efforts of many births, a yogi in the end becomes wise, and he takes My shelter. A great soul, who considers Lord Vasudeva thus everything is very rare." (7.19) We can get started on this journey beginning from now and God will begin to protect us. We must allow some time for it as instructed by Lord Krishna, "Steadfast in yoga, such people while always glorifying Me and endeavouring, having firm vows worship Me with devotion, offering obeisance." (9.17) Then, what happens? God promises, "These people, who worship Me with undivided attention, meditating on Me, for these practitioners of yoga, I help in getting what one does not have and provide security of what one has." (9.22) We get started and God gets started. It is that simple. Then, what happens? Lord Krishna states, "Fix your mind in Me only; engage your intelligence in Me; thus hereafter you will remain in Me only; there is no doubt about this." (12.8) We get to live in God.

What does this mean? God takes care of us as our mother. Our lives will be micromanaged. One will benefit like one can never imagine, because, as indicated earlier, God is everything, not helpless like our bio-



logical mother. Over some time our consciousness will change, as detailed by Lord Krishna, "Through consciousness offering all activities to Me; practising buddhi-yoga, having taken My shelter be always in My consciousness." (18.57) Our consciousness, which otherwise is essentially material will change to God consciousness; it will turn spiritual. When this happens, a big change will take place in our lives, as explained by Lord Krishna, "Having My consciousness, you will cross all impediments by My 'kripa' (grace)." (18.58) In the same verse, Lord Krishna warns, "If you will not heed on account of feeling of being the doer, you will perish."

This is what normally happens to us human beings. We must curb our egos; God and ego do not go together. Can you imagine what privileged status we would have achieved if we heed God's instructions? Life will become smooth (theek chalegi). We will wholeheartedly take shelter in God, as instructed by God. In all respects take shelter of God only. We neither get any peace nor liberation at some stage in our eternal journey due to our refusal to surrender to God. We will do so now. What will we do then? We will follow God's instructions as detailed in verse #18.65, which is, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me. You will attain Me only. This I truly promise to you, because you are dear to Me."

The last verse sheds light on the biggest benefit of all, in which the Lord promises, "Take My shelter only; I shall release you from all sins. Do not worry." (18.66) Why do we get repeatedly in trouble? Why are we always worried? Because our bad karmaphalas keep on manifesting. Now what will happen? They will make their appearance and God will forgive us, and we will not be troubled much. This is like being liberated while still in our material bodies. This is simply unbelievable to even think about. I won't stop trying to remain in the shelter of God as much as possible as fast as convenient.

(The writer is a spiritual teacher; views are personal)

A young mother becomes a symbol of hope

Arti, a child bride whose education was cut short, now shines as a local hero, transitioning from e-rickshaw driver to Amal Clooney Award winner, embodying resilience and empowerment



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR



Her face is bathed in sweat and her hair is dishevelled. But neither the scorching June heat nor the humidity can wear down the wide smile on Arti's face. Even the power cut at the Aga Khan Foundation's Project Lehar Centre, where she has been coming for entrepreneurial training, cannot dim her joy. She has just admitted her young daughter to one of the top English medium schools in Bahraich district in Uttar Pradesh.

This is a dream come true for the 19-year-old single mother whose own education came to an end after being married off as a child. What has made this feat even more special for her is that it was the school that expressed keenness to admit her four-year-old daughter. The telephone call from its founder inviting her to fill out the form came soon after Arti was returning from the school having been told admissions for the session were closed. While the call and offer to waive all tuition fees came as a big surprise to Arti, it was not totally unexpected.

Ever since Arti, an e-rickshaw driver, hit the national headlines for winning the prestigious Amal Clooney Women's Empowerment Award in May this year, she has become a celebrity in Bahraich. Given to young women around the world in recognition of their determination and ability to overcome challenges and make a difference, the international award has catapulted Arti from being just another pink e-rickshaw driver to the official brand ambassador for women's empowerment in Bahraich, an aspirational district with low socio-economic indicators.

The buzz around her has been non-stop since her return from London where she went to receive the award from the King's Trust International founded by King Charles. There has been unrelenting attention by local and national media to know more about her remarkable jour-



WHEN THE TEAM MET ARTI, SHE WAS LIVING WITH HER MOTHER IN BAHARAICH'S RISIA BLOCK HAVING LEFT AN ABUSIVE MARRIAGE, ARTI WAS DIRECTIONLESS. MARRIED AT 13 AND A MOTHER AT 14, ARTI LACKED BOTH SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE

ney, including her ride in a pick-rickshaw to meet King Charles at the award reception in Buckingham Palace. She has also been publicly felicitated by top leaders and officials of the district. But all this would have never been possible had Arti not met the Aga Khan Foundation (AKF) Project Lehar team. Instituted to provide vocational training, entrepreneurship, and life skills courses to marginalised young women, Project Lehar run by AKF in partnership with The King's Trust International, enables girls and young women from disadvantaged backgrounds to learn, earn, and thrive. When the team met Arti, she was living with her mother in Baharaich's Risia block Having left an abusive marriage, Arti was directionless. Married at 13 and a mother at 14, Arti lacked both skills and confidence. On her mother's insistence, she agreed to join Project Lehar. Little did she know that her life was about to change. Not far away, in Lauki, another village in the same block a young widow with three children was struggling to make two ends meet after the death of her husband. She was only 20 when she came in touch with the Lehar team.

Left to fend for her children alone, Bitti wanted to do something other than supporting her family as a daily wagger and registered for the project. Here she would meet Megha, Saira Bano and Bhagyalakshmi, all young widows with similar backgrounds and living in difficult circumstances. Fate was about to give these four and Arti a collective second chance at life. In June 2023, when Seema Shukla Project Coordinator, state programme

manager Sudhir and the AKF team were mulling over the possibility of teaching them to drive and using this skill as a means of livelihood on the lines of the popular Sakha cabs driven by only women, it was Monika Rani, the dynamic Bahraich district magistrate, who turned this idea into reality.

"We were considering how to make the girls economically self sufficient and hit upon the idea of launching the pink e-rickshaw initiative under the government Mission Shakti scheme to empower women and expand their income earning opportunities. We wanted to give single mothers, widows and women separated from their husbands the first chance to come out of the house, increase their mobility and regain their confidence," says Monika Rani. So on October 2, 2023, these five girls were chosen as the first recipients of a batch of 10 girls from Project Lehar to be given the pink e-rickshaws under this innovative scheme. A loan of Rs 1.66 lakh was provided and repayable in 38 months at an EMI of Rs 4500. Since then, there has been no looking back. Not only have the women paid eight instalments already, but they are also transforming their lives. From eating just one meal a day, Saira Bano can now give her children proper nutritious food. "I have seen days where my two children and I ate just namak and roti.

Now I earn enough to fulfill every need of my children. I want to do better so that I can build my own house and get an electric connection so that my children don't have to study under a lamp and I don't have to pay to charge

my e-rickshaw," shares Saira. The confidence Bitti has gained has given her the courage to demand her right to the family land. She has filed a case in the civil court and wants her father-in-law to put her deceased husband's share in her son's name. "I am paying the fees for the lawyer from the money I earn as a e-rickshaw driver. I never thought I would be able to take such a big step," reveals Bitti. Bhagyalakshmi has opened a tiny kiosk selling biscuits, sweets and pencils for her mother from her earnings. "I want to expand my business. My dream is to make my elder daughter a doctor and the younger one a policewoman. When my income increases I will shift them to an English medium school. I want my children to have a bright future," she says. For Megha too, the e-rickshaw has been life-changing. "I am happy because my economic situation has changed for the better. Now I can give my children better education. I have admitted the two children to private English medium school and can the monthly fee of Rs 250 for both of them. Education will ensure they never have to live on charity like I did." While association with Project Lehar and the opportunity to become self-reliant thanks to the pink e-rickshaws has turned their lives around, it has been their confidence that has helped them hold their heads high in a male-dominated profession. This is inspiring other village women to step out of their homes and fulfil their dreams.

(Swapna Majumdar is a journalist writing on development and gender. The views are expressed are personal)

Battling the heat and hatred: The ongoing fight for LGBTQIA+ rights

There is widespread violence against women and LGBTQIA+ individuals, fueled by a deeply ingrained prejudices against 'transgressive' love

Be-Loved - Celebrating Pride Month through TheatreKhushi Pahuja In the scorching heat of June 2024, I, along with a lesbian couple, have been shuttling from police station to police station, all to protect their fundamental rights to life and equality. The constant torment for the three of us stems from society's disdain for 'transgressive' love and an unquestioned acceptance of violence against women by family members. Familial and domestic violence is perpetuated and reinforced each time someone scrutinizes and polices one's queerness through one's body. Hope often dwindles with seemingly unending cycles of individual, systemic, and systematic violence. Especially, when



KHUSHI PAHUJA

community members like Prerna (name changed), a 23-year-old lesbian woman says, "We are investing so much money, time, and energy for protecting my rights, is it even worth it? Will things ever change?" In the face of such questions, social workers not only provide a safe listening space and support in bureaucratic procedures; but also share the responsibility of holding on to the beacon of

hope. History reminds us that hope, and perseverance lay the foundational stones for advocacy, action, and change. One history of hope is that of Pride Month. Each year, June is celebrated as pride month around the globe, commemorating the Stonewall Uprising. On June 28, 1969, like many other days in New York City, the police raided a small bar called the Stonewall Inn. Taking advantage of the laws against crossdressing, the police would raid bars to arrest queer and transgender persons. When the same happened at Stonewall Inn, the people protested. Days of riots against police brutality acted as a catalyst for the LGBTQIA+ rights movement. Following this, the movement for LGBTQIA+ rights has

expanded, bringing relief to many within the community. Various events like theatre, music, poetry, sensitisation programs, etc. happen during June all over the world, including India.

Such programs are particularly important as they present possibilities for intersectional dialogue through non-conventional sensitisation methods. An example of this approach is 'Be-Loved', a theatre play by Mumbai-based Theatre Group 'Tamaasha', which was recently co-organized by Nazariya Foundation and SAATHII (Solidarity and Action Against The HIV Infection in India) on June 9 at the Bipin Chandra Pal Auditorium in Delhi. Be-Loved is a musical and satirical drama directed by Sapan



Saran and penned by 17 prominent writers, including artist Bhupen Khakhar, poet Josh Malihabadi, and LGBTQIA+ rights activists Maya Sharma and Saleem Kidwai. Recalling the journey

of making this play, Sapan shares, "Be-Loved is a collaborative effort. It took us about three months to put it together. We opened the play last year in June after rigorous rehearsal for 45 days."

"The play dealt with a very sensitive issue with a lot of care, especially in a context where talking about sex and sexuality is a taboo. They emphasize, "You cannot forget about the issue once you have seen this play. It forces you to think and reflect when you come out of the theater hall." Resonating with this perspective, Urvashi Butalia, feminist publisher and writer says, "The play took stories on queerness by many writers and connected them with real life cases. People can dismiss stories, but it is difficult to dismiss lived realities."

As Rituparna Borah (she/they), Director, Nazariya Foundation pens, "Events like this are the best ways to show to the world that advocacy can be done in various ways either through UN mechanisms, through the government, or plays like this. With collective power we can challenge any hate, discrimination, and violence against the queer-trans community." "Such events help us to reach an audience that is generally not approachable for training sessions, or for whom training sessions are not accessible. Therefore, when we engage with allies through well-accepted mediums like theater, music, etc., the much-needed information gets conveyed to a huge audience," adds Randhoni Lairikyengbam, Assistant Director, SAATHII.

