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# Prez Murmu slams Emergency

**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

In the backdrop of a spate of entrance and job related examinations paper leaks, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said the Government was fully committed to investigating the recent incidents and ensure that the guilty are punished. Addressing the 18th Lok Sabha for the first time, Murmu said her Government was working to create an environment to enable youth of the country to dream big and realise their dreams. As she mentioned the steps taken by the Government on the education front, some Opposition members were heard shouting "NEET". Speaking about the recent general elections, Murmu said the whole world is talking

sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his third term, Murmu described the poll result as an endorsement of his Government's policies while ruing attempts to weaken people's faith in electoral process including EVMs, an apparent swipe at Opposition parties. It is like cutting the very branch on which "we all are sitting", she said. A day after Modi and Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla condemned the imposition of Emergency, Murmu too described in her speech the imposition of Emergency in 1975 as the "biggest and darkest chapter" of a direct attack on the Constitution and said the country triumphed over unconstitutional forces.

Continued on Page 2



President Droupadi Murmu addresses the joint sitting of the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha in New Delhi on Thursday. The first Session of the 18th Lok Sabha began on Monday and the 264th session of the Rajya Sabha will begin on June 27 PTI

about successful completion of India's Lok Sabha polls. "The world is witnessing that the people of India have elected a stable Government with clear majority for a third consecutive term," she told the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament. In her first address to a joint

# CBI makes first arrest in NEET case

**RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI**

On a day when President Droupadi Murmu talked tough on examination papers leak during her address in Parliament on Thursday, a series of development related to the raging controversy took place including the first arrest made by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the NEET paper leak case. Meanwhile, the Supreme Court has asked the National Testing Agency (NTA) to apprise it if there was a time limit for raising grievances regarding the OMR sheets provided to the candidates who appeared in NEET-UG 2024. The Delhi High Court too sought response from the NTA to a petition by a NEET candidate alleging 'out of syllabus' question in the entrance examination. In another

LK Advani discharged from AIIMS  
**PNS ■ NEW DELHI**

Veteran BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani, who was admitted to the AIIMS here last night, was discharged on Thursday, a hospital official said. The 96-year-old former Deputy Prime Minister was evaluated by a team of doctors from different specialities, including urology and geriatric medicine and is learnt to have undergone a minor procedure.



In this combo photo, men arrested in the NEET-UG paper leak case being taken to custody following their medical check-up at LNJP hospital, in Patna, on Thursday PTI

development, Opposition leaders under the banner of INDIA Bloc in its Parliament strategy meeting on Thursday evening decided to raise the NEET and NET paper leaks issue in both the Houses of Parliament on Friday.

Continued on Page 2

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LG temporarily dissolves DDCD amid favouritism allegations

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Delhi Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena has approved temporary dissolution of the Delhi Dialogue and Development Commission (DDCD) and removal of its non-official members...

following any procedure, drawing huge salaries is not only undesirable but also patently illegal," LG noted. Saxena said that it is a blatant and clear case of nepotism and favouritism...

amongst the Members of DDCD and, therefore, the continuation of non-official Members, drawing huge salaries is not only "undesirable" but also patently illegal," the Lieutenant Governor said in a note to Chief Secretary...



observations, Mohan was again accommodated, this time by appointing him as Non-Official Member of DDCD in the rank, pay and facilities equivalent to Secretary to the Government of India...

Vice-Chairperson, non-official members without following due process are void ab initio. The incumbent Vice-Chairperson Shri Jasmine Shah has already been restrained to function on the post due to his political activities...

Cabinet Decisions. The DDCD was intended to be an institution of public importance to advise Govt. of NCT of Delhi on governance and technological solutions to various problems afflicting Delhi...

exchequer, which were incommensurate to the duties assigned. It appears that the whole exercise of creating the DDCD by the incumbent Government was only to extend financial benefits and extend patronage to certain persons of partisan inclinations...

allies, thereby embroiling the commission, created with good written objectives, in controversies since its inception. Reacting to the development, Delhi cabinet minister Saurabh Bharadwaj accused Saxena of doing "petty politics"...

BJP, Congress protest against AAP Govt over water crisis in MCD meeting

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI



BJP Councillors raise slogans as they protest against water crisis during the House meeting at Civic Centre

The House meeting of the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) on Thursday witnessed stormy scenes both BJP and Congress councillors protested against the Arvind Kejriwal Government over the water crisis in the national capital...

also carried placards that had 'puche Delhi ek sawal, pani kab degi Kejriwal' and 'har ghar bacha bimbar hai, saf pani ki darkings began at 11.55 am after an hour's delay, opposition councillors rushed into the well of the House and raised slogans against the Kejriwal-led AAP Government creating ruckus in the house over water problems...

Government, the people of Delhi are yearning for every drop of water. The BJP is with the people and is raising their voice in the House," he said. Singh alleged that water is being wasted due to leakage in the pipeline. Taking a jibe at the indefinite fast of Water Minister Atishi, he said that the public is being misled by pretending to fast...

Delhi Police set to implement three new criminal laws

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The Delhi Police is all set to implement the three criminal laws in the national Capital starting July 1, with the completion of training of 25,000 personnel. It has also launched a dedicated application — 'E Pramaan' — for carrying out procedures under the Bhartiya Sakshya Adhinyam (BSA) to help its personnel record videos and audio of search and seizures related to the crime, they said...



of Criminal Procedure (CrPC). The sections under Indian Penal Code (IPC) will be replaced by BNS (Bhartiya Nyay Sanhita) and the Indian Evidence Act, 1872 by BSA, according to the new criminal laws, the officer said. Delhi Police has imparted training to its 25,000 personnel from the ranks of assistant sub-inspectors and inspectors to assistant commissioners of police (ACP) and deputy commissioners of police (DCP), who are responsible for registering the FIRs and conducting investigations...

was led by Special Commissioner of Police Chhaya Sharma and comprised DCP Joy Tirkey, Additional DCP Uma Shankar and other ACP, inspector and SI ranks officers. The training will continue to be imparted to their lower subordinates at district and police stations level, another officer said. For the cases lodged on or before June 30 and their FIRs registered on or after July 1, the sections will of CrPC and IPC will be applicable, the officer said. For instance, if a cheating committed on June 29 and it is reported after July 1, the case will be registered and investigated under IPC and CrPC, he explained. The charge sheets in the cases that occurred before July 1 will be filed according to the CrPC, however after July 1, they will be done under the procedure of BNS...

The Delhi police have given booklets to their officers with old sections of CrPC and IPC and their corresponding sections under the BNS and BNS on the same page, officials said. These booklets will help police personnel with handy information about the new laws, they added. The police have also filed some dummy FIRs and conducted their trial investigations to help officers get the idea of the complete procedure one the new laws are effective. It has been under practice in several districts, the officer said. Another officer said once the laws come into force, the Delhi police will have to tweak some of their orders and circulars, which were issued for the force. Delhi has 15 police districts and around 200 police stations in them. It has a strong force with the capacity of 95,000 police personnel.