The echoing sentiments of audience members about how the play moved them to highlight the importance of collective efforts toward sensitization using multiple advocacy mediums. It restores hope that change is possible when we create spaces where people can critically reflect on their actions, thoughts, and behaviour, and feel part of the collective. Pride Month, therefore, is not only a time to celebrate queerness and advocate for LGBTQ+ rights but also an opportunity to look back into history and remind ourselves of the perseverance of those who fought for the rights and then move into the future with hope, care, and kindness. (The author is a social worker and a sexuality educator; views are personal. Charkha Features)

France bans extreme-right and radical Islamic groups ahead of polarising poll

AP ■ PARIS

France's government on Wednesday ordered the dissolution of extreme right and radical Muslim groups, four days before the first round of high-stakes legislative elections that may see a surge in support for political extremes. Snap national elections called by pro-business moderate President Emmanuel Macron have plunged the country into a hasty and disorderly electoral race. Immigration, France's retirement age and taxes emerged as top points of contention as the prime minister and two potential challengers for his job held a televised debate Tuesday night. Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin announced Wednesday that the govern-

ment ordered the dissolution of multiple extreme-right and "radical Islamist" groups. A series of decrees announcing the shutdown cited the risk of violence. The groups affected include the GUD, a group known for violence and anti-semitism whose members have provided support for far-right political leader Marine Le Pen in the past. Le Pen's National Rally party is leading all polls ahead of the two-round elections June 30 and July 7, and Macron's centrist alliance is lagging badly. However, the outcome remains highly uncertain due to the complex, two-stage voting system and potential political alliances. In the TV debate, young and fast-rising National Rally president Jordan Bardella renewed

his proposal to abolish free health care for foreigners and toughen regulations around the acquisition of French nationality. But his proposal to prevent dual citizens from accessing certain "strategic" state jobs in particular attracted the ire of Prime Minister Gabriel Attal, who said it revealed the true objectives of a party that has long been tied to xenophobia and racism. "The message you are sending is that when we are dual citizens, we are half-citizens, we are not real French people," Attal said. Attal suggested the real targets of this measure are not dual citizens with high-level positions, when he said Bardella had a Franco-Russian representative in the European Parliament, who sits at the Committee on

Foreign Affairs on security and defense issues. Bardella has softened many of the party's hard-line positions, and was put on the spot during the debate over another key issue, the age of retirement, which Macron's highly contested reform last year raised from 62 to 64, prompting months of protests and weakening his government. The National Rally backs the idea of setting back the retirement age to 62, but Bardella said 42 years of work would be needed to for entitlement to a full pension, de facto raising the retirement age for those who started working later in their 20s. This is the first time since the Nazi occupation during World War II that France could elect a far-right government.

Opposition parties on both sides of the political spectrum have been scrambling to form alliances and field candidates. The elections were called by Macron earlier this month after his party suffered a crushing defeat by the far right in the European Parliament election. Eric Bompard, of the France Unbowed party, part of a new coalition of far-to-center left parties, also came after Bardella's economic program and his proposal to lift taxes for people under 30 years of age. Citing economists, Bompard said the National Rally's program would contribute to making the rich richer, at the expense of the poorest 30% share of the population, while Attal accused the 28-year-old Bardella of personally benefiting from the measure.

ICC convicts al-Qaida-linked leader of atrocities in Mali

AP ■ THE HAGUE

The International Criminal Court has convicted an al-Qaida-linked Islamic extremist leader of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Mali's Timbuktu. Al Hassan Ag Abdoul Aziz Ag Mohamed Ag Mahmoud was accused of playing a key role in a reign of terror unleashed by insurgents on the historic desert city in northern Mali in 2012. He was accused of involvement in crimes including rape, torture, persecution, enforced marriages and sexual slavery. Prosecutors say he was a key member of Ansar Dine, an Islamic extremist group with links to al-Qaida that held power in northern Mali at the time. Al Hassan faces up to life imprisonment when a sentence is handed down at a later date. Prosecutors say he was a key member of Ansar Dine, an Islamic extremist group with

links to al-Qaida that held power in northern Mali at the time. Women and girls suffered in particular under Ansar Dine's repressive regime, facing corporal punishment and imprisonment, the court's then-chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda said at the start of Al Hassan's trial nearly four years ago. "Many were forced into marriage," Bensouda said. "Confined against their will and repeatedly raped by members of the armed group." Al Hassan was involved in organizing such marriages, the prosecutor told judges. She cited one rape victim as saying, "All that was left of me was a corpse." Defence lawyer Melinda Taylor told judges that Al Hassan was a member of the Islamic police force who was "obliged to respect and execute the decisions of the Islamic tribunal. This is what

the police around the world do." In Timbuktu, victims of Ansar Dine crimes were awaiting the verdicts and possible compensation. "We are waiting and hoping for a judgment that will give us justice," said Yehia Hama Cissé, president of a group of victims' associations in the Timbuktu region. "Members of our associations have been raped, had their hands cut off, been whipped, and we would like to be compensated," he said. The court made a reparation order following the 2016 conviction of an Ansar Dine member, Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi. He was sentenced to nine years' imprisonment for attacking nine mausoleums and a mosque door in Timbuktu in 2012. A French-led military operation in 2013 forced Al Hassan and others from power.

UN tells Israel it will suspend aid operations across Gaza

AP ■ WASHINGTON

Senior U.N. officials have warned Israel that they will suspend the world body's aid operations across Gaza unless Israel acts urgently to better protect humanitarian workers, two U.N. officials said Tuesday. The ultimatum is the latest in a series of U.N. steps demanding Israel do more to safeguard aid operations from strikes by its forces and to curb growing lawlessness hindering humanitarian workers. A U.N. letter sent to Israeli officials this month said Israel must provide U.N. workers with a way to communicate directly with Israeli forces on the ground in Gaza, among other steps, the officials said. They spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss ongoing negotiations with Israeli officials. The U.N. officials said there has been no final decision on suspending operations across Gaza and that talks with the Israelis were ongoing. U.N. spokesman Stéphane Dujarric told reporters in New York that U.N. humanitarian coordinator Muhannad Hadi had written to the Israeli military on June 17 and the U.N.'s undersecretary for security, Gilles Michaud, spoke with Israeli military officials Monday. Dujarric called conditions for aid workers in the territory "increasingly intolerable." But he said the U.N. was "pushing all its contacts" with the Israelis to resolve the problems and noted that "the U.N. will not turn its back on the people of Gaza." U.S. officials are talking with the U.N. and Israeli military to try to help resolve U.N. concerns, State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters Tuesday. Asked if the U.S. had received any commitments from Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who is visiting this week to speak with Biden administration officials, Miller said, "we went through a number of specific things that we want to see resolved when it comes to the humanitarian situation and got an assurance to continue to work on those." The Israeli army declined to comment on the U.N. warning, and the Israeli defense ministry did not respond to requests for

'Palestinian who was shot, tied to army jeep posed no threat'

Jenin (AP): When Mujahid Abadi stepped outside to see if Israeli forces had entered his uncle's neighbourhood, he was shot in the arm and the foot. That was only the start of his ordeal. Hours later, beaten and bloodied, he found himself strapped to the searing hood of an Israeli military jeep driving down a road. The army initially said Abadi was a suspected militant, but later acknowledged he had not posed a threat to Israeli forces and was caught in crossfire with militants. Video showing the 24-year-old strapped to the jeep circulated on social media, sparking widespread condemnation, including from the United States. Many said it showed that Israeli soldiers were using him as a human shield — a charge Israel has frequently levelled at Hamas as it battles the group in Gaza. The military said it was investigating the incident and that it did not reflect its values. But Palestinians saw it as yet another

act of brutality in Israel's crackdown on the occupied West Bank, where violence has surged since Hamas' October 7 attack triggered the war in Gaza. Abadi, speaking to The Associated Press from a hospital bed on Tuesday, said he stepped outside his uncle's house in the volatile West Bank city of Jenin on Saturday after he heard a commotion. "I went outside to see what was happening, and looked towards the neighbours' houses, where I saw the army," he said. "When I tried to return to the house, heavy and indiscriminate gunfire was suddenly directed at me. My cousin who was near me was also hit." After he was shot in the arm, he hid behind his family's car. Then he was shot again, in the foot. Unable to move, he called his father and told him he was about to die. "I told him to try not to lose consciousness and to keep talking to me," Raed Abadi said as he stood over his sons

hospital bed. "Suddenly, the call was disconnected." Raed later saw false reports on social media that a Palestinian had been killed in the raid. "I collapsed, because I was 90 per cent sure it was my son," he said. Abadi was not dead, but his suffering had just begun. After a couple of hours, Israeli soldiers found him. He says they struck his head and face and in the areas where he had been shot. Then they dragged him by his legs, lifted him by his hands and feet and threw him onto the hood of the military jeep. "I screamed because of the heat," he said. "Then, one of the soldiers started cursing at me and told me to be quiet." The military said its forces had tied Abadi to the hood of the jeep to transport him to paramedics. But Nebal Farsakh, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent rescue service, said the army had sealed off the area and prevented paramedics from tending to the wounded for at least an hour.

Kenya clears debris after protests in which 6 died

AP ■ NAIROBI

Kenya's woke up to the acrid smell of tear gas still lingering in the capital on Wednesday, a day after protesters stormed parliament and burned part of the building over a controversial tax plan. As the day began, there were no reports of violence, but more protests were expected in coming days. Police and soldiers patrolled the streets as city workers began cleaning up debris. Parliament, the city hall and the supreme court were cordoned off with tape reading "Crime Scene Do Not Enter." The military was deployed overnight to support police as President William Ruto called the events treasonous and vowed to quash the unrest "at whatever cost." Kenya has been rocked by massive protests for over a week in opposition to a proposed finance bill that would

raise taxes as frustrations over the cost of living are simmering. Many young people who helped vote Ruto into power with cheers for his promises of economic relief have taken to the streets to object to the pain of reforms. Thousands of protesters stormed Kenya's parliament Tuesday, burning parts of the building while legislators fled. Police responded with gunfire and journalists counted three bodies at the gates of parliament. The Kenya Human Rights Commission, a non-government organization, said that at least 22 people have died. The commission chairperson, Roseline Odede, told journalists that 300 people were injured in the protests and 50 people were arrested. Herman Manyora, a professor at the University of Nairobi, said that the youth-driven protests could escalate further if the president does not adopt

a more conciliatory approach. "We expected him to appreciate the gravity of the issue and empathize with the young people," Manyora said. "Instead, people saw an angry president who is reading a riot act to the nation." Authorities said police fired over 700 blanks to disperse protesters in the suburb of Githurai, east of the capital Nairobi. Videos of gunfire piercing the night air were shared online. UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres said he was deeply saddened by reports of deaths and injuries. "I urge the Kenyan authorities to exercise restraint, and call for all demonstrations to take place peacefully," he wrote on the social media platform X. In Nairobi, a regional hub for expatriates and home to a United Nations complex, inequality among Kenyans has sharpened along with long-held frustrations over state corruption.

Paris court upholds validity of arrest warrant for Syrian Prez

Paris (AP): The Paris appeals court ruled on Wednesday that an international arrest warrant for Syrian President Bashar Assad issued by France for alleged complicity in war crimes during Syria's civil war is valid and remains in place. Jeanne Sulzer and Clemence Witt, lawyers who represented the plaintiffs, and non-governmental organizations behind the complaint hailed the decision as a historic judgment. In May, French anti-terrorism prosecutors asked the Paris appeals court to rule on lifting the arrest warrant for Assad, saying he has absolute immunity as a serving head of state. "It's the first time that a national court has recognized that the personal immunity of a serving head of state is not absolute," the lawyers said in a statement.

comment. The army claims it is trying to facilitate aid shipments and accuses Hamas of disrupting them, noting Tuesday that the militant group fired a projectile at the humanitarian route near a UNICEF aid convoy. Israel has previously acknowledged some military strikes on humanitarian workers, including an April attack that killed seven workers with the World Central Kitchen, and has denied allegations of others. Citing security concerns, the U.N. World Food Program has already suspended aid delivery from a U.S.-built pier designed to bring food and other emergency supplies to Palestinians who are facing starvation amid more than eight months of war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. U.N. and other aid officials have complained for months that they have no way to communicate quickly and directly with Israeli forces on the ground, in contrast with the

usual procedures — known as "deconfliction" — employed in conflict zones globally to protect aid workers from attack by combatants. Relief groups say Israel's procedure for coordinating aid work requires them to speak instead with an agency within the military. In its letter to Israeli officials, the U.N. cited communication and protective equipment for aid workers as among the commitments that it wanted Israel to make good on for its aid operations in Gaza to continue, the two U.N. officials say. Miller said taking aid from trucks and other criminal attacks were the biggest problems blocking aid delivery within Gaza right now, rather than strikes on aid workers by Israeli forces or commandeering of aid convoys by Hamas. "And so we have been working with the U.N. and Israel to try to find a solution to that problem," including trying to ensure that aid workers "have radios

and other communications equipment so they can communicate with each other and safely move around Gaza," Miller told reporters. The U.N. and other humanitarian organizations also complain of increasing crime in Gaza and have urged Israel to do more to improve overall security from attack and theft. The lawlessness has stymied what Israel said was a daily pause in fighting to allow aid into southern Gaza, with humanitarian officials saying groups of gunmen are regularly blocking convoys, holding drivers at gunpoint and rifling through their cargo. On top of that, "missiles hit our premises, despite being deconflicted," said Steve Taravella, a spokesman for the World Food Program, one of the main organizations working on humanitarian delivery in Gaza. He was not one of those confirming the U.N. threat to suspend operations across the territory.

here with the intention of giving any winnings to local charities," said the now-suspended Labour candidate. "While I did not place this bet with any prior knowledge of the outcome, this was a huge mistake, for which I apologise unreservedly," he said. As in the case of any suspended Tory MPs, the party symbol will appear beside his name in the ballot papers at this late stage in the campaign but he would be considered an Independent MP if elected. Meanwhile, he has said he will "comply fully" with a Gambling Commission's investigation into this bet and "will take the consequences of this stupid error of judgement on the chin." For the Labour Party, having pressured Sunak in the past few days to suspend his betting party colleagues, it was seen as somewhat of an unavoidable move.

UK betting scandal now engulfs Opp Labour Party

London (PTI): The escalating scandal of candidates placing general election-related bets has widened from the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak-led Conservative Party to engulf the Opposition Labour Party after its leader, Keir Starmer, suspended one of his candidates for betting against himself ahead of the July 4 polls. Kevin Craig is running to become Labour's member of Parliament for Central Suffolk and North Ipswich in eastern England, considered a safe Conservative seat. It was previously held by Dan Poulter, who defected from the Tories to Labour ahead of the election before exiting politics. On Tuesday, Craig took to social media to confirm his "huge mistake" of betting in favour of the Tories holding on to their stronghold. "A few weeks ago when I thought I would never win this seat I put a bet on the Tories to win

opened off the coast of Aden, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations (UKMTO) center said. The captain "of a merchant vessel reported a missile impacted the water in close proximity to the vessel," the UKMTO said. "The crew are reported safe and the vessel is proceeding to its next port of call." The UKMTO did not say if the ship had been damaged. Meanwhile, the Israeli military said early Wednesday that a drone "fell off the coast of Eilat." The military activated air raid sirens in the area. The drone "was monitored by (Israeli) soldiers throughout the incident and it did not cross into Israeli territory," the Israeli military said. "During the incident, an interceptor was launched toward the" drone. The Houthis have targeted Eilat before with drones and missiles. However, an Iranian-backed umbrella group known as the Islamic Resistance in Iraq claimed the attack.

Suspected Houthi attack targets ship in Gulf of Aden

Dubai (AP): Suspected attacks by Yemen's Houthi rebels early Wednesday targeted a ship in the Gulf of Aden, while a separate attack claimed by Iraqi militants allied with the rebels targeted the southern Israeli port city of Eilat, authorities said. The attacks follow the departure of the USS Dwight D Eisenhower after an eight-month deployment in which the aircraft carrier led the American response to the Houthi assaults. Those attacks have reduced shipping drastically through the route crucial to Asian, Middle East and European markets in a campaign the Houthis say will continue as long as the Israel-Hamas war rages in the Gaza Strip. Meanwhile, the Houthis faced allegations they seized commercial aircraft that brought back pilgrims from the Hajj amid a widening economic dispute between the rebels and the country's exiled government. The ship attack hap-

recognizes those couples' legal rights, though the city doesn't call them marriages. It has no laws banning same-sex relationships. In September, the Hong Kong's top court ruled that the local government should provide a legal framework for recognizing same-sex partnerships, including rights to inheritance, joint custody of children, taxation, spousal visas and benefits from employment with the local government. That came after LGBTQ+ rights activist Jimmy Sham, who married his husband in New York in 2013, raised a challenge at the city's Court of Final Appeal that Hong Kong's laws violated the constitutional right to equality. That contrasts with the increasingly conservative political tone in the Asian financial hub, where edicts from the authoritarian Communist Party leadership in Beijing have led to criticism from around the world that it's squashing democratic rights and free speech.

Suspected N Korean hypersonic missile exploded in flight, South Korea says

AP ■ SEOUL

A suspected hypersonic missile launched by North Korea exploded in flight on Wednesday, South Korea's military said, as North Korea protests the regional deployment of a US aircraft carrier for a military drill with South Korea and Japan. Later Wednesday, South Korea conducted live-fire drills along its disputed western sea boundary with North Korea, its first since it suspended a 2018 agreement with the North aimed at reducing front-line military tensions in early June. The North Korean missile was launched at about 5:30 am and was aimed toward the North's eastern waters before the failure, South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said. Missile fragments were scattered in the water up to 250 kilometres from the launch site near North Korea's

capital, it said. No damage was immediately reported. The Joint Chiefs of Staff said it believes the weapon was a solid-fuelled hypersonic missile. The launch generated more smoke than normal launches, possibly because of an engine fault, it told South Korean reporters at a background briefing. The contents of the briefing were shared with foreign media. In a three-way phone call, senior diplomats from South Korea, the US and Japan condemned the missile launch as a violation of UN resolutions and agreed to maintain close coordination in response to North Korean threats, according to South Korea's Foreign Ministry. North Korea has performed a series of hypersonic missile tests since 2021 in an apparent effort to acquire an ability to penetrate its rivals' missile defence shields. Foreign experts ques-

tion whether the missiles have achieved their desired speed and maneuverability during the test flights. In recent years, North Korea has also been developing more missiles that use solid propellants. Launches of such missiles are harder to detect than liquid-propellant missiles, which must be fuelled before liftoff. Wednesday's missile test came as the rival Koreas are engaged in Cold War-style psychological warfare using balloons and loudspeaker broadcasts. South Korea said North Korea launched large balloons carrying trash across their border Tuesday night for the sixth time since late May. About 100 balloons with bags of paper waste reportedly fell in South Korean territory. The balloons resulted in the suspension of takeoffs and landings at South Korea's Incheon International Airport,

about an hour's drive from the border, for three hours early Wednesday, in the second such disruption since the North's balloon launches began on May 28, according to South Korean aviation authorities. North Korea says it is responding to balloons launched by South Korean activists that carried political leaflets into the North. On June 9, South Korea briefly conducted propaganda broadcasts from loudspeakers along the border for the first time in years in response to the North Korean balloons. South Korea's military said Monday it is ready to turn on its loudspeakers again. On Wednesday, South Korea forces on front-line islands fired 290 artillery and missile rounds into the waters near the Korea's western sea boundary, the site of several bloody naval skirmishes since 1999, the South Korean marine corps said.

US officiant marries 10 same-sex couples in HK

AP ■ HONG KONG

Ten same-sex couples got married in the United States over the internet from Hong Kong, a semi-autonomous southern Chinese city that does not formally recognize such unions but offers them legal protections. The event Tuesday was timed to mark Pride Month, with a registered officiant from the American state of Utah making their marriages official. Most states require the couple to appear in person to fill out paperwork and present identification, but Utah does not, and its digital application process has made it a go-to for online weddings since the COVID-19 pandemic. Family members gathered in a hotel wedding hall in Hong Kong's Kowloon district as couples exchanged rings, then raised their glasses in a toast. "I hope one day that everybody would accept the fact that love is not just between a man and



a woman. It's between two people who love each other," said Lucas Peng, a 66-year-old Singaporean businessperson living in Hong Kong, and one of the 20 people tying the knot in Tuesday's semi-virtual event. "It's just two humans who love each other. That's the key. That's the important part. And to be able to publicly declare our love for each other today is a very important step for us, definitely," Peng said. Wedding organizer Kurt Tung

said he hoped the event would send a message to the public. "In Hong Kong, there's not yet a way to go to a marriage registry to get married, but there's still this way we can offer for them to realize their dreams of getting married," Tung said. Keeping with cultural and religious traditions, Hong Kong only recognizes weddings between a man and a woman. Self-governing Taiwan is the closest place that issues same-sex marriages, and Hong Kong

US journalist goes on trial in Russia for 'espionage'

AP ■ YEKATERINBURG

Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich went on trial behind closed doors in Yekaterinburg on Wednesday, 15 months after his arrest in the Russian city on espionage charges that he, his employer and the US government vehemently deny.

The 32-year-old journalist appeared in the court in a glass defendants' cage, his head shaved and wearing a black-and-blue plaid shirt. A yellow padlock was attached to the cage. Journalists were allowed into the courtroom for a few minutes before the proceedings were closed. Also briefly permitted in court were two consular officers from the US Embassy in Moscow, according to the embassy.

The next hearing for Gershkovich was set for August 13, court officials said. Jay Conti, executive vice president and general counsel for Dow Jones, publisher of the Journal, described the trial as a sham in an interview with The Associated Press.

"He was an accredited journalist doing journalism, and this is a sham trial, bogus charges that are completely trumped up," Conti said.

The American-born son of immigrants from the USSR, Gershkovich is the first Western journalist arrested on espionage charges in post-Soviet Russia. Authorities arrested Gershkovich when he was on a reporting trip to Yekaterinburg, in the Ural Mountains, and claimed he was gathering secret information for the US State Department has declared him "wrongfully detained," thereby committing the government to assertively seek his release.

The Journal has worked diligently to keep the case in the public eye and it has become an issue in the combative months leading up to the US presidential election.

After his arrest on March 29, 2023, Gershkovich was held in Moscow's notoriously dismal Lefortovo Prison. He has appeared healthy during court hearings in which his appeals for release have been rejected.

"Evan has displayed remarkable resilience and strength in the face of this grim situation," US Ambassador Lynne Tracy said on the first anniversary of his arrest.

Gershkovich faces up to 20 years in prison if the court finds him guilty, which is almost certain. Russian courts convict more than 99 per cent of the defendants who come before them, and prosecutors can appeal sentences that they regard as too lenient, and they even can appeal acquittals.

In addition, Russia's interpretation of what constitutes high crimes like espionage and treason is broad, with authorities often going after people who share publicly available information with foreigners and accusing them of divulging state secrets.

Paul Whelan, an American corporate security executive, was arrested in Moscow for espionage in 2018 and is serving a 16-year sentence.

Gershkovich's arrest came about a year after President Vladimir Putin pushed through laws that chilled journalists, criminalising criticism

of what the Kremlin calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine and statements seen as discrediting the military. Foreign journalists largely left the country after the laws' passage; many trickled back in subsequent months, but there were concerns about whether Russian authorities would act against them.

After he was detained, fears rose that Russia was targeting Americans as animosity between Moscow and Washington grew. Last year, Alsu Kurmasheva, a reporter with dual American-Russian citizenship for the US government-funded Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe was arrested for alleged violation of the law requiring so-called "foreign agents" to register.

Another dual national, Los Angeles resident Ksenia Karelna, is on trial, also in Yekaterinburg, on treason charges for allegedly raising money for a Ukrainian organisation that supplied arms and ammunition to Kyiv. Several Western reporters have been forced to leave after

Gershkovich's arrest because Russia refused to renew their visas. With Gershkovich's trial being closed, few details of his case may become public. But the Russian Prosecutor General's office said this month that he is accused of "gathering secret information" on orders from the CIA about Uralvagonzavod, a plant about 150 kilometres north of Yekaterinburg that produces and repairs tanks and other military equipment.

Not only is Uralvagonzavod strategically sensitive, it's also been a nest of vehement pro-Putin sentiment where an inquisitive American could offend and alarm.

In 2011, a plant manager, Igor Kholmanski, attracted national attention on Putin's annual call-in program by denouncing mass protests in Moscow at the time. Putin later appointed him as his regional envoy and as a member of the National Security Council.