Rain causes traffic congestion, waterlogging in many parts of city

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The national Capital woke up to a pleasant morning as heavy rain lashed several parts of the heat struck Delhi, bringing much-needed respite from the heat to Delhiites. However, the downpour resulted in traffic congestion and waterlogging in several areas across the city. Commuters at many places in the city faced inconvenience as traffic police received several calls for waterlogging issues, traffic congestions and fallen trees.

heavy rain over parts of Delhi and adjoining areas will cause slippery roads, low visibility, traffic disruption and localised waterlogging in low-lying areas. Amid the heavy rain, several parts of the city reported traffic snarls including heavy traffic from the Akshardham area to Ghazipur meat market due to waterlogging. Vehicles were seen crawling on the stretch. Similarly, the traffic was also heavy on the Akshardham-Sarai Kale Khan road. A resident of Noida Ramesh Sharma shared how near Ghazipur it took him more than an hour to cross a half a kilometre stretch because of heavy traffic jams. "There were no traffic police and lorries and trucks carrying material for the construction site of Regional Rapid Transit System (RTS) created chaos. It made the traffic worse," he said, adding that his average mileage dipped from 14.9 to 12.6 due to heavy traffic and frequent stops. Avadesh Mehra, a resident of Ghaziabad, said that it took him around one hour to reach

his home. "The traffic was very heavy on the stretch from near Akshardham towards UP. There was water logging near the Ghazipur meat market roundabout. It took me an hour to pass the stretch and reach my home. The condition of traffic was very bad," Mehra said. Akshita Sharma, who works at a firm in central Delhi, said that the traffic was very heavy from near the toll gate on NH-48. Traffic was also affected at ITO due to waterlogging. Meanwhile, the BJP slammed the AAP for waterlogging on several road stretches in the city with light rain on Thursday, alleging that around 150 of 700 drains were desilted in the city. "Those (AAP) who used to curse the MCD earlier for all the civic problems are now themselves ruling the civic body and they can not have the excuse that they are powerless. The AAP government is least concerned with Delhi people and their well-being," Delhi BJP President Virendra Sachdeva



Heavy traffic jam at ITO due to water logged road amid rain shower

stated, attacking the AAP run Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD). There are over 700 drains that need to be desilted before Monsoon every year, Sachdeva said and claimed "Our information is only around 150 were desilted so far and rest are filled with silt." "The Delhi people are left with no option but to tolerate such

a government where no minister is ready to be accountable for anything," he said, warning if the drains were not cleaned on a war footing, the Delhi people were in for worse days in the rainy season. The Monsoon is delayed this year and the agencies like MCD and PWD, both under AAP dispensation, had ample time to desilt the drains, he added.

A wall of a vacant plot collapsed due to rain in southwest Delhi's Vasant Kunj area. The police said no one was injured in the incident. "We are investigating the matter. CCTV footage shows no one was around when the wall collapsed," a senior police officer said. People took to social media platforms to share the traffic-related problems faced by them. Commuters said that there was heavy traffic on the airport route from Raja Garden marble market till Naraina, from Meer Bagh/Vikaspuri flyover towards

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Peeragarhi, and on the Mahipalpur-Gurgaon route. Nishant Yaduvanshi, a resident of Bhopura in Ghaziabad, said, "I was going to Patparganj to see an ailing relative. However, the traffic condition was very pathetic from Anand Vihar to Ghazipur roundabout."

Agencies make plans to handle waterlogging ahead of monsoon

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As the India Meteorological Department (IMD) may predict the arrival of monsoon in the next two days in Delhi, agencies here are putting last-minute touches to their plans to handle waterlogging in the city. The New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) has set up six control rooms equipped with over 160 pumps to ensure that Lutyens' Delhi does not face waterlogging. According to officials, CCTV cameras have already been installed at all the waterlogging hotspots in the area. The feed from these cameras will be monitored through the day at the Integrated Command Control Centre at Palika Kendra, they said. The civic agency has identified five vulnerable points of water stagnation -- Africa Avenue, Baba Kharak Singh

Marg, Panchkuian Road, Purana Quila Road and Lodhi Estate -- on the basis of feedback from public and traffic police officers. "The drainage control rooms have been set up at Sangli Mess, Khan Market, Netaji Nagar, Malcha Marg, Mandir Marg and Connaught Place. These will be manned by senior officers and will function round the clock to address waterlogging complaints," an official said. "There are 99 permanent pumps for draining out water and 62 temporary pumps," he added. Apart from the setting up of control rooms, the focus of the agency is also on desilting of drains system, the official said, adding that it will be completed by June 30. There are 14 drainage systems across the NDMC area and the length of transverse drainage line is 270.82 km. The Public Works



Department, which has a major chunk of roads under its jurisdiction, said they have repaired the permanent pumps and temporary pumps have been procured to drain out water. "The Delhi Traffic Police had identified 308 locations that had witnessed waterlogging last year. There are 214 locations under the PWD. Out of these, there were around 40 locations that required engineering intervention for

ensuring that there is no waterlogging. At other places, maintenance work, like cleaning of bellmouth, removing of debris, etc, was required," the official said. The CCTV cameras have been set up at waterlogging hotspots and they will be monitored by a control room. The feed from these cameras will also be available on the cellphones of the concerned area officials and they will be able to keep tabs on whether there is waterlogging. The department will also be deploying maintenance vans and teams to move in Delhi during monsoon. The Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD) has completed almost 95 per cent of desilting work. "The MCD has completed approximately 95.46 per cent of work for desilting of drains till date. Their target is to complete this work by June 30. MCD has a total of 20,884 drains

that are less than four feet deep across its 12 zones and 713 drains that are more than four feet deep. The cleaning of these drains are done at the departmental level and through tender process, respectively," a department official said. The civic body has set a target to remove 1,27,368 metric tons of silt in two phases under its action plan for the year 2024-2025. In the first phase, the target to remove 78,062 metric tons of silt was set till June 15. In the second phase, the target to remove 49,305 metric tons of silt is set till January 15, 2025. The silt released during cleaning from all the drains has been disposed at sanitary landfill sites at Bhalswa, Okhla and Ghazipur. The concerned department ensures that the silt taken out from the drain is picked up within three to five days and sent to the landfill site, the official said.

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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Steady leadership

Om Birla's re-election as Speaker of Lok Sabha reveals his calibre and his faith in democracy

Om Birla has been re-elected as the Speaker of the Lok Sabha. This marks a significant chapter in parliamentary history. Birla's leadership has been characterised by impartiality, a deep commitment to democratic principles, and a steady hand in navigating the complexities of parliamentary proceedings. "Parliament is the temple of democracy. It is our duty to ensure that it functions efficiently and reflects the aspirations of the people," Birla stated. "I am committed to working with all members to ensure that the Lok Sabha continues to be a vibrant and effective forum for democratic deliberation."



Om Birla, a seasoned politician from Rajasthan and a member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), first assumed the role of Lok Sabha Speaker in June 2019. His re-election signifies a continuity of leadership essential for maintaining the stability and decorum of the lower house. It was indeed heartening to observe that his election was met with widespread support, not only from his party but also from various opposition factions.

This cross-party endorsement reflects Birla's ability to maintain neutrality and manage the house with a balanced approach, fostering an environment where diverse viewpoints can be expressed and debated constructively.

Om Birla's political journey began in the early 1990s, rooted in a commitment to public service and grassroots development. Representing the Kota-Bundi constituency in Rajasthan, Birla has held various significant roles in both state and central politics. As Speaker, Birla has championed initiatives to improve the transparency and efficiency of parliamentary procedures. He has been instrumental in modernising the Lok Sabha's functioning, introducing digital tools and processes to streamline legislative activities and enhance accessibility for the public. Birla's tenure as Speaker has not been without challenges. Birla has had his fair share of controversies. Om Birla has faced allegations of bias, with critics accusing him of partiality in parliamentary proceedings, favouring the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by selectively allowing or disallowing debates on critical issues. Controversies have also arisen from his suspension of opposition MPs for disruptions, which critics argue is a harsh and selectively enforced tactic to suppress dissent. Additionally, Birla has been accused of adopting a high-handed approach toward opposition leaders, often curtailing their speaking time and limiting their opportunities to present viewpoints. Birla has also encouraged greater participation of women and young MPs, fostering a more inclusive and representative parliamentary process. Birla's re-election as Speaker of the Lok Sabha is a reflection of the trust and confidence that the members of the house have in his leadership. His ability to maintain neutrality, coupled with his dedication to upholding the dignity and decorum of the house, has earned him respect across party lines.

### PICTALK



Tourists enjoy during rains, at the Taj Mahal, in Agra

## Will British Indians back Rishi Sunak?



VIVEK SHUKLA

With the July 4 general election approaching, the key question is whether British Indians will rally behind Sunak and the Conservative Party

Will Rishi Sunak, Britain's first Hindu Prime Minister, remain in office after the upcoming general election on July 4th? Will Sunak's Conservative Party receive the votes of British Indians? Will the Labour Party also receive votes from the Indian diaspora? These are important questions indeed. According to the 2011 British census, there are approximately 1.5 million people of Indian origin in Britain, representing 2.5% of the country's total population. Indians are the largest immigrant group in Britain. They are relatively well-educated compared to other immigrant groups and are considered to be among the wealthiest in Britain.