"Evan Gershkovich is facing a false and baseless charge. ... The Russian regime's smearing of Evan is repugnant, disgust-

ing and based on calculated and transparent lies. Journalism is not a crime," Journal publisher Almar Latour and chief editor Emma Tucker said in a statement after his trial date was announced.

"We had hoped to avoid this moment and now expect the US government to redouble efforts to get Evan released," they said.

Russia has not ruled out a prisoner exchange involving Gershkovich but says that's not possible before a verdict in his case. That could be months away, because Russian trials often adjourn for weeks. The post-verdict prospects are mixed. Although Russia-US relations are highly troubled because of the conflict in Ukraine, the Kremlin and Washington did work out a swap in 2022 that freed WNBA star Brittney Griner, who was serving a 9 1/2-year sentence for cannabis possession. But that exchange also freed the highest-value Russian prisoner in the United States, arms dealer Viktor Bout, and the US may not hold

another card that strong. Putin has alluded to interest in freeing Vadim Krasikov, a Russian imprisoned in Germany for assassinating a Chechen rebel leader in Berlin, but Germany's willingness to aid in a Russia-US dispute is uncertain.

The Biden administration would also be sensitive to appearing to be giving away too much after coming under substantial criticism in trading Bout, widely called "the Merchant of Death," for a sports figure.

But Biden may feel an incentive to secure Gershkovich's release because of boasts by former President Donald Trump, who is his main challenger in this year's election, that he can easily get the journalist freed. Putin "will do that for me, but not for anyone else," Trump claimed in May. The Kremlin, however, says it has not been in touch with Trump, and Putin's spokesman Dmitry Pevkov bristled at the attention given to a possible exchange, saying "these contacts must be carried out in total secrecy."

Suspect kills self after shootings near Las Vegas leave 5 people dead, teen hurt

AP ■ LAS VEGAS

A man who fatally shot five people and critically injured a 13-year-old girl at apartments near Las Vegas has killed himself, authorities said on Tuesday.

The North Las Vegas Police Department said the suspected shooter, 57-year-old Eric Adams, killed himself Tuesday morning as he was confronted by officers in a neighborhood. Authorities had been searching for him since Monday night's shootings in separate apartment units.

Efforts to locate relatives of Adams for comment weren't immediately successful. Police said initially they found two women dead while investigating reports of a shooting late Monday at an apartment in North Las Vegas. One of them was in her early 40s and the other in her late 50s, according to the department.

While officers were investigating, the department said, they learned a teen girl had been taken to a hospital with critical gunshot wounds and that there could be more victims in a nearby apartment. Officers then found the bodies of two women in their mid-20s and a man in his early 20s. All five victims had been shot, police said. They weren't immediately identified.

The discovery led to an overnight search for Adams, who authorities had described as "armed and dangerous." Just after 10 a.m. Tuesday, police learned that the suspect had been seen at a business in North Las Vegas.

As officers arrived in the area, they saw the suspect with a firearm, running into the backyard of a nearby home. The department said officers followed him, but the suspect refused to drop his weapon and died by suicide. Police haven't disclosed a motive for the shootings, which they described as an "isolated incident." A spokesperson for the police department didn't respond Tuesday to phone and emailed requests for more information.

Zelenskyy scolds officials who shirk their duties

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signaled Wednesday that he is getting tough on officials he suspects are shirking their duties in the war with Russia that is now in its third year.

Zelenskyy and Commander in Chief Oleksandr Syrskyi visited troops in the eastern Donetsk region who have weathered fierce Russian ground and air assaults in recent months. They also discussed with local officials the drinking water supply, social issues, evacuation plans and the rebuilding of local homes, Zelenskyy said.

He added that back in Kyiv he would speak to "officials who must be here and in other areas near the front line — in difficult communities where people need immediate solutions."

"I was surprised to learn that some relevant officials have not been here for six months or more," Zelenskyy said. "There



will be a serious conversation, and I will draw appropriate conclusions regarding them."

Zelenskyy has frequently visited front-line areas during the war. He said his trip to the Donetsk region was to introduce the new commander of the Joint Forces Command, Andrii Hnatov.

Hnatov replaced Yuriy Sodal, who had held the position since February 2023.

Zelenskyy didn't give a reason for the change, but it came after the widely admired chief of staff of the Azov regiment, Bohdan Krotvykh, released a statement

rebuking an unnamed general for having "killed more Ukrainian soldiers than any Russian general," in what was seen as a reference to incompetent management of troops.

Several Ukrainian media outlets, quoting unidentified sources in the armed forces, said he was referring to Sodal.

Ahead of Zelenskyy's visit, Russian forces dropped a powerful glide bomb on the Donetsk city of Selydove, causing extensive damage to 37 homes, six multi-story buildings and administrative infrastructure, regional authorities said Wednesday. They reported no injuries.

Over the previous 24 hours, the Russian military shelled 20 Donetsk region settlements, killing one person and injuring at least nine, regional head Vadym Filashkin said. About 250 people have been evacuated from their homes in the Donetsk region since Tuesday, officials said.

NATO picks outgoing Dutch PM Mark Rutte as its next secy-general

Brussels (AP): NATO appointed Mark Rutte as its next secretary-general on Wednesday, putting the outgoing Dutch prime minister in charge of the world's biggest security organisation at a critical time for European security as war rages in Ukraine.

Rutte's appointment was sealed by NATO ambassadors during a meeting at the 32-nation alliance's headquarters in Brussels. US President Joe Biden and his counterparts will formally welcome him to their table at a summit in Washington on July 9-11.

The outgoing Dutch premier will take over from the current secretary general, Norway's Jens Stoltenberg, on October 1. Stoltenberg spent more than a decade at the helm. His mandate was repeatedly extended, in part to provide continuity after Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022.



A helicopter drops water on the Apache Fire as it burns in Palermo, Calif., on Tuesday, Jun. 25, 2024. According to Cal Fire, more than a dozen new fires sparked by lightning

Sri Lanka finalises debt restructuring agreement

PTI ■ COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's government said on Wednesday it has finalised a long-delayed debt restructuring agreement for USD 5.8 billion with its bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris to meet a key condition of an IMF bailout.

This was announced by President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office, which said the agreement grants significant debt relief allowing Sri Lanka to allocate funds to essential public services and secure concessional financing for its development needs.

"Sri Lanka reached a final restructuring agreement for 5.8 billion US dollars with its bilateral lenders' official creditor committee in Paris," the President's office said in a statement.

The statement came ahead of a

televised address to the nation later tonight by President Wickremesinghe, who has steered the effort to take the island out of the economic crisis since Sri Lanka declared its first-ever sovereign default in 2022.

President Wickremesinghe, who also holds the portfolio as the finance minister, is expected to contest the presidential election in the coming months. It is understood that Wickremesinghe, 75, will "declare an end to bankruptcy" following the agreement reached with bilateral creditors and private bondholders on external debt restructuring.

State Finance Minister Shehan Samasinghe announced that the Sri Lankan authorities are also in the process of signing bilateral debt treatment agreements between Sri Lanka and the Export-Import Bank of China.

"On behalf of Sri Lanka, I would like to sincerely thank the OCC chairs - France, India, and Japan - as well as the Export-Import Bank of China for their leadership in this process, as well as all OCC members for their unwavering support," he said.

He also commended the OCC Secretariat for their dedication to finding a resolution to our debt crisis and achieving this significant milestone, which will enhance confidence in Sri Lanka's economy and foster growth. This agreement means that half of the government's external debt by creditor countries and organisations has been restructured. The details of the restructuring are yet to be announced.

According to the Treasury figures, as of the end of March 2024, the debt stock outstanding remained at USD 10,588.6 million.

Heatwave kills 450 in Karachi region in 4 days

Karachi (PTI): A searing heat wave that has hit Pakistan's biggest city has led to the death of at least 450 people over the last four days, a leading NGO claimed on Wednesday. The Edhi Foundation said it received at least 427 bodies in the last four days excluding Wednesday while the Sindh government had on Tuesday released 23 bodies in three government hospitals.

Karachi, Pakistan's port city, has been hit by extreme hot weather since Saturday with soaring mercury crossing 40 degrees Celsius for the third consecutive day on Wednesday, temperatures that are too high for a coastal area.

"We have four mortuaries operating in Karachi and we have reached a stage where there is no more space to keep more bodies in our mortuaries," Faisal Edhi, who heads the Foundation, said.

Edhi Trust is the largest welfare foundation in Pakistan and provides various free or subsidised

services to the poor, homeless, orphan street children, discarded babies and battered women.

"The sad fact is that many of these bodies have come from areas where a lot of load shedding is going on even in this harshest weather," he said.

Edhi said most of the bodies belonged to homeless people and drug addicts on the streets.

"The extreme heat wave got to them as these people spend their entire day out in the open searching for fixes," he said only to add: "But only the government hospitals or where they were initially taken to can tell you the real cause of death."

He said on Tuesday itself they had received 135 bodies at their mortuaries and 128 on Monday. Karachiites also have to brave long hours of load shedding in many areas with the electricity supplier, Karachi Electric, now claiming it has to resort to power cuts because the Sindh government still has to clear dues of Rs 10 billion.

Pakistan PM Shehbaz extends olive branch to Imran Khan

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Wednesday extended an olive branch to his predecessor and political rival Imran Khan, offering to hold talks with him if he was facing "troubles" in jail. Khan, the founder of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, has been in jail since August last year after being convicted in some of the nearly 200 cases slapped on the 71-year-old cricketer-turned-politician since his ouster from power in April 2022.

"If their [PTI] founder is facing troubles [in jail], then I reiterate: come, let's sit down and talk," Sharif said while addressing the National Assembly.

"Let us sit together to take the country ahead. Let us talk for the betterment of the country. There is no other way forward," he said.

The Nawaz Sharif-led Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) have been at loggerheads for years, particularly after the February 8 elections, which Khan's party claims it had won.

Commenting on the 2018 elections won by Khan's PTI, Sharif said: "We joined Parliament despite the [rigged] polls. The sort of slogans that were raised during my first speech will always be remembered as a dark chapter in the history books."

"If someone is facing any injustice, then I believe that the scales of justice should be in favour of those [being victimised], there is no difference over it — whether it be any politician or anyone from any walk of life," Geo News quoted Sharif as saying.

Sharif lamented that he had once again, while he was in

the opposition, proposed to Khan to sit for a dialogue but such slogans were raised again.

"So who is responsible for this bitterness [between politicians]. We don't even shake hands now," he said.

Sharif, 72, also recounted his ordeal of facing victimisation by Khan's government and that he was in jail when his mother passed away.

He said that despite being a cancer survivor and with a backbone issue, he used to be taken to courts on the ordinary prison van just to exacerbate the condition, but he never complained.

In response to Prime Minister Sharif's remarks, Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Omar Ayub reiterated that the PTI would talk with the government only when Khan and other incarcerated leaders and workers are released from jail.

As Iran's prez vote looms, tensions boil over renewed headscarf crackdown

AP ■ DUBAI

Seemingly every afternoon in Iran's capital, police vans rush to major Tehran squares and intersections to search for women with loose headscarves and those who dare not to wear them at all. The renewed crackdown comes not quite two years since mass protests over the death of Mahsa Amini after she was detained for not wearing a scarf to the authorities' liking. A United Nations panel has found that the 22-year-old died as a result of "physical violence" wrought upon her by the state.

Amini's death set off months of unrest that ended in a bloody crackdown, and for a time morality police disappeared from the streets.

But now videos are emerging of women being physically forced into vans by police as lawmakers continue to push

for harsher penalties. Meanwhile, authorities have seized thousands of cars over women having their hair uncovered while also targeting businesses that serve them.

The renewed hijab push, which police are calling the Noor — or "Light" — Plan, began before President Ebrahim Raisi died in a helicopter crash, and whoever wins a vote to replace the hard-line cleric on Friday will have an influence over just how intense it becomes — and how Iran responds to any further unrest.

"An intervention ... under the Noor Plan will take us into darkness," reformist presidential candidate Masoud Pezeshkian recently told a group of female supporters.

Enforcement began ramping up in April, with videos spreading online showing women having violent encounters with female enforcers

dressed in the all-encompassing black chador alongside uniformed police officers.