Hinduja, Lakshmi Mittal, and Swaraj Paul are some prominent Indian-origin individuals who feature in the list of Britain's richest people. Rishi Sunak and his wife Akshata Murthy, daughter of Infosys founder N.R. Narayan Murthy, were ranked 245th in the Sunday Times list of Britain's wealthiest individuals released in May. Historically, Indian immigrants in Britain have leaned towards the Labour Party. It was during the Labour government that India gained independence from British rule. However, recent surveys suggest a growing inclination towards the Conservative Party, the main rival to the Labour Party. Vinod Chavan, a writer residing in London since the 1970s, believes that Hindu voters in Britain may vote en masse for the Conservative Party in the upcoming elections. This news could be a relief for Sunak and his Conservative Party. It's important to understand that when we talk about Indians in Britain, we also include those who have settled in the country from East Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and other places. Sunak's family settled in Britain from Kenya in the 1960s, although his ancestors originally hailed from Punjab. There is also a belief that a large number of Indian residents in Britain became supporters of the Conservative Party after

Narendra Modi became India's Prime Minister in 2014. Hindus comprise the majority of these supporters. The total Hindu population among Indians in Britain is over a million. Modi addressed over 60,000 people of Indian origin at a packed Wembley Stadium in London during his 2015 visit to Britain. Gujarati and Punjabi people were in the majority at that time. Boris Johnson, the then British Prime Minister, was known to proudly call himself "India's son-in-law". He was a unique son-in-law. His (second divorced) wife Marina Wheeler's mother, Deep Singh Kaur, was previously married to Sardar Daljit Singh, son of renowned contractor Sir Sobha Singh from New Delhi. Now, let's understand another subtle point. Not all Indian immigrants in Britain think alike politically or support any specific party. It is believed that most Indian Muslims and Sikhs may vote for the Labour Party. They are not fond of the close ties between the Conservative Party and Modi. From the 1960s to the 1980s, a significant number of Indian immigrants settled in Britain from Uganda, Kenya, and the Caribbean Islands. These communities viewed Labour as sympathetic to immigrants.



IN THE PAST 20-25 YEARS, A NEW WAVE OF IMMIGRANTS FROM INDIA HAS ARRIVED IN BRITAIN. THESE ARE DOCTORS, ENGINEERS, IT PROFESSIONALS, ETC. THEY ALL IDENTIFY THEMSELVES AS CONSERVATIVE PARTY VOTERS

They were particularly attracted to Labour's commitment to immigrants' rights, especially following the introduction of the Race Relations Act in 1965 by Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson. Thousands of Indian immigrants came to Britain from Uganda after Uganda's cannibalistic president Idi Amin ordered the expulsion of all Indians from his country within 90 days in August 1972. A deeper analysis reveals that British Hindus have been leaning towards the Conservative Party since 2010. This trend includes wealthy and educated second and third-generation Hindus. In the past 20-25 years, a new wave of immigrants from India has arrived in Britain. These are doctors, engineers, IT professionals, etc. They all identify themselves as Conservative Party voters. The Indian diaspora's disaffection with the Labour Party did not happen overnight. It was triggered by Labour's 2019 resolution calling for "the right of self-determination" for the people of Jammu and Kashmir. This resolution led a large section of the Indian diaspora in Britain to distance themselves from the Labour Party. They saw it as direct interference in India's internal affairs. Meanwhile, Rishi Sunak

became Britain's first Hindu Prime Minister in 2022. This development deepened the bond between Hindus and the Conservative Party. It is still too early to say whether Hindus will vote en masse for the Conservative Party in the upcoming British general election. However, for the first time, British Hindus have released a manifesto outlining their aspirations and expectations from the next government. They say they will only support those who endorse their demands. Hindus are the third-largest religious group in Britain. 29 Hindu organizations have so far endorsed this manifesto. According to the manifesto, "Hindus are the backbone of the British economy. Our contribution to the country's economy is disproportionately high. We are one of the most law-abiding communities. Yet, anti-Hindu hate is on the rise in the country." One of their key demands is for their safety. Will the Hindu votes be split or go to the Conservative Party? Will the Labour and Conservative parties consider the manifesto of the Hindu organizations? (The writer is Columnist and ex-Information Officer, UAE Embassy, New Delhi; views are personal)

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

#### Dynamic Opposition in Parliament



The swearing-in ceremony for Members of Parliament at the 18th Lok Sabha was noteworthy, with the opposition members prominently holding mini copies of the Constitution while taking their oaths.

Leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Dimple Yadav, Avadesh Prasad, and Rakibul Hussain were seen holding these mini constitutions as they swore in as elected MPs. This gesture underscores the opposition's commitment to active governance and to reminding the government of its constitutional responsibilities. By swearing with the Constitution in hand, the opposition members are enhancing their personal commitment to the nation. Their duty is now twofold: to fulfill their roles as MPs and to safeguard constitutional values, reminding the government of its duties. Time will tell who upholds these values. Meanwhile, it is encouraging to see a dynamic opposition in the Indian Parliament to provide a robust counterbalance to those in power. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

## India's assertive foreign policy and global aspirations



PUSHKAR PRIYADARSHI

From bolstering defence capabilities to fostering regional cooperation, India under Modi's leadership navigates a complex geopolitical landscape

Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy initiatives have consistently underscored India's assertiveness and strategic clarity from his first term in 2014 to his current third term in 2024. This period has seen India take decisive actions such as the Balakot Airstrike in 2019 and the banning of TikTok, aimed at countering China and safeguarding national interests. These measures have not been welcomed by neighboring states like China and Pakistan, particularly in light of incidents such as the Galwan clash in 2020, which resulted in the loss of Indian soldiers and prompted a bolstering of border security and a significant increase in the defense budget from approximately Rs 4,73,378 crores in 2020 to Rs 6,21,540 crores presently. This heightened defense spending underscores India's unwavering commitment to national development and security. Underpinning Modi's governance is the vision of a 'Viksit Bharat 2047' (Developed India), with ambitions to elevate India to the rank of the world's third-largest economy. Since 2014,



India has advanced from being the 10th largest economy to the 5th largest, showcasing potential for further growth. The Viksit Bharat agenda prioritizes boosting manufacturing industries, evidenced by substantial subsidies totaling \$28 billion across 14 sectors and an additional \$10 billion allocated to the semiconductor industry. This economic expansion surpasses historical parallels, outstripping even Britain's colonial economic hegemony. India's aspirations extend to securing a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, a move contested primarily by China. Despite these challenges, India is forging independent diplomatic pathways, exemplified by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) involving India, Japan, the United States, and Australia. While debates on the Quad's efficacy persist, its role in ensuring Indo-Pacific security and countering Chinese influence remains pivotal. Additionally, India is strengthening regional ties through initiatives like BIM-STEC and expanding BRICS to include UAE and Saudi Arabia, key oil suppliers, thereby enhancing its global stature and influence. Modi's foreign policy approach is characterized by a nuanced engagement in global politics, leveraging soft power to augment India's international standing. The 'Neighbourhood First'

policy, emphasized during Modi's third term inauguration, exemplifies India's commitment to fostering regional cooperation. High-profile visits and agreements, such as those with Bangladesh, underscore the policy's success in enhancing regional connectivity and economic collaboration. Beyond tangible policy actions, Modi's government champions India as a 'Vishwaguru' (World Teacher), invoking the country's ancient heritage and cultural legacy. This narrative not only promotes India's soft power but also influences global discourse on geopolitics, art, culture, and values originating from India's ancient civilization. India's advocacy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (the world is one family) at international forums like the G20 reinforces its role as a leading soft power and positions it closer to superpower status. Modi's third term inauguration signifies a continued assertiveness in foreign policy, aimed at securing India's strategic interests while fostering global partnerships. (The writer is a researcher; views are personal)