While police haven't published arrest numbers about the crackdown and media haven't given it major attention, it's widely discussed in Iran. But still, many women continue to wear their hijabs loosely or leave them draped around their shoulders while walking in Tehran. On a recent afternoon in northern Tehran, women sat in cafes and other public places, as a police officer in his 50s told those passing by: "Please cover yourselves, ladies," and then muttered audibly: "My God, I am fed up repeating this without getting any attention."

"We know the police are not eager to fight women, but they are under pressure to," said Fatemeh, a 34-year-old math teacher who gave only her first name for fear of reprisal.

"Sooner or later, the authorities will realise that it would serve their interests better to pull back," Iran and neighbouring Taliban-controlled Afghanistan are the only countries where the hijab remains mandatory — even conservative Saudi Arabia has dialled back on its morality patrols.

While women attend school, work and can manage their own lives in Iran, hard-liners insist that the hijab must be enforced. The garment has long been entwined with politics in Iran. Former ruler Reza Shah Pahlavi banned it in 1936, part of his efforts to mirror the West. The ban lasted only five years, but many middle and upper-class Iranian women chose not to wear it.

After the 1979 Islamic Revolution, some of the women who helped overthrow the shah embraced the even more conservative chador. But

others protested a decision by Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini to order women to wear hijabs in public. In 1983, it became law, enforced with penalties including fines and up to two months in prison.

Amini's death in September 2022 sparked months of protests and a security crackdown that killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained. But less than two years later, hard-liners within Iran's theocracy have pressed forward with a crackdown.

The government's insistence on enforcing the hijab also reflects its conspiratorial view of the world. Iran's national police chief, Gen. Ahmad Reza Radan, has alleged without providing evidence that the country's enemies plan to transform the nation's culture by encouraging women to avoid the veil.

Already, "tens of thousands of

women have had their cars arbitrarily confiscated as punishment for defying Iran's veiling laws," Amnesty International said in March.

"Others have been prosecuted and sentenced to flogging or prison terms or faced other penalties such as fines or being forced to attend 'morality classes.'" On Saturday, police said they would release some 8,000 vehicles held over women not wearing the hijab in them for the Eid al-Ghadir holiday marked by Shiites.

There's also been a push to close down businesses that serve women who aren't wearing hijabs. "The Islamic Republic is using the distraction of its presidential election to go after its women activists and cow them into silence through imprisonment and abuse," said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of the New York-based Centre for Human

Rights in Iran. The centre said at least 12 women activists have been sentenced to prison since Raisi's deaths for their work. But there are signs that

Iran's government, and 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, know there are risks to escalating enforcement.

Indira Gandhi University
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Employment Notice
(Advt. No. 66/2024 & 67/2024)

Indira Gandhi University invites online applications from the eligible candidates for recruitment of various Non-Teaching posts against sanctioned vacant posts. Category-wise number of vacant non-teaching posts along with Advt. Nos., detailed instructions, requisite qualifications, pay scales and modalities for selection are given on the University Website www.igu.ac.in. The link for submission of online application shall be available on the University Website w.e.f. 22.06.2024.

REGISTRAR

RO 27208 Dated 26-06-2024

Sensex, Nifty settle at new all-time high levels

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Stock market benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty rallied for the third straight session and ended at their fresh all-time high levels on Wednesday in tandem with Asian peers and buying in Reliance Industries. The 30-share BSE Sensex climbed 620.73 points or 0.80 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,674.25. The Nifty went up by 147.50 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at a record closing peak of 23,868.80. Intra-day, it surged 168.6 points or 0.71 per cent to hit the fresh lifetime high of 23,889.90.



In the past three days of rally, investors' wealth have risen by Rs 2.53 lakh crore. Among the 30 Sensex companies, Reliance Industries, Bharti Airtel, UltraTech Cement, Sun Pharma, Adani Ports, Axis Bank, NTPC and Bajaj Finance were the biggest gainers. Mahindra & Mahindra, Tata Steel, Tech Mahindra and JSW

Steel were among the laggards. "The domestic market hit a new peak, bolstered by a rally in large-cap stocks, where the valuation is relatively fair. In contrast, mid and smallcap stocks saw profit-taking due to valuation concerns. Currently, the financials & consumption stocks are catching up driven by improved balance sheets, a strong GDP growth forecast, and softening inflation. "Global market sentiments reflected similar trends, with a consensus on imminent rate cuts," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.15 per cent while midcap index declined 0.29 per cent. Among the indices, telecommunication jumped 2.30 per cent, energy (1.45 per cent), teck (0.78 per cent), bankex (0.58 per cent) and services (0.46 per cent). Commodities, consumer discretionary, IT and auto were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.80 per cent to USD 85.69 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,175.91 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark jumped 712.44 points or 0.92 per cent to settle at 78,053.52 on Tuesday.

SEZ developers can install solar power panels under existing norms after DCs approval

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The Commerce Ministry has asked development commissioners of SEZs to consider requests of developers of these special economic zones for installation of solar power panels under the existing SEZ guidelines for power generation, transmission and distribution norms. In a communication to the Development Commissioners (DCs) of all special economic zones (SEZs), the Department of Commerce said that various requests have been received from EPCEs (Export Promotion Council for EOUs and SEZs) as well as SEZ developers for installation of solar power panels as capital goods in these zones for solar power generation for captive use. "The matter has been examined in consultation with DGER, CBIC. Accordingly, the DCs are requested to consider such requests from developers/co-developers" under the power guidelines issued on February 16, 2016 by the department, the communication said. The Directorate General of Export Promotion (DGER) is an extended arm of Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC). Under those guidelines, a power plant, including non-conventional energy power plant, to be set up by developer/co-developer in an SEZ as part of an infrastructure facility will be in the non-processing area of the SEZ only. It will be entitled to fiscal benefits only for its initial setting up and no fiscal benefit would be admissible for its operation and maintenance. Such a power plant can supply power to DTA (domestic tariff area) after meeting the power requirement of the SEZ subject to payment of customs duty. SEZs are key export hubs which contributed over one-third of the country's total outbound shipments in the last fiscal. These zones are enclosures that are treated as foreign territories for trade and customs duties, with restrictions on duty-free sales outside these zones in the domestic market.



SBI raises ₹10,000 cr via bonds to fund infra projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
State Bank of India (SBI) on Wednesday raised Rs 10,000 crore through its fifth infrastructure bond issuance. The country's largest lender raised the funds at a coupon rate of 7.36 per cent. The issue attracted overwhelming response from investors with bids in excess of Rs 19,884 crore and was oversubscribed by around four times against the base issue size of Rs 5,000 crore, SBI said in a regulatory filing. The total number of bids received was 143, indicating wider participation with heterogeneity of bids, it said. The investors were across provident funds, pension funds, insurance companies, mutual funds, corporates etc, it said. The proceeds of bonds will be utilized in enhancing long-term resources for funding infrastructure and affordable housing segments, it said. "Based on the response, the bank has decided to accept Rs 10,000 crore at a coupon rate of 7.36 per cent payable annually. This represents a spread of 21 bps over the corresponding FBIL G-Sec par curve," it said. With the current issuance, the total outstanding long-term bonds issued by the Bank is at Rs 49,718 crore. This issuance is also very significant as the Bank has been successful in raising long-duration bonds successively. SBI Chairman Dinesh Khara said that this issuance will help in developing a long-term bond curve and encourage other banks to issue bonds of longer tenor.



FHRAI seeks infra status for hotels, convention centres

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Besides, the federation requested a 12 per cent GST rate across all hotels and also demanded the delinking of restaurant tariffs from room tariffs as the current system of GST shifting to different slabs in the same hotel creates compliance issues and confusion among the public. "Although there is no evasion and avoidance of tax, but the said confusion has become a bone of contention for the hotels across the country due to notices and demands from the GST department," FHRAI said. Shetty said, "We are confident in the ministry's commitment to implementing GST rationalisation for the hospitality sector." The federation said in its pre-budget recommendations, it highlighted the significance of efforts under the 'Incredible India' campaign and recommended the enhancement of the budget for tourism branding and also requested specific measures to promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism in the country. In its pre-budget recommendation, the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) also sought GST rationalisation proposing a 12 per cent GST rate across all hotels. "Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centres across all cities is crucial for attracting investments and accelerating growth in the hospitality sector," FHRAI President Pradeep Shetty said in a statement. FHRAI said one of the key requests put forward by the hospitality federation to the Finance Ministry was to "grant infrastructure status for hotels across all categories and convention centres built at a project cost of Rs 10 crore and above to give a fillip to budget segment in the hotel industry."

Juniper Green Energy secures renewable PPAs in Gujarat, Rajasthan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Juniper Green Energy on Wednesday said it has signed two separate power purchase agreements for renewable energy projects in Gujarat and Rajasthan. It has secured an agreement with Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (GUVNL) under wind phase VI for a standalone 90 MW wind project in Gujarat, the company said in a statement. The project is expected to generate nearly 293 million units (MUs) of electricity annually, offsetting approximately 2,66,002 tonne of Co2 emissions. The electricity generated is estimated to electrify 56,539 households in Gujarat. The company has signed another PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) under hybrid tranche VII for the development of a 150 MW wind-solar hybrid power project in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The project is aimed to generate about 477 MU of electricity annually, offsetting 445,796 tonne of Co2 emissions each year and support the electrification of around 95,079 households. Naresh Mansukhani, CEO, Juniper Green Energy, said, "Partnering with SECI and GUVNL on these projects embodies our forward-



thinking approach and commitment to harnessing the synergy of wind and solar energy. These initiatives not only leverage the strengths of both wind and solar energy but also reinforce our commitment to delivering green energy solutions that are both reliable and environmentally responsible." Juniper Green Energy is an independent renewable energy power producer and operator of solar, wind and hybrid power projects with significant experience in conceptualising, building, and developing renewable energy assets.

US transport security body seeks one-stop pact with India to end rescreening of passengers

PTI ■ WASHINGTON
The US transport security body has sought a unique "one-stop agreement" with India to end the rescreening of passengers, asserting that the "really powerful" concept will raise global aviation security standards. Addressing the India US Aviation Summit here on Tuesday, David Pekoske, Administrator of the US Transportation Security Administration (USTSA) said that the one-stop security concept is "very reachable" between the countries. "I think very tangible and very reachable between India and the United States is one-stop security," he said. "It's a concept that expedites the flow of passengers and baggage to their destinations by eliminating the duplication of security controls at transfer points," Pekoske said. He said in the case of a one-stop agreement, passengers who reach an airport in another country and have a connecting domestic flight would not need to be rescreened and their checked bags would go from aircraft to aircraft. Terming it a "really powerful" concept, Pekoske said it raises global aviation security standards. "Flights inbound to the United States are more secure. If there's a reverse agreement between the United States and India where US screening satisfies Indian requirements, that means that flights to India would also be more secure. It does require the regular exchange of information," he said. "It requires improvements to security processes to maintain the agreement. It yields a reduction in security costs through better allocation of resources, reduces flight connection times and missed connections, and improves the passenger experience," he said. Pekoske said the two countries should consider signing a memorandum of agreement to share sensitive security information. "We have a category of classification of information that is not classified in the true sense of classified material, but it is sensitive enough that it needs additional protections," he said. He said that whenever there is



a sharing of sensitive security information -- which is critical to a growing partnership -- there is a need to have a memorandum of agreement which covers the aspects of that sharing arrangement. He noted that both the TSA and India's transportation security posture were born of cruel tragedy. For India, it was the bombing of Air India 'Kanishka' Flight 182 in 1985, while for the TSA, it was the 9-11 attacks in 2001. "These tragic events were paradigm shifts in how we both thought about transportation security that continues today," he said. Meanwhile, addressing the summit, US Federal Aviation Administrator Michael Whitaker said that India and the United States need to work together on issues like aviation safety. Asserting that safety is a team sport, he said that sharing data between the two countries can allow better identification and mitigation of risks in the sector. "Our (US and India's) national systems of aviation are inextricably linked into a single global network," he said, adding that the two countries have adjoining air spaces, integrated supply chains, and international services that connect their economies and people.