#### OM BIRLA RE-ELECTED AS LS SPEAKER

Madam — The re-election of NDA nominee Om Birla as Lok Sabha Speaker, following a voice vote, comes as no surprise. Unlike his first term in 2019, where he was elected unopposed, this time, elections were necessary. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to retain familiar faces in key ministries during his third term underscores his administration's commitment to continuity. Om Birla's reappointment makes him the first leader of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party to be re-elected as Lok Sabha Speaker twice in over two decades. In a democracy, elections are essential and should be welcomed. The position of Lok Sabha Speaker traditionally requires broad support to ensure the smooth functioning of the House. When a Speaker is elected with bipartisan support, it significantly enhances the role's prestige. Opposition in an election does not necessarily indicate a lack of trust. As Om Birla embarks on his second term, he faces the challenge of surpassing his previous performance, which saw a record number of MP suspensions. While no single party can be blamed, it is evident that all parties will need to exhibit greater maturity and understanding this time. Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

#### AFGHANISTAN REACH SEMIFINALS!

Madam — Giant Australia is out of the T20 World Cup 2024 semifinals, while Afghanistan has secured a place, demonstrating the unpredictable nature of cricket and sports. No one can foresee the winner or loser; sometimes, luck plays a significant role. If Bangladesh had won, Australia might have advanced to the semifinals. We often hear quotes like 'well-coordinated team effort', 'try and try again, you will win at last', 'rise from the ashes like a phoenix' and 'focus on the issue and proceed in an organized and scientific manner'. Today, we witnessed these principles in action by Afghanistan's well-coordinated cricket team. Their success is a beacon of hope in a world often characterized by substandard and duplicitous behaviors such as wars, violence, and negative activities. The world can learn about peaceful coexistence from two sources: Mahatma Gandhi's India and friendly, cooperative sports teams like Afghanistan's. Yes, indeed! PVS Sreelekha | Secundrabad

#### SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE

Madam — Almost 50 per cent of adults in India engaged in insufficient levels of physical activity in 2022, according to a study published in the Lancet Global Health journal. Far more women in India (57 per cent) were found to be insufficiently physically active, compared to men (42 per cent), in line with trends across the South Asian region, the study found. The insufficient levels of physical activity in women in the region were, on average, 14 per cent higher than those in men, it said. The South Asian region also ranked the second high-

est in terms of adults being insufficiently physically active after high-income Asia Pacific region, an international team of researchers, including those from the World Health Organization (WHO), said. This was up by 5 per cent, from 26.4 per cent of adults worldwide insufficiently engaged in physical activity in 2010. In India, a little over 22 per cent of the adults engaged in insufficient physical activity in the year 2000, while in 2010, close to 34 per cent of the adults were insufficiently physically active, the researchers found. They projected that in 2030, 60 per cent of the adults could be insufficiently engaging in physical activity, should current trends continue. This is indeed a cause of concern. India had 101 million diabetics, 315 million people with hypertension, 254 million with obesity, and 185 million with high levels of LDL cholesterol. Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

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## FIRST COLUMN

### TOWARDS BETTER TIES WITH BANGLADESH

Sheikh Hasina's visit highlights Bangladesh's pivotal role as a strategic partner for India



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

The new Indian Government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is back to its foreign policy agenda, which it has carefully curated in the past decade. Mr Modi was in Italy to attend the G7 meetings as a special invitee, within days of his swearing-in. His swearing-in ceremony was in itself a statement of the stated policy focus of Neighbourhood First.

The swearing-in ceremony was attended by leaders from almost all Southeast Asian countries and, some from the Indian Ocean region. Significantly Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, was back in India, within a month of her attending the swearing-in ceremony, to further strengthen the bilateral relations. The focus of the meeting as highlighted by Prime Minister Modi during the joint briefing with Sheikh Hasina was "Today we have prepared a futuristic vision for cooperation in new areas. Youth of both countries will benefit from the agreement reached on cooperation in a lot of areas such as Green Partnership, Digital Partnership, Blue Economy, Space. India Bangladesh "Maitri Satellite" will give new heights to our partnership. We have kept in our focus-Connectivity, Commerce and Collaboration." Bangladesh is an important strategic partner for India, not just due to the intimate geographical boundaries, and the shared culture and language, but also as an important corridor connecting India's Northeast to the Bay of Bengal. Prime Ministers of both countries Sheikh Hasina and Narendra Modi have been at the top job for more than a decade now.

They have developed a working relationship, that is hard to match, underscored by the ten meetings these leaders had in the last five years. Both Prime Ministers jointly inaugurated the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline on 18 March in a virtual format. PM Sheikh Hasina also participated in the Inaugural Session of the Voice of the Global South Summit on 11 January 2023 and the second Virtual Voice of the Global South Summit on 17 November 2023. Bangladesh and India share nearly 4000 km of the international border, security of which is an important pillar of the relationship for keeping a check on the drug trade, smuggling, fake currency, human trafficking, and movement of criminals or terrorists.



As an upgrade to the security partnership, India and Bangladesh have over the years worked on a defence cooperation framework. The recent visit of Bangladesh's PM saw both countries put a special focus on enhancing the defence partnership. In his statement PM Modi highlighted "...on further strengthening our defence cooperation, from defence production to modernisation of armed forces. In the Indian Ocean region, we have a common perspective. We welcome Bangladesh's decision to join the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. We will continue our cooperation in other regional and international forums, including BIMSTEC."

The strongest pillar of the India-Bangladesh relationship is economics. Bangladesh is India's biggest trade partner in South Asia and India is the biggest trade partner for Bangladesh in Asia. The bilateral trade between the two countries is nearly \$16bn. Besides the much sought-after Illich fish from Padma River, Bangladesh exports nearly \$2 billion in goods to India, which is the highest in Asia. In the past few years, an aggressive China has tried to take over some of the traditional space, reserved for India in bilateral relationships, through its opaque infrastructure projects. This has been resisted by India by upping the infrastructure partnership and bringing Bangladesh closer towards the Indo-Pacific geopolitical worldview, than a South East Asian outlook. It helps to align Bangladesh with India's multilateral partners such as Australia, Japan, South Korea and beyond in the Middle East. PM Sheikh Hasina's visit as the first state guest of India, under Modi 3.0 is an important reinforcement of the strong bonds between the two neighbours.

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

# Macron's calls for snap polls to thwart ultra right

This strategic manoeuvre aims to disrupt the growing momentum of the far-right National Rally and prevent further erosion of his political standing



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

Macron's Election Gambit by Nilantha Ilangamuwa Emmanuel Macron, the youngest president in French history, is known for taking risks, as evidenced by his recent call for snap elections to avoid further humiliation after a significant defeat in the European Union Parliamentary Elections, where his main contender garnered over 50% of the votes. This move, the first since 1997, invokes Article 12 of the French Constitution, allowing the president to end the Assemblée Nationale's term early, thus advancing the end of the current five-year term from 2027 to 2024. The new parliamentary elections are set for June 30 and July 7, catching many of Macron's allies off guard. France is at a crossroads. As former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin once mentioned, "Politics is not about morality, it's about efficiency." Throughout French history, there have been five notable instances of snap elections.

In 1962 and 1968, Charles de Gaulle dissolved the Assemblée Nationale following a motion of no confidence and widespread protests, respectively, securing significant victories both times. François Mitterrand used snap elections in 1981 to secure a Socialist majority and again in 1988 to address political "cohabitation." Jacques Chirac's 1997 snap election gamble backfired, leading to a left-wing coalition victory. Currently, Macron faces low approval ratings and a paralyzed parliament, with the National Rally (Rassemblement National or RN) capitalizing on the situation. By calling for snap elections, Macron aims to confront the populist movement and disrupt their momentum, leveraging the more challenging two-round system of French national elections compared to the single-round European elections. Marine Le Pen and RN president Jordan Bardella, the party's candidate for PM, are gearing up for the snap elections, which will have higher stakes compared to the European elections. Macron, aiming to dramatize the choice facing the French, challenged voters in a televised address, asking if they truly want to be governed by the far right.

What exactly is the 'far right', a term frequently echoed in European politics? Often, it's a convenient label used to obscure the significant failures of so-called neo-liberals. When individuals dare to address real societal issues on the ground, rather than fabricating crises to vilify "designated enemies" like Vladimir Putin, they are often hastily labelled as "far-right" or conservative. Instead of accurate representation, this knee-jerk reaction by warmongers, fueled by Western media, reflects bias. Recent events in France, where President Macron's centrist coalition faced electoral setbacks, highlight this skewed narrative. The term "far right" is wielded without nuance, disregarding the diverse ideological spectrum and legitimate concerns championed by these movements. The shifting landscape of French politics challenges outdated perceptions. Parties like Marine Le Pen's National Rally are not accurately depicted as "far-right"; instead, they signify a redefinition of mainstream conservatism. Their platforms, focusing on issues such as controlled migration and national defence, resonate with many voters disenchanted with traditional leadership. Understanding these complexities demands a departure from simplistic labels and a recognition of Europe's evolving political dynamics. While Marine Le Pen may not



mirror Trump's trajectory in France, it's crucial to acknowledge the significant support they garner from the public, despite mainstream media's continued misrepresentation. Blaming perceived evils is often easier than confronting one's own side's failures.



MACRON'S LEADERSHIP IN THIS MATTER HIGHLIGHTS HIS DEDICATION TO UPHOLDING NATO'S FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES AND PRESERVING ITS STRATEGIC DIRECTION IN THE FACE OF EVOLVING GLOBAL CHALLENGES

In this context, polarized politics in France are teaching a new lesson about the deceptive nature of labelling certain movements as "far right" to deflect attention from the failures of neoliberalism. Unlike the European elections with a 50% turnout, local watchdogs asserted that the national elections could see 70% voter participation, potentially mobilizing moderates and reviving the anti-populist front. Macron's team believes voters will scrutinize RN's policy proposals, particularly as the autumn session promised censure motions likely to collapse Prime Minister Gabriel Attal's government. As per the London Guardian, Macron's gamble may yield three outcomes. First, he might recover his majority, although this seems unlikely given his unpopularity and the normalization of the "far right" across Europe. Second, the National Rally could win a majority, leading to an unprecedented cohabitation with a populist right-wing parliament, which Macron might see as a chance to highlight their governance shortcomings. This scenario poses significant risks as an RN-controlled parliament would handle crucial domestic policies, potentially clashing with Macron on issues like immigration and national security, while creating tensions with Brussels due to RN's nation-first policies. The third scenario, considered most probable by analysts, is that RN increases its seats but fails to gain an absolute majority, resulting in a splintered parliament and potential deadlock. Macron may seek alliances with the mainstream centre-right or centre-left, but success is uncertain. This fragmented parliament could lead to increased political instability.

However, one cannot forget that it was Macron who stood firm against NATO's proposal to establish a liaison office in Japan, marking a significant division within the alliance on the eve of a crucial summit. Macron's decisive opposition reflects his insistence that NATO should not stray from its original North Atlantic focus, particularly amid escalating tensions with China.

His resolute stance accentuates France's commitment to maintaining the alliance's core principles, despite pressure to expand its reach into Asia.

Macron's leadership in this matter highlights his dedication to upholding NATO's foundational principles and preserving its strategic direction in the face of evolving global challenges. Macron's recent interview with Le Parisien sheds light on evolving European attitudes towards Ukraine, acknowledging the potential necessity for ground operations in the future. This represents a significant policy shift amidst rising tensions between NATO and Russia. Macron's acknowledgement of the need to prepare for all scenarios, including ground interventions, signals a departure from previous official denials and underscores the increasing seriousness of the situation in Ukraine. Additionally, France's plan to send Mirage 2000-5 fighter jets adds a tangible dimension to the discussion, indicating a more assertive stance from France and its European allies in response to the ongoing conflict.

This regional tension exacerbated France's already unstable domestic political situation, leading to a humiliating defeat for Macron and bolstering Le Pen's populist narrative. According to local media outlets, the political parties in France held emergency talks to explore potential alliances at the beginning of this week following the announcement of a snap legislative election. The unexpected and risky decision to hold elections soon could potentially shift major polit-

ical power, undermining Macron's presidency three years before its scheduled end. Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire emphasized the high stakes, calling it the most consequential parliamentary election in decades.

This could potentially impact on warmongering President of the European Commission, and France would sooner lose its interest in involving in the Ukraine War, while more focus on domestic issues. RN leaders, including Jordan Bardella, the party's candidate for prime minister, and Marine Le Pen, the party's parliamentary leader, are strategizing to capitalize on their recent success. Bardella expressed his readiness to build a large majority, while the divided French left, comprising hard-left LFI, Communists, Socialists, and Greens, also held talks to forge a united front against the populist right.

Despite the populist right's strong performance in the European elections, analysts suggest that an outright RN majority in the parliamentary elections is unlikely, as voters often use European elections to express dissatisfaction with the incumbent government. The president aims to rally these voters in response to the populist right surge, despite concerns from within his party and criticisms from other political figures. Macron described his decision as an act of confidence in the French people's ability to make the best choice for the country, emphasizing the need for a clear majority to govern effectively.

His previous successes in presidential elections were aided by a "Republican front" that unified various political groups against the populist right, a strategy that was not extended to parliamentary elections, costing him a majority. The upcoming elections will test whether he can restore this principle and rally other political groups to prevent the Le Pen clan from gaining control.

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

# India-Arab green strategic partnership: Pioneering sustainable development

This initiative highlights the shared commitment of the two countries to foster a greener and more resilient future

The India-Arab Green Strategic Partnership represents a collaborative initiative aimed at enhancing sustainable development and combating climate change. In today's world, where environmental concerns hold significant global importance, the Green Strategic Partnership between India and Arab countries stands out as a beacon of collaboration and innovation.



PADMALOCHAN DASH

Green Strategic Partnership builds on this foundation by integrating environmental sustainability into the bilateral agenda, reflecting a modern approach to diplomacy in our changing world.

**Objectives and Strategic Imperatives:** At its core, the partnership seeks to harness the strengths of both India and Arab countries in advancing green technologies, renewable energy solutions, water management practices, and climate resilience strategies. India, as a rising global player in renewable energy deployment and innovation, offers practical solutions to the challenges faced:

**Renewable Energy Leadership:** India excels in renewable energy technologies like solar photovoltaic and wind power. This aligns well with Arab countries' goals to diversify their energy mix away from fossil fuels. For example, India's collaboration with the UAE has seen investments in solar parks and wind energy projects, demonstrating tangible outcomes of this partnership.

**Water Security and Management:** Water scarcity poses a critical challenge for both regions, exacerbated by climate change and rapid urbanisation. India contributes practical solutions through its expertise in sustainable water management practices. Initiatives like community-driven water conservation and wastewater treatment can be adapted and shared with Arab countries facing similar challenges.

**Climate Change Mitigation:** The impacts of climate change require urgent mitigation efforts. India has committed to ambitious targets under the Paris Agreement, focusing on renewable energy deployment and emissions reduction. Collaborative projects with Arab countries aim to implement climate-resilient infrastructure.

**Sustainable Urbanisation and Biodiversity Conservation:** As urban populations grow, sustainable urban planning becomes crucial to reduce environmental footprints and improve quality of life. India promotes green building standards, urban green spaces, and effective waste management practices through initiatives like the Smart Cities Mission. Collaborative projects with the UAE in sustainable urban development integrate renewable energy solutions and eco-friendly infrastructure.

**Energy Efficiency:** Improving energy efficiency is key to reducing carbon footprints and enhancing energy security. India's initiatives like the Perform, Achieve, and Trade (PAT) scheme for industrial energy efficiency offer practical models for collaboration.

**Green Finance and Investment:** India's experience in issuing green bonds and establishing green funds, alongside initiatives like the National Clean Energy Fund (NCEF), provides pathways for financing renewable energy, energy storage, and sustainable infrastructure projects.

**Technological Innovation:** Collaboration in research and development (R&D) is crucial for advancing green technologies. India's vibrant start-up ecosystem and research institutions contribute to innovations in areas such as green hydrogen production and battery storage technologies. Joint innovation hubs and technology parks facilitate technology transfer and accelerate the adoption of sustainable innovations. Despite its potential, the Green Strategic Partnership faces several challenges:

**Geopolitical Dynamics:** Diverse geopolitical interests and regional conflicts among Arab countries and India may impact the partnership's cohesion and operational effectiveness. India's role as a neutral mediator and advocate for collaborative solutions helps navigate geopolitical complexities and build trust among partner countries.