"We need to work together on issues like safety, we need to share ideas and share innovations, especially in how to safely incorporate some of these new technologies into our airspace," he said. Noting that the two countries have different systems that will take different approaches to solving challenges, he said, "We can and should work together to share best practices and learn from one another." "We all have an interest in increasing safety within our respective countries, but we must work together to increase the level of safety in the global aviation system," he added. "This means sharing data. Sharing information allows us to better identify and mitigate risks before those risks become accidents and even before they become failures to the safety layers in our system," he added. "When I started in aviation, accidents were unfortunately not uncommon. They were almost annual events, and safety regulators learned from those accidents and made the system safer," he said. "For the past couple of decades, we've moved beyond that model, and accidents are now extremely rare, and they are simply unacceptable as an outcome," Whitaker said. "Our challenge is to bring safety to the next level, and that means we need to proactively analyse data and find those risks of failure and mitigate those risks before they happen," he said. Asserting that all the job categories in the aviation sector are highly sought after, he said that "for regulators, it means new questions about how we oversee those operations." "We have to find a safe yet nimble way to regulate these new entrants who are operating at the speed of a startup while we are operating at the speed of government, he said. He added that there is a need to figure out how to close the gap, identify these risks and leverage technology to incorporate them safely into the air-space. "In the US, we've seen the public perception of safety and risk in the system evolve over time. As more people have access to aviation, the expectation grows that the system will be completely safe," he asserted.

Deccan Gold Mines gets investment commitment of ₹60 crore for key projects

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Deccan Gold Mines Ltd (DGML) on Wednesday said it has received an investment commitment of Rs 60 crore for developing its key projects -- Jonnagiri Gold Project in India and Altyn Tor Gold Project in Kyrgyzstan. The investment commitment has been received from Ardent Steel, Hira Infra Tek Pvt Ltd and Med Edu Care Marketing Management, Dubai, the company said in a filing to BSE. The funds are likely to be received over the next couple of months, it said. "DGML has secured investment commitment of Rs 60 crore...To cater to the development of its key projects viz., Jonnagiri Gold Project, India and Altyn Tor Gold Project, Kyrgyzstan," the filing said. DGML, the first and only gold exploration company listed on BSE, has a significant stake of 40 per cent in Geomysore Services India Ltd, which is



developing the first private sector gold mine at Jonnagiri. DGML was established in 2003 by promoters with deep roots in the exploration and mining sector. DGML for a long period of time has been involved in gold exploration activities in India and overseas. DGML's exploration in India, particularly in Karnataka, led to the discovery of open pit gold deposits in the Archaean greenstone belts of Dharwar Craton. These deposits are in Hutti and Dharwar - Shimoga belts. Since 2021, as part of expansion and diversification, DGML has initiated merger and acquisition activities.

Gender minorities, marginalised groups to comprise 25 per cent of Tata Steel workforce, says official

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR
Tata Steel aims at having a minimum of 25 per cent of its workforce made up of diverse groups, including gender minorities, marginalised communities, persons with disabilities and LGBTQIA+ individuals, within the next few years, a company official said. It is one of the first companies in the country to roll out a special recruitment drive for transgender talent, having recruited over 100 members from the community for various roles across different locations, the official claimed. "Continuing this drive, we aim to have 25 per cent of our workforce from diverse groups in the next couple of years," the official said. A total of 113 transgender individuals have been onboarded and posted at various locations, including manufacturing, operations and maintenance, mining, and services. These employees are stationed in Noamundi, West Bokaro, Kolkata, Kharagpur, Kalinganagar, and



Jamshedpur. Some of these employees work all three shifts and operate Heavy Earth Moving Machinery (HEMM) at the Noamundi iron ore mine in Jharkhand's West Singhbhum and West Bokaro coal mine in Ramgarh district. "Tata Steel appreciates the potential of diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) and has a tremendous organisational focus on it," the official said. "In line with this, we renewed our commitment and refocused our approach to DE&I in 2015 by setting up MOSAIC - a platform for pioneering initiatives,

diversity targets, and employee-friendly policies conceptualised and executed from the apex level," he added. The official admitted that the initial planning stage was challenging due to inadequate knowledge about the transgender community. "However, we made a detailed plan and implemented it without any difficulty. To date, we have not received any complaint from either side of the employees since the first batch of transgender individuals was inducted following proper training in 2019," the official said. On the productivity of these employees compared to the general workforce, he said transgender individuals perform better in some areas. Jaya Singh Panda, Chief Diversity Officer at Tata Steel, said, "We believe in nurturing a workplace where every person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, feels valued, respected, and empowered. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and continuing this practice is key to long-term success and innovation." Speaking on condition of anonymity, a transgender employee at the company's Jamshedpur plant said, "We feel very safe inside the company as coworkers are friendly, supportive, and cooperative. The company has also developed infrastructure, including separate toilets for us." Another trans-female employee from Noamundi lamented that her parents never used to care about whether she ate or came home on time.

MEIL bags ₹12,800 cr tender by Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
India's engineering major Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) is happy to announce that it has emerged the lowest bidder for the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contract by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) under the Department of Atomic Energy. It is the highest value tender ever rolled out by the NPCIL. This prestigious project involves the construction of two 700 MW electrical reactors at Kaiga in Karnataka and represents a significant milestone in India's journey towards clean and reliable nuclear energy. The project marks a ground breaking moment with the introduction of the Quality cum Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) methodology. This rigorous process ensures a meticulous evaluation of technical expertise and cost-effectiveness for all proposals. The tendering process began in May 2023, with the technical bid opening in October 2023. The highly competitive bidding process saw participation from prominent industry leaders -- BHEL, L&T, and MEIL. MEIL emerged as the lowest bidder, demonstrating its exceptional technical capabilities and cost-efficiency by submitting the lowest bid of Rs.12,799.92 crores. "This contract represents the most significant project for MEIL and our strategic entry into the nuclear energy sector," said Ch Subbaiah, Director, MEIL. "MEIL's unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation has been recognised through this landmark achievement. The company is excited to contribute to India's self-reliance in clean energy solutions."

INDIA'S TOP ATHLETICS STARS VIE FOR OLYMPICS BERTHS AT NATIONAL INTER-STATE C'SHIPS

PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)

The absence of Olympic javelin throw champion Neeraj Chopra notwithstanding, there will be no lack of star power as the country's remaining top track and field athletes vie for Paris Olympics berths during the National Inter-State Championships beginning here Thursday. The championships will serve as the final qualifying event for the upcoming Paris Games where the athletics events begin on August 1. Incidentally, the final day of the four-day championships -- June 30 -- also coincides with the Olympics qualifying window deadline. Chopra will skip the championships as there is only a few days gap before the Paris Diamond League on July 7, in which he is set to compete. He competed in the Federation Cup in Bhubaneswar last month, winning a gold. Last month, Athletics Federation of India (AFI) president Adile Sumariwalla had made it clear that except for Chopra, it will be mandatory for all the other athletes to participate in the National Inter-State Championships to get selected for the Paris Olympics.



AFI rules state that all the athletes will have to participate in the National Inter-State Championships if they have to get selected for major multi-sport events like the Olympics, Asian Games or the Commonwealth Games, unless the federation gives exemption on the request of particular athletes or their coaches.

In the absence of Chopra, the likes of Avinash Sable (men's 3000m steeplechase), Kishore Jena (men's javelin throw), Ram Baboo (men's 20km race walk) and Parul Chaudhary (women's 3000m steeplechase) -- all of whom have booked Paris Games berths by breaching the qualifying standards -- will headline the championships.

Other athletes who can book Paris ticket through world ranking quota like Jyothi Yarraji (women's 100m hurdles), Annu Rani (women's javelin throw), DP Manu (men's javelin throw), Tajinderpal Singh Toor (men's shot put), Jeswin Aldrin (men's long jump), Praveen Chitravel and Abdulla Aboobacker (both men's triple jump) have also

entered their names. Toor, an Asian record holder till a few days back, told PTI on Tuesday that he is dealing with a slight ankle pain and his doctor told him not to throw for three-four weeks. But his name figured in Wednesday's updated entry list of the AFI. Some of rising stars like sprinter Animesh Kujur, 110m hurdler Tejas Shirse -- who

recently set the national record -- and long jumper Shaili Singh are also set to be seen in action. National record holder Manikanta Hoblidhar is also set to be back in action after missing the Federation Cup and his 100m dash duel with Kujur, Amlan Borgohain and Gurindervir Singh for the tag of the country's fastest man will be interesting to watch though none of them are likely to make it to Paris. Federation Cup 200m gold medallist Kujur will also be up against national record holder Borgohain in another duel. Almost all the members of the Indian men's and women's 4x400m relay teams that had booked Paris berths will feature in the individual quarter-mile events. National record holder 20km race walker Akshdeep Singh, who has also breached the Paris Games qualifying mark, is missing from the entry list. Women's 20km race walk national record holder Priyanka Goswami, who has also qualified for Paris Olympics, is not in the list. The opening day will see just three finals -- women's hammer throw, men's and women's 500m races. A few athletes from Sri Lanka and Maldives are also taking part in the championships.g



Harmanpreet named captain as Hockey India announces 16 members squad for Paris Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Harmanpreet Singh was named captain and Hardik Singh his deputy as Hockey India announced a 16-member squad for next month's Paris Olympics, featuring five Games debutants and a handful of seniors from the previous edition. India, who won a bronze medal in the Tokyo Olympics 2020, are placed in Pool B alongside defending champions Belgium, Australia, Argentina, New Zealand and Ireland. Teams finishing in the top four in the pool's points table will advance to the quarter-finals. The Indian players are currently busy preparing for the Olympics in their national camp at the SAI Centre in Bengaluru. The venerable goalkeeper PR Sreejesh and midfielder Manpreet Singh are set for their fourth Olympic appearance while skipper Harmanpreet is bracing up for his third Games. The five players who will make their Olympics debut for India in Paris are Jarmanpreet Singh, Sanjay, Raj Kumar Pal, Abhishek and Sukhjeet Singh. Since their historic show in Tokyo, where the team won an Olympic medal after a gap of 41 years, Indian defenders Rupinderpal Singh and Birendra Lakra have retired whereas Surender Kumar has been out of favour. Nilkanta Sharma, who was part of the main squad in Tokyo has been kept among the alternative players but Dilpreet Singh missed out. Goalkeeper Krishan Pathak will continue to be an alternate player in second successive Olympics. The defence includes Harmanpreet Singh, Jarmanpreet, Amit Rohidas, Sumit and Sanjay, while the midfield will have Pal, Shamsher Singh, Manpreet Singh, Hardik Singh, and Vivek Sagar Prasad. Abhishek, Sukhjeet, Lalit Kumar Upadhyay, Mandeep Singh and Gurjant Singh will be among India's forwards. Defender Jugraj Singh is India's third alternative player apart from Pathak and Nilkanta. Head coach Craig Fulton was quoted as saying, "The selection process for the Paris Olympics' squad was incredibly competitive due to the depth of talent within our ranks, however, I am confident that every player chosen will bring their best to Paris." "Each player selected has demonstrated exceptional skill, dedication, and resilience throughout our rigorous preparation phase." Fulton continued, "Our focus has been on building a cohesive team that can adapt to different playing styles and situations, and I believe we have achieved that." "As we head to Paris, our goal is clear - to play with heart, skill, and determination. We are prepared to face the world's best teams and strive for the highest podium. This squad is ready to seize the opportunity and bring glory to India," he added. India will begin their campaign against New Zealand on July 27 followed by a clash against Argentina on July 29. India will then take on Ireland on July 30, Belgium on August 1 and face Australia on August 2. India have a total of 12 Olympic medals, including eight gold, one silver and three bronze. Pool A comprises the Netherlands, Germany, Great Britain, Spain, South Africa, and host nation France.