**Technological and Financial Barriers:** Scaling up renewable energy projects and adopting advanced environmental technologies demand substantial investments and technological advancements.

**Policy Alignment:** Harmonising national policies, regulatory frameworks, and institutional capacities is crucial for seamless collaboration and effective implementation of joint initiatives across borders.

India advocates for policy coherence through dialogue platforms such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and bilateral strategic dialogues, facilitating alignment on climate goals and regulatory standards.

(The author is an ICSSR-Post Doctoral Fellow, School of National Security Studies, Central University of Gujarat. The views expressed are personal)











## HIL will help identify talent for national team: VR Raghunath

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Dragflick icon VR Raghunath said the upcoming Hockey India League will play a vital role in unearthing players who have the potential to contribute to the national team in future. Making a return after seven years, the tournament, featuring eight men's and six women's teams, will be held across December 2024 and February 2025.

Harmanpreet Singh were picked up from HIL. This is a platform for the domestic players to showcase their skills," Raghunath said in a release from the organisers. Hockey India has invited players and support staff from top 15 teams in the world for this event, and Raghunath said it will give a chance for domestic players to learn from experienced pros. "Several young players will be brushing their shoulders with top-quality international players from Europe, Australia and South America. "It will be an opportunity for

them to understand how top players play and how they think about the game and the work that goes into it," he said. Raghunath also praised HI's move to start an exclusive women's league from this edition of the HIL. "Our women's team has been doing well for the past few years. The Hockey India League will be a great motivation for the players. "Through HIL, young players who don't have much access to hockey, will get a chance to showcase their skills and impress the selectors," he added.

## Chennaiyin FC rope in Lalrinliana Hnamte for three years



**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
 Chennaiyin FC on Thursday drafted in talented central midfielder Lalrinliana Hnamte on a three-year contract ahead of the ISL 2024-25 season. The 21-year-old has thus become the third midfielder to join the Marina Machans after Lukas Brambilla and Jitendra Singh ahead of the upcoming season. The Mizoram-born Hnamte is one of the brightest talents of Indian football. He made his Indian Super League (ISL) debut at the age of 18 for East Bengal in 2021. Welcoming Hnamte to the club, head coach Owen Coyle said: "With the ability he possesses we haven't seen as much of Hnamte as we

should've in the league. He's a fantastic young boy who will offer something different to our midfield options." Before joining Chennaiyin, Hnamte was part of Mohun Bagan Super Giant for three seasons. He won the Durand Cup (2023), the ISL title (2023) and the League Shield (2024) with them. "I'm very excited and grateful to be part of this amazing club and I can't wait to play in front of the fans. I will give absolutely everything I have to help this team win," said Hnamte. Hnamte has made 43 appearances in the ISL, spending more than 1300 minutes on the field. In the last season, he recorded an impressive passing accuracy of 83 percent in 13 matches.



## Unprecedented: Over 30 dope sample collection officers at National Inter-State C'ships

**PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)**  
 A huge posse of more than 30 dope control officers (DCO) from the NADA have descended here for sample collection from the athletes taking part at the National Inter-State Championships, the final Olympics qualifying event, and they have been instructed to do target testing also. Usually, dope samples of the medal winners are also collected at big events like the national championships, and the unprecedented number of DCOs present at the Tau Devi Lal Stadium is expected to lead to a large sample size. The DCOs have mostly come from New Delhi where the National Anti-Doping Agency head office is located. "I can't tell much, but we have a big team here because it's the most important domestic event of the year as it's the final Olympics qualifying event in athletics," one of the officers, who can't be named for obvious reasons, told PTI on Thursday. "We are also doing target selec-

tion of athletes for collection of samples. That much I can tell." Even athletes who finished third or below at the heat races in the morning session of the opening day on Thursday were seen being asked by the DCOs to sign the receipt of notification form and agreement to undergo the test. The NADA team landed here on Wednesday, a day before the start of the championships. A source also said there was out-of-competition collection of samples, which would mean that it was done on Wednesday. The officers refused to divulge the exact or the possible sample size. Meanwhile, 100m national record holder Manikanta Hoblidhar of Karnataka made a shock exit in the preliminary round after finishing fifth in his heat race with a time of 11.10 seconds. His national record stands at 10.23s. Gold medal contenders Gurindervir Singh of Punjab, Amlan Borghain of Assam and Animesh Kujur of Odisha won their respective heats easi-

ly to make it to the semifinals. In the women's 100m, Assam's Hima Das, who is yet to attain full fitness after an injury, finished sixth in her heat with an unimpressive time of 12.69 seconds. The men's and women's 400m races saw a depleted field as some of the top runners pulled out to concentrate in the mixed 4x400m relay race in which India is hoping for a last minute qualification for the Paris Olympics. The initial entry list had the likes of Jyothika Sri Dandi, Subha Venkatesan and MR Poovamma among women and Muhammed Anas Yahiya and Amoj Jacob but they did not run the individual quarter-mile event. But still, Kiran Pahal of Haryana stole the limelight in the women's 400m preliminary round with the fastest time of 52.33 seconds. In men's high jump, national record holder Tejaswani Shankar and Sarvesh Kushare made the finals after finishing first and second in the qualifying round with identical heights of 2.10m.

## Kvaratskhelia's Georgia upsets Ronaldo's Portugal 2-0 to reach the last 16 at Euro 2024

**AP ■ GELSENKIRCHEN (GERMANY)**  
 A pre-game chat with Cristiano Ronaldo inspired Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Georgia to one of the biggest upsets in European Championship history, beating Portugal 2-0 and advancing to the last 16. Georgia's No. 7 has admired Ronaldo for years and had spoken before the game of how much he wanted his hero's shirt. He got it, along with a goal and a slice of soccer history, on a frustrating night for Ronaldo and Portugal.



second, tripping Luka Lochochvili inside the penalty area. Mikautadze hit the spot kick low and past Portugal goalkeeper Diogo Costa in the 57th minute. Georgia advanced in its debut at a major tournament as one of the best third-place teams. Portugal had already qualified from Group F after winning its first two games. The Georgians will next face Spain on Sunday in Cologne, while Portugal plays Slovenia on Monday in Frankfurt. Slovenia is another defense-first team and it upset Portugal 2-0 in a March friendly. Ronaldo is still without a goal at Euro 2024. He felt he deserved a penalty in the first half and kicked away a water bottle when he was substituted in the 66th minute. Ronaldo was given a yellow card for his protests after his penalty appeal was turned down. He wanted the decision after his shirt was pulled in the area by Lochochvili as a cross came in. No foul was given. With Portugal already qualified, Ronaldo was one of only three players kept in the lineup from the previous 3-0

win over Turkey, along with Costa and midfielder João Palhinha. Portugal created little in the second half as Georgia's defense sat deep, but the 2016 champions had chances in added time. Goalkeeper Giorgi Mamardashvili kept Georgia's two-goal lead intact with saves from Nelson Semedo and Diogo Dalot, while Francisco Conceição narrowly missed the target. Portugal coach Roberto Martinez criticized "very inconsistent" video reviews but denied his team had underestimated Georgia. "This was a game where Georgia was playing to be part of history and we didn't match their intensity," he said. At the final whistle, Georgia's players sprinted off the bench to embrace Mamardashvili in a huddle and leapt with joy in front of their raucous fans. Turkey beat the Czech Republic 2-1 in the other group match. The Turks also advanced while the Czechs were eliminated. Georgia's victory also eliminated Hungary, which finished third in Group A.

## Belgium advances to last 16 at Euro 2024 after 0-0 draw, Ukraine eliminated

**AP ■ STUTTGART (GERMANY)**  
 Belgium got the best out of a 0-0 draw at the European Championship, advancing to the last 16 while Ukraine became the first team with four points in a group to be eliminated. The downside for the Belgians at Euro 2024 is they will next face France and Kylian Mbappe on Monday in Duesseldorf. "We go to win. We are here and qualified for this Euro to be part of the best teams. Now, we face a top team," Belgium coach Domenico Tedesco said. "That's why we qualified, otherwise we could stay at home. These are the games we're looking for, and everything is possible." All four teams in Group E finished with four points.

Romania ended up first, followed by Belgium and Slovakia. Ukraine was last on goal difference. Romania and Slovakia drew 1-1 in Frankfurt and both advanced to the knockout stage. Playing at Euro 2024 against the backdrop of Russia's invasion, Ukraine came agonizingly close to advancing and will finish with more points than at least one of the four best third-place teams. The 3-0 loss to Romania in the team's opening game proved to be decisive. "In the last two games, we showed the character of our nation. But this is life, you make some mistakes, but then it's important how you react," Ukraine coach Serhiy Rebrov said. "I'm very proud of the players. Of course, everyone is



unhappy with the result, but there are no questions for the players." There was nearly a different ending when Ukraine substitute Ruslan Malinovsky tried to score directly from corner late in the match. Belgium goalkeeper Koen Casteels managed to save the

effort at the near post. The third-ranked Belgians had another scare when Georgiy Sudakov ran into the box but shot right at Casteels. Belgium, which lost to Slovakia in its opening game, struggled to get its offense going again with Romelu Lukaku failing to make the

most of his team's best chance in the first half. The Belgian fans booed their players at the end of the game at Stuttgart Arena, while Ukrainian supporters, who earlier held up a banner of a fallen soldier named Nazariy Hryntsevich, showed their appreciation to the national team. "We wanted to bring them joy, to make them proud. We left it all on the field, but it wasn't enough," Ukraine defender Oleksandr Tymchyk said. Belgium will likely need to improve against France, which was the runner-up at the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. While the French have also been unconvincing, Belgium was expected to advance with ease from a group without any of the traditional European soccer powerhouses.

## Sreeja attributes recent wins to mental and physical strength, aims to carry momentum to Olympics

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
 Indian's top-ranked women's table tennis player Sreeja Akula credits her enhanced mental and physical strength over the past two years for her stunning victories against higher-ranked players as she hopes to carry this momentum into the Paris Olympics. Sreeja created history last week by becoming the first Indian table tennis player to win a WTT Contender singles title and on Tuesday she became the country's top paddler with a career-high ranking of 24. "For the last two years, I have been working a lot on improving my mental strength and I think that is the first aspect where I have improved, especially in 2024. I am mentally well prepared to play



against any opponent, whoever it is," Sreeja said in an interview with Ultimate Table Tennis. "I have also been working a lot on my strength and conditioning, especially to prevent injuries, and to

improve my agility on the table. I think that has made a lot of difference in my game. "I have also worked a lot on my first ball attack against the push. I have tried to be more consistent in attacking that ball and I can see these three

aspects have brought a lot of change in my game," she said. Sreeja would be participating in both the team and individual events and is definitely high on confidence as she has hit a purple patch this year. "It's my debut Olympic Games but I think I am well prepared for the tournament. I just want to play my best in whichever event I am playing and just want to create the maximum number of upsets." Both Indian men's and women's teams have secured a historic qualification in the team event at the Paris Olympics. In 2022, Sreeja had teamed up with Sharath to win the mixed doubles gold in her first-ever Commonwealth Games appearance in Birmingham

## Gukesh beats Deac Bogdan-Danielin Superbet Classic chess

**PTI ■ BUCHAREST (ROMANIA)**  
 Indian Grandmaster D Gukesh started off on a positive note, beating Deac Bogdan-Daniel of Romania in the first round of the Superbet Classic chess tournament here. Set to challenge reigning World Champion Ding Liren of China later this year, Gukesh got a bit lucky in the middle game as the both players missed a tactical nuance but the Indian emerged on top soon after to give his campaign a positive start in his first classical game since winning the Candidates tournament. The other Indian in fray R Praggnanandhaa tried hard but had to settle for a draw against Nodirbek Abdusattorov of Uzbekistan in a keenly-contested game. The other winner of the round was Fabiano Caruana of the United States, who beat Firouzja Alireza of France, while the other two games in the 10-player round-robin tournament ended in draws. It was a Nimzo Indian defense by Deac



Bogdan-Daniel that led to a complicated middle game. The Romanian was up to the task in finding counter-attacks and won a sacrificed pawn in the middle game. The position looked promising when Gukesh erred and allowed a tactical skirmish. However, Bogdan-Daniel failed to spot the best move and ended up trading his rook

for a minor piece. The position remained complicated but Gukesh converted it with ease. Praggnanandhaa faced the Ruy Lopez with black against Abdusattorov and, after initial opening duel, won a pawn to reach a rook and pawns endgame. While the position remained within the boundaries of a draw, the Indian tried hard for over sixty moves. However Abdusattorov did not give much as the two players eventually decided to split points. Caruana was in a spot of bother in the middle game arising out of a London system but Alireza could not find the right attacking moves. The American exchanged pieces at regular intervals and his extra pawn came in handy in the ensuing queen and minor piece endgame. In other games of the day, Dutchman Anish Giri played out a draw against American Wesley So, while Maxime Vachier-Lagrave of France also had to sign peace against Russian Ian Nepomniachtchi.

# SOUTH AFRICA BANISH AFGHANISTAN, ENTER MAIDEN T20 WC FINAL

**PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)**  
South Africa exorcised their agonising semifinal jinx through an exceptional spell of pace bowling as they walloped an emotionally drained Afghanistan by nine wickets to enter their first-ever T20 World Cup final here. They will face the winners of the second semifinal between India and England in the title clash, but the Afghans will go home with their heads held high after a stirring run in the tournament. Marco Jansen (3/16) Kagiso Rabada (2/14) and Anrich Nortje (2/7) ripped the soul out of the Afghanistan top-order while bundling them out for a paltry 56 in just 11.5 overs after being invited to bowl. Despite the early departure of Quinton de Kock, bowled through the gate by impressive pacer Fazalhaq Farooqi, the Proteas had little trouble in reaching 60 for one in 8.5 overs. Reeza Hendricks (29 not out), who put up his highest score in this event, and skipper Aiden Markram (23 not out) navigated them safely to the shores of victory as they have finally freed themselves from the painful tag of chokers in global events. Afghanistan have given their

everything to reach the World Cup semifinal, and in the crucial clash they were left with no energy, and produced a nothing effort that belied their doughtiness until now. It affected their batting as they looked unusually edgy against the South African pacers, who summoned a spell from hell. They reduced the Afghans to 28 for five inside the Powerplay and there was no coming back from that depth as they crashed to their lowest total in a T20 International. Their 56 was also the lowest total in a T20 World Cup semifinal clash. Once reduced to 28 for six, Afghanistan could not even offer a smidgeon of fight as their dream of reaching a maiden World Cup final was squashed even before it began. While the South Africa pacers were on the money, the Afghan batters too should cope some blame for being edgy on a pitch that hid no evils apart from those deliveries that kicked up from a length. Opener Rahmanullah Gurbaz was the first to perish, chasing Jansen's delivery outside the off-stump to give Reeza Hendricks an easy catch at slip. The dismissal of in-form Gurbaz seemed to inject doses of panic in the Afghanistan line-up, and Gulbadin Naib was consumed by a lovely in-



coming delivery by Jansen. But the next two dismissals were a combination of bowler's brilliance and batters' irrationality. Ibrahim Zadran, on whom a lot was riding for the Afghans, did not move his feet at all against a Rabada delivery that came back a bit. There was enough room for the ball to sneak past the bat and pad to rattle Zadran's leg-stump. Three balls later in the fourth over, Mohammad Nabi's dismissal was along similar lines and the only difference was that Rabada disturbed the off-stump this time. Nortje joined the party with the scalp of Azmatullah Omarzai, whose slash found Tristan Stubbs in the deep. Gurbaz, Zadran and Omarzai have been the leading run-makers for Afghanistan in this ICC showpiece, but on the crucial day all they could manage was a paltry 12 runs between them. Skipper Rashid Khan, who could have made some valuable runs, chose to expose all his stumps to Nortje to see the one close to his legs getting cartwheelled across the field. Leg-spinner Tabraiz Shamsi (3/6) applied the coupe de grace on Afghanistan batting line with two wickets in one over, jettisoning Karim Jannat and Noor Ahmad.