England coach Southgate targeted after 0-0 draw with Slovenia

AP ■ COLOGNE (GERMANY)

Top of the group, unbeaten and on the favorable side of the draw for the knockout phase of Euro 2024. It's a case of job done for England at this stage of the tournament. Try telling that to the fans who jeered loudly and threw beer cups as the final whistle blew on a 0-0 draw with Slovenia at Cologne Stadium. Criticism of England's performances in Germany has been fierce. "I've not seen any team qualify and receive similar," manager Gareth Southgate said. Southgate believes he and his England team could be paying the price for its success under his leadership. Safe passage through to the round of 16 maintains his personal record of advancing from the group stage of every major tournament he's taken charge of, dating back to the World Cup in 2018. "I think probably expectation (is different). We've made England over the last six or seven years fun again. I think it has been enjoyable for the players," Southgate said. "We've got to be very, very careful that it stays that

way." England haven't been fun to watch at these Euros with a 1-0 win against Serbia, their only victory in Group C. That was followed by a 1-1 draw with Denmark and the scoreless draw with Slovenia. Three games, two goals and a whole lot of underwhelmed fans. The performance against Denmark was apparently so uninspiring that former captain and now BBC presenter Gary Lineker used an expletive to describe it. And despite claiming he was "oblivious" to Lineker's stinging critique, it contributed to the "unusual environment" Southgate said he was working in at this tournament. The atmosphere was hardly helped by plastic beer cups being thrown on the field as Southgate and his players went to applaud England supporters after the match. "I'm not going to back down from going over and thanking the fans who were brilliant during the game," he said. "They might feel differently towards me. But for me, we only will succeed if we are together." Southgate led England to the



semifinals of the World Cup in 2018 and the final of the last Euros. But his team will likely need a sharp upturn in form if it is to live up to its pre-tournament billing as one of the favorites for the European title. Still, England has at least ended up on the opposite side of the draw to Spain, France, Germany and Portugal and will play one of the best third-place

teams in the next round after advancing as group winner. "That was the aim before the start of the tournament. Come top of the group and control our destiny," captain Harry Kane said. The result also meant Slovenia reached the round of 16 for the first time and Croatia was eliminated. "We are such a small country, with

such a big heart and mental strength. That's why I'm very proud of my team," coach Matjaz Kek said. "This is only the beginning for a new and beautiful era for Slovenian football." While it was a proud night for Slovenians, it was another performance that highlighted England's attacking issues, with substitute Cole Palmer coming closest to scoring a winner in stoppage time. "You can't go into every game with such pressure and score four goals. Football doesn't work like that," Southgate said. "It is important to win the group to control your own destiny." A masked Kylian Mbappe scored his first goal of the Euros, but France drew 1-1 with Poland to finish runner-up in Group D behind Austria, which beat the Netherlands 3-2. Mbappe wore a protective mask after breaking his nose in France's opening game against Austria and scored from the penalty spot. But Robert Lewandowski's twice-taken spot kick gave already eliminated Poland its first point of the tournament.

Tennis Hall of Fame to get facelift in time for golden era inductees like Federer, Serena Williams



AP ■ NEWPORT

The International Tennis Hall of Fame is getting all dolled up for some extra special visitors. The Newport shrine on Tuesday unveiled plans for a \$3 million renovation that will double the museum's exhibit space and redesign the plaque gallery in time for the enshrinement of all-time greats such as Roger Federer and Serena Williams. "When you think about this golden era of who's going to be inducted coming up in the next five to 10 years, (it's) perfect timing," Hall CEO Dan Faber said in a news conference to announce the plans. Most visible among the upgrades will be a new display for the inductees, replacing plaques on the wall with a line-up of markers, each including a golden tennis racket that mirrors the Hall's logo. A replica of the racket will be given to the inductee as part of the enshrinement ceremony. "It truly represents the prestige that that honor is for those inductees, for both players and contributors," said Reese Stevens, who helped design the new displays. "The golden-cast rackets are going to be the new manifestation of what it means

to be a Hall of Famer." The gallery of inductees will move from the beginning of the exhibits to the end of the meandering tour through the 19th Century building that surrounds the only grass courts in the United States regularly available to the public. A new retail store will be added at the end of the exhibits. Previously, because of the building's layout, visitors would start at the plaque gallery and walk through the exhibits, then need to double back to get out. "We want to be very respectful of the fact that this is a historic building, and we know that," said Mindy Ward, who also worked on the plans for the Nashville, Tennessee-based design firm Advent. "Part of our challenge - and one that we embraced with gusto - was making sure that what we were developing, while fresh and new and modern, blended seamlessly with some of the historic displays in the historic art and architecture that we didn't want to just get rid of." It is the first major upgrade to the Hall since 2015; the plaque gallery had not been updated since 2008. About 30,000 visitors tour the Hall in person each year - a number it hopes to double -

with plans to make the exhibits more accessible online to those who can't make the trip to this well-heeled home of mansions and marinas on Narragansett Bay. The Hall will close during the renovation, which is scheduled to begin in November and end by next May. Players are eligible for Hall of Fame induction five years after they were last a "significant factor" on the ATP or WTA tours. Federer retired in 2021 and Williams a year later, meaning they will be eligible for induction in 2026 and '27. "The golden era of tennis is perhaps retiring, but it's upon us," Hall vice president Julianna Barbieri said. "Roger Federer, Serena Williams, Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray and Venus Williams are going to become Hall of Famers, and it was time for us to take what was in the current gallery and modernize that, modernize that to the present day, modernize that for the evolution of the sport and make that fit more within who and what the game has evolved to from 2008." President Patrick McEnroe also said that the organization is planning new events after the Hall of Fame Open lost its spot on the ATP calendar after this season. The tournament has been played for almost 50 years in July in conjunction with the induction ceremonies, but the date the week after Wimbledon led many top players to skip the tournament and rest. The specifics will be announced next month. "You know the phrase, Today is the first day of the rest of your life?" McEnroe said. "Next year is the first year of the rest of our life."

Argentina advances to Copa America quarterfinals, beats Chile 1-0 on Martínez 88th-minute goal

AP ■ EAST RUTHERFORD (USA)

After nearly 90 minutes of total domination, Lionel Messi and defending champion Argentina advanced to the Copa America quarterfinals after the ball ricocheted in front of the net during a frantic scramble that led to the breakthrough. Lautaro Martínez scored off the last in a series of rebounds in the 88th minute, lifting the Albiceleste over Chile 1-0 on Tuesday night and into the quarterfinals with a game to spare. "The golden era of tennis is perhaps retiring, but it's upon us," Hall vice president Julianna Barbieri said. "Roger Federer, Serena Williams, Rafael Nadal, Andy Murray and Venus Williams are going to become Hall of Famers, and it was time for us to take what was in the current gallery and modernize that, modernize that to the present day, modernize that for the evolution of the sport and make that fit more within who and what the game has evolved to from 2008." President Patrick McEnroe also said that the organization is planning new events after the Hall of Fame Open lost its spot on the ATP calendar after this season. The tournament has been played for almost 50 years in July in conjunction with the induction ceremonies, but the date the week after Wimbledon led many top players to skip the tournament and rest. The specifics will be announced next month. "You know the phrase, Today is the first day of the rest of your life?" McEnroe said. "Next year is the first year of the rest of our life."

Claudio Bravo, where Argentina's Giovanni Lo Celso and Chile's Nicolás Fernández were wrestling. Lo Celso kicked the ball off Bravo and it rebounded to Chile's Igor Lichnovsky, who tried to poke it wide. Lautaro Martínez, who entered in the 73rd, calmly one-timed that rebound into the roof of the net on Argentina's 21st shot. Players stood and waited for three minutes while the goal, Martínez's 26th for the national team, was confirmed in a video review. "We deserved the win. It was not an easy match," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "We managed to win at the moment least expected." Argentina leads Group A with six points, followed by Canada with three, and Chile and Peru with one each. The Albiceleste finish the first round against Peru at Miami Gardens, Florida, on Saturday, when Canada meets Chile in Orlando, Florida. Playing a day after his 37th birthday, Messi frequently flaunted his talent to spin around and slalom through defenders before an adoring sellout crowd of 81,106 at MetLife Stadium, site of the 2026 World Cup final. Argentina dominated 22-3 in shots and 11-0 in corner kicks.



Chile didn't take its first attempt until the 72nd minute. Messi came the closest to scoring before Martínez with a 30-yard shot that glanced off the post to Bravo's left in the 36th minute. Messi had received treatment on the thigh area of his right leg for nearly two minutes after getting kicked by Gabriel Suazo in the 24th. Nicolás González's shot from

another Messi pass in the 62nd was parried off the crossbar by Bravo. Argentina outshot Chile 17-0 before Rodrigo Echeverría's 72nd-minute effort following a turnover was saved by Emiliano Martínez, who blocked the ball while falling after it deflected off Alexis Mac Allister. The goalkeeper then used his right hand to bat another Echeverría shot in the 76th that deflected off a toe of defender Cristian Romero. "I always have to save one or two every match. And I'm lucky to keep doing it," Martínez said. On the 46th anniversary of Argentina's first World Cup title, the teams returned to the stadium where Chile beat Argentina on penalty kicks in the 2016 Copa America final. That defeat prompted Messi to announce his international retirement only to reverse his decision seven weeks later.

Canada beat Peru 1-0 at Copa America

AP ■ KANSAS CITY (USA)

Jonathan David scored in the 74th minute as Canada beat Peru 1-0 in the Copa America for their first victory over a South American opponent in 24 years. Peru played a man short after Miguel Araujo was given a red card in the 59th minute for a studs-up tackle on Jacob Shaffelburg, a call made after a video review. Canada got their first win in four matches under Jesse Marsch, the American hired as coach last month, and beat

a South American team for the first time since a 2-0 victory over Colombia in the 2000 CONCACAF Gold Cup final. David's goal, his 27th for Canada, ended the national team's 391-minute scoreless streak. Twenty-six of his goals have come in competitive matches. The game was paused in first-half stoppage time when an assistant referee running on the non-shaded part of the stadium collapsed and needed medical attention. He got to his feet briefly and was taken



off the field in a stretcher. He had been running down the line on the non-shaded part of the stadium. David scored after Cyle Larin made a long outlet pass to Shaffelburg, who crossed. David took two touches and beat goalkeeper Pedro Gallese from near the penalty spot, sending the ball in off the far post. David is two behind Larin, Canada's career scoring leader. Canada goalkeeper Maxime Crepeau made a diving save in second-half stoppage time, then punched away a free kick.

2021 before losing to Brazil. They had failed to score in nine of its last 12 matches. David scored after Cyle Larin made a long outlet pass to Shaffelburg, who crossed. David took two touches and beat goalkeeper Pedro Gallese from near the penalty spot, sending the ball in off the far post. David is two behind Larin, Canada's career scoring leader. Canada goalkeeper Maxime Crepeau made a diving save in second-half stoppage time, then punched away a free kick.

INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

With a refreshingly aggressive batting approach, India would look to avoid the knockout stage jitters plaguing them for over a decade when they take on defending champions England in the semifinals of the T20 World Cup here on Thursday. The last time these two teams met at this stage, it turned out to be a no contest as England outplayed an outdated India in the 2022 edition's semifinal. However, India have finally been able to shed their conservative approach at the top of the order since that 10-wicket hammering in Adelaide and have become the team to beat in this competition. On paper, Rohit Sharma and his men look the stronger bunch for the conditions expected at the Providence Stadium and look primed for revenge. The spinners have enjoyed bowling here since the opening game and the likes of India's Kuldeep Yadav and England's Adil Rashid would be itching to flaunt their skills in the knock-out fixture. Spinners are not the only ones who will come into play, the pacers too have got success at the venue with Afghanistan

speedster Fazalhaq Farooqi producing a match-winning spell against New Zealand at the start of the competition. Interestingly, no match has been staged here since June 8 when the West Indies breezed past Uganda in a day game, giving the curators extra time to prepare a suitable pitch for the high-profile game. India were clinical in the Super 8 stage but the extreme pressure of a semi-final tends to produce unforced errors. At the top of the order, India will be hoping for runs from the bat of Virat Kohli, who has had an underwhelming tournament by his high standards. On the contrary, his opening partner and skipper Rohit has set the benchmark for other batters when it comes to fearless cricket. His blazing 41-ball 92 against Australia is the sort of knock that won't be easily forgotten for some time to come. For both Rohit and Kohli, it is probably their last shot at winning the T20 world title in India colours and the two would be desperate to leave a mark. Rohit has already made it clear that he intends to go ballistic in the powerplays without a care for personal milestones, which was evident in the game

EYE REVENGE AGAINST ENGLAND IN T20WC SEMIS



against Australia. Shivam Dube has not batted as per expectations in the middle-order and it will be interesting to see how he fares against wily leg-spinner Rashid. India are likely to go unchanged into the game even though they have Yuzvendra Chahal in the squad who can come in handy against England's right-handers including Phil Salt, Jos Buttler, Harry Brook and Jonny Bairstow. Chahal is yet to get a game in this competition and it is set to remain that way with India expected to continue the trio of Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel and Kuldeep, who was the team's trump card in Super 8s. Jasprit Bumrah is in a league of his own and England will need to do something special to score off him. Hardik Pandya's all-round show has helped India

immensely thus far and the management will be hoping it stays that way. England, on the other hand, have not had the smoothest of campaigns. They stuttered into Super 8s where they lost to South Africa before turning things around. Skipper Buttler was back among the runs against USA in England's final Super 8 game and considering the familiarity with the Indian attack, he is well-placed to come up with a game-changing knock. His opening partner Phil Salt can take the game away from opposition very quickly and India will need to dismiss him in the powerplay. More runs are expected from Bairstow and Moeen Ali, whose off-spin could be useful against India's left-handers. Liam Livingstone, who bowls both leg and off spin, too can bowl his full quota of overs like he did against USA the other night. Rashid's four overs can also prove decisive in the all-important fixture. In his first high-profile event since returning from injury, pacer Jofra Archer has done well in the seven games so far and would be backing himself to trouble Rohit and Kohli with the new ball. Having taken a hat-trick in the

last game, the confidence of Chris Jordan too will be sky high. "Obviously, when we left England a few weeks ago, we left to come and obviously try and defend the title. There's been a few bumps in the road along the way, but I think you kind of described them as good bumps because they've really narrowed down our focus and really made our direction really clear," said Jordan after the win over USA. "There is also a likelihood of rain impacting the game with chances of showers in the lead up to the semi-final and also on match day." **SQUADS:** **India:** Rohit Sharma (c), Hardik Pandya, Yashasvi Jaiswal, Virat Kohli, Suryakumar Yadav, Rishabh Pant, Sanju Samson, Shivam Dube, Ravindra Jadeja, Axar Patel, Kuldeep Yadav, Yuzvendra Chahal, Arshdeep Singh, Jasprit Bumrah, Mohammed Siraj. **England:** Jos Buttler (c), Moeen Ali, Jofra Archer, Jonathan Bairstow, Harry Brook, Sam Curran, Ben Duckett, Tom Hartley, Will Jacks, Chris Jordan, Liam Livingstone, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Reece Topley, Mark Wood.

SA, Afghanistan look to rise above deep scars to seal T20 WC final berth

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Tournament story-makers Afghanistan will be up against perennial dark horses South Africa in the first semifinal of the T20 World Cup here, a much-anticipated showdown that will be historic irrespective of the outcome. Without belittling the poised run of the Proteas, Afghanistan have been the revelation of this ICC showpiece. They found life and fighting spirit to rise above the ravages of war back in their country, best exemplified by an astounding win over 2021 winners Australia, whom they had never beaten before. There were multiple heroes -- skipper Rashid Khan has been immense throughout, pacers Fazalhaq Farooqi and Naveen-ul-Haq have given early breakthroughs, Gulbadin Naib conjured a miraculous spell against the Aussies while Mohammad Nabi remained perseverant. Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz leads the batting chart with 281 runs, while Farooqi is on top of the bowling list with 16 scalps. It is a story in itself as how two Afghanistan players have raced past some marquee names to the top of the stats table. But all of it can come to nothing if they falter at the Brian Lara Academy, a venue named after the West Indian legend who has supported Afghanistan to the hilt. The Afghans are a skilled set of cricketers, on whose back the team rose brilliantly from the low-tier obscurity of the early 2000s. So, they are not unfamiliar to intense competition and T20, more than any other format, offers them the chance to challenge the big brothers. But they have never competed in the semifinal of a World Cup, and the Afghans now need to control their nerves to overcome a fancied opponent. Head coach Jonathan Trott affirmed his side was not perturbed by the big occasion. "We go into the semifinal with no scarring or no history. This is uncharted territory for us. But, by no means, do we feel like we're going into the semifinal just to compete. We're there to win the semifinal. We've beaten some major teams," Trott said after the win over Bangladesh. South Africa's scars also run deep but they are purely of cricketing nature.



In the past, the Proteas have assembled some high-velocity squads but never managed to enter the title round of a T20 or 50-over World Cup after their re-admission into world cricket in 1991. To change that long-running show of misfortune, South Africa need to tame not just Afghanistan but also the demons in their own minds. The signs have so far given hope. In this event, they have shown a propensity to win the clutch moments, their Achilles Heel in previous global tournaments, that often prop up without any warning. But here, they have notched up victories as close as one-run (vs Nepal), four-run (vs Bangladesh) and three wickets (vs West Indies). South Africa of old could have bungled in those situations, but Aiden Markram's side has displayed remarkable fortitude. They seem to have escaped the hackneyed C-Word. Experienced left-arm spinner Keshav Maharaj explained his team's run in this World Cup. "If you look at previous World Cups, the small moments, we haven't really won. It's good to see that all the games have come really close and we've found a way, so it's building the character within the team. It prepares us for certain opportunities that we could get and cross over the line in those small moments. These are things that we've never done before. So, it's good to see us get-

ting into that," said Maharaj. His words offer a true reflection of the collective effort South Africa have made here. There is only one South African player in top-10 batters' list. Quinton de Kock is placed sixth with 199 runs from seven matches, while none of their bowlers feature inside the first 10. But here they are, playing in the semifinal and they will have to negate those small, key moments against Afghanistan, perhaps in the next match too. For once, South Africa might not feel overwhelmed by that thought. If Afghanistan too can keep their heartbeats in check, a classic for the ages seems well on the cards.

SQUADS: **Afghanistan:** Rashid Khan (c), Rahmanullah Gurbaz, Ibrahim Zadran, Azmatullah Omarzai, Najibullah Zadran, Mohammad Ishaq, Mohammad Nabi, Gulbadin Naib, Karim Janat, Nangyal Kharoti, Mujeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Faeed Ahmad Malik. Reserves: Sediq Atal, Hazratullah Zazai, Saleem Safi. **South Africa:** Aiden Markram (c), Ottniel Baartman, Gerald Coetzee, Quinton de Kock, Bjorn Fortuin, Reeza Hendricks, Marco Jansen, Heinrich Klaasen, Keshav Maharaj, David Miller, Anrich Nortje, Kagiso Rabada, Ryan Rickelton, Tabraiz Shamsi, Tristan Stubbs.

I was in tears laughing, Australia skipper Marsh sees the funny side of Naib's theatrics

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

Australia captain Mitchell Marsh saw the funny side of Afghanistan all-rounder Gulbadin Naib's theatrical complaining of cramps in a T20 World Cup match against Bangladesh, terming it as "one of the funniest things" he has ever seen on a cricket field. Naib, who was fielding in the slip, fell on his back while clutching his thighs during the 12th over, just after coach Jonathan Trott signalled to slow down the proceedings as rain was imminent with Afghanistan ahead in the proceedings in the must-win Super Eights game. "I was almost in tears laughing and at the end of the day it had no bearing on the game. So, we can laugh about it now - but, gee, it was funny. It was outstanding," Marsh told cricket.Com.Au. Bangladesh were chasing 115 for a win then, and fell behind the DLS par score of 83 at the end of the 12th over at 81 for seven.



However, Naib later bowled two overs and participated with vigour in Afghanistan's victory celebrations without showing any hint of 'cramps.' The ICC's playing conditions stipulate that a player can get up to two-match ban for "deliberate or repetitive" time wasting tactics, but that Naib might just escape with a first and final warning by the match referee. With the win, Afghanistan knocked Australia out of the T20 World Cup, and

Marsh said the 2021 champions have only themselves to blame for the exit. "We watched it (the match) as a group. It was obviously a pretty amazing game, wasn't it? A lot of twists and turns. "Obviously, you want to keep playing this tournament and that was our only way of doing it. But there's also the element that it was completely out of our control and we only had ourselves to blame for that," said Marsh. The all-rounder said the team was dejected after the fall of the final Bangladesh wicket. Pacer Naveen-ul-Haq trapped Mustafizur Rahman in front of the wicket to signal a famous win for the Afghans. "We were all flat (when the final wicket fell). We were desperate to continue on in the tournament. But fair play to Afghanistan - they beat us and they beat Bangladesh and they deserve to be in the semifinals," added Marsh. Afghanistan will face South Africa in the first semifinal of the T20 World Cup at Trinidad on Thursday.

We still haven't played our best game yet: SA coach Rob Walter

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Asserting that their best is yet to come, South Africa coach Rob Walter said the team is not bogged down by near misses of the past and will "take confidence" from its performance in crunch moments on way to the ongoing T20 World Cup semifinals. In the first semifinal of the tournament here on Thursday, perennial dark horses South Africa will take on an Afghanistan team that has caused a flutter with its heroics in the tournament, the highlight of which has been the sensational win over heavyweights Australia. In the press-match press conference, Walter was asked if this could be South Africa's time after having battled their way past tricky opponents in testing conditions over the last few weeks. "Definitely it's always great to dream and I think everyone in South Africa dreams of the time when a trophy gets lifted. No doubt that will happen. Whether it's going to be this week, that remains to be seen. We're just going to try and play

the best game of cricket that we can. And we still haven't played our best game yet," Walter told reporters. South Africa's success in prevailing in tricky situations, their Achilles Heel in the past, bodes well for the side chasing a maiden World Cup title triumph. "From the closeness point of view, yeah, we've managed to get over the line in quite a number of close games in the lead up to the semifinal, which for a team has been great for us. "We've potentially missed out on a few of those moments in the past, and this time around we managed to get over the line. So, we certainly take confidence out of that. "We still want to play our best cricket in the key moments of the game tomorrow." Right from the 1992 World Cup, their first since readmission into international cricket after the apartheid ban, South Africa have either choked in those big semifinals of ICC tournaments or luck deserted them. Needless to say, the subject was broached during the interaction. "Look, I said, the near misses in



the past, they belong to the people who missed them. To be honest, this team is a different team. We own whatever is ours to own. And so, our nearest reflection point is this tournament where we've managed to get over the line. So that's what we think about." Walter made no effort to play down the pressure and excitement of playing in a World Cup semifinal.

"It's never just another game. I think that sort of rhetoric around semifinals is always untrue, or people trying to downplay the occasion. Certainly, we don't do that. It is a semifinal of a World Cup, and we appreciate that and we're looking forward to it." Instead, he played down the luck factor. "I don't think you can win a cricket game because of luck. I think potentially a few things can go your way but there's a few things that might not. So, skill will always trump luck, that's for sure. So, I'd like to think that." He lavished praise on Afghanistan's incredible run to the semifinals, the war-ravaged nation's first in a World Cup. "We're seeing Afghanistan in a T20 semifinal. It's awesome for the game of cricket. I love the way they play the game and the way they support it." How well does he know the Afghanistan team? Walter said, it's not difficult to study teams in modern cricket, with plenty of technology at its disposal. "Look, I mean, a number of their players play in a number of the leagues around the world. In this

day and age, there's not too many players where there's no footage or no information about. "So, from an Afghanistan player point of view, we do have that sort of information. We've also got an entire World Cup, which they've also played seven games in. "So, from that point of view, we've had the opportunity to watch games of cricket as near as last night and then also in the different leagues that the guys have played and played together. So, we're comfortable with our knowledge in it." Walter is wary of the threats Afghanistan could pose in the semifinal. "I think you, yeah, you would have seen it all in the last two days. I think they are a well-rounded team. Gone are the days where there is an area of the team that is not strong. They wouldn't be in a semi-final if that was the case. "You're talking about some world-class spinners. Everyone knows about the world-class spinners led by Rashid Khan. I mean, he's a top-class T20 spinner anywhere in the world. So, we know about that. But as I said, it's not a one-man show anymore. That's for sure," Walter said.