## Laura calls for more red-ball cricket in women's cricket calendar

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
South Africa skipper Laura Wolvaardt has called for more Tests in women's cricket calendar and inclusion of red-ball tournaments in the rainbow nation's domestic structure, ahead of their one-off Test against India starting here on Friday. India and South Africa will face off here at Chepauk for only their third Test in history and first in nearly 10 years, a contest for which Wolvaardt conceded her side is not fully prepared for. While a multi-day red-ball women's competition was resumed in India last season, South Africa have no such tournaments.

"Most of us don't have any preparation in the format, since we don't play domestic four-day cricket. It's difficult, since I have to leave the balls that I have been cover-driving my whole life, and I still tend to play it by instinct," Wolvaardt said during a press conference here on Thursday. Citing the lack of preparation for red-ball cricket fixtures which are few and far between, the star batter even suggested scrapping the format. "We either need to play more Tests and incorporate it into the domestic level, or we can just leave it because playing one or three Tests is very hard to adapt to," she said. "But I want to have more of it," Wolvaardt added.



South Africa's last outing in the format was earlier this year in February when they were trounced by Australia by an innings and 284 runs in Perth. After this fixture against India, South Africa's next Test assignment will be against England in December. "Getting the opportunity to

play more red-ball cricket is awesome. Having three scheduled in a calendar year is pretty cool," she added. "I personally really enjoy the format. So, this Test will be a huge challenge for us, and hopefully, we will adapt to the conditions well." "Women's Tests, in general, is a bit unknown as neither teams have too much experience in it. India does have a good home advantage and winning here will be a tough challenge, but we are up for it," she added. The pitch is expected to be spin-friendly while there is also forecast of rain. "Preparation-wise, we have been facing a lot of spin in the nets lately since it will be the biggest threat here. The balls

were staying low at the nets yesterday," Wolvaardt said. "Batting-wise, it's going to be a big challenge. But thankfully, we have a few top spinners in our squad who are licking their lips and getting ready for the game tomorrow. Hopefully, they are going to put on a great show," she added. With the South African men's team making it to the final of the T20 World Cup, Wolvaardt said her side would also be keeping an eye on Saturday's final. "Most of us woke up early to watch the game, but only to watch them chase 57. It was absolutely amazing to watch and felt incredible. We will definitely watch the final and cheer them on," she said.

## Sri Lanka head coach Chris Silverwood steps down

**PTI ■ COLOMBO**  
Sri Lanka's head coach Chris Silverwood on Thursday stepped down from the role following the team's dismal outing in the ongoing T20 World Cup, the SLC announced. Former captain Mahela Jayawardene had resigned from the post of the consultant coach on Wednesday. "Being an international coach means long periods away from loved ones. After lengthy conversations with my family and with a heavy heart, I feel it is now time for me to return home (England) and spend some quality time together," Silverwood, who played six Tests and seven ODIs for England as a pacer, said in his statement. "It has been a real honour for me to be part of Sri Lanka Cricket and I will be taking away many fond memories,

added Silverwood. Sri Lanka crashed out of the T20 WC in the group stages itself with two losses, a no result and a solitary win, and it was the former champions' worst performance in the ICC showpiece. During Silverwood's tenure, Lanka won the T20 Asia Cup in 2022 and also reached the final of the 50-over Asia Cup last year where they lost to India. They also secured a slew of bilateral series wins both at home and overseas, including one against Australia in the 50-over format and two away Test series wins over Bangladesh. The SLC has already started the process of finding a new head coach ahead of the team's next international outing against India in a white ball series next month. The Lankans will then head to England for a two-match Test series.

## Rahane joins Leicestershire, to play County Championship and One Day Cup

**PTI ■ LEICESTER**  
Former India skipper Ajinkya Rahane has signed with English county side Leicestershire for the second half of the ongoing season, the club announced on Thursday. As per the deal, he will be featuring in the team's final five games of the ongoing County Championship, besides playing in the One Day Cup, where the Foxes are the defending champions. The 36-year-old joins Leicestershire in place of Wiaan Mulder, who is expected to travel to the West Indies with South Africa in August. Rahane has accumulated over 26,000 runs across formats (First-Class, List-A and T20), having struck 51 hundreds with a top score of an unbeaten 265. Playing for the 'Men in Blue', he has collected more than 8,000 runs, including 15 centuries, along with a best knock of 188 in the New



Zealand Test in 2016. "I'm really excited to have another opportunity to come to Leicestershire. I've built a strong rapport with Claude (Henderson) and Alfonso (Thomas), and I'm looking forward to playing for the Club this summer," Rahane said in a club statement.

"I followed the team's results last year and was very impressed with what I saw. I'm hoping to enjoy my cricket and contribute to more success for the Club this season." Rahane is expected to arrive in mid-July, with his first contest being away to Notts Outlaws in the One Day Cup on July 24. "We are thrilled to welcome someone of Ajinkya's quality to Leicestershire. It was unfortunate that Ajinkya's schedule didn't quite work with ours last year. But, it's a massive boost to have secured his services for the business end of this season," commented Leicestershire's Director of Cricket, Claude Henderson. "He holds immense experience and vital leadership qualities, which will be hugely beneficial to the team alongside his run-scoring ability. Ajinkya's arrival also presents a fantastic opportunity for our batters to learn from one of the game's best."



## Bumrah is 1000 times better than me: Kapil Dev

**PTI ■ NEW DELHI**  
Iconic former India all-rounder Kapil Dev feels Jasprit Bumrah is a "1000 times better" bowler than what he was at his prime. Bumrah, who has been doing exceptionally well in the ongoing T20 World Cup, snaring 11 wickets at an outstanding economy of 4.08 in the 23 overs he has bowled so far. "Bumrah is 1000 times better than me. These young boys are far better than us. We had more experience. They are better," Kapil told PTI Videos. Bumrah, who is widely regarded as the best pacer in international cricket now,

has played 26 Tests for India, picking up 159 wickets and an economy of under three. His 89 ODI appearances have yielded 149 wickets while his T20I wicket count stands at 85 from 68 matches. Kapil ended his career with a then world record 434 Test wickets and is considered one of the best all-rounders of all time who also claimed 253 ODI scalps. The 65-year-old, who led India to their maiden World Cup title in 1983, also lauded the overall fitness levels of the current national team. "They are very good. Outstanding. They are fitter. They are much more hardworking. They are fantastic," he said.

# Debutantes in focus as India Women take on South Africa in one-off Test

**PTI ■ CHENNAI**  
The focus will be on young talent, especially the debutantes, when the Indian women's cricket team squares off against South Africa in a one-off Test starting here on Friday, a decade after the two teams last clashed in a five-day game. With Test cricket not being a regular affair for women, as many as five in the Indian squad could get a debut in the longest format, after having established themselves and proved their mettle in the limited-overs circuit. Also, with India coming off a 3-0 clean sweep in the preceding ODI series against the same side, the momentum is surely with the hosts although this will be a different format altogether. The likes of Uma Chetry, Priya Punia, Saika Ishaque, Arundhati

Reddy and Shabnam Shakil will be the ones to watch as they prepare for their Test debut. The last time India competed in a red-ball match was December 2023, which was their first Test outing in two years. Playing back-to-back home Tests against England and Australia (one each), the hosts were successful in both instances. The Indians last played South Africa in a Test back in 2014 in Mysore, winning it by a comprehensive innings and 34-run margin. Although the focus has generally been on white-ball cricket for the Indian women, head coach Amol Muzumdar has mentioned that there will be more red-ball cricket going forward. He has said that having a Women's Test Championship will add more value to the bilateral Tests.

"It's not a bad idea to have a (Women's) Test Championship, something we can look forward to. But that is for the Board (BCCI and ICC) to decide. If it happens, it's indeed better for the game," he had said on Wednesday. While Harmanpreet Kaur will lead the side with five Tests under her belt, vice-captain Smriti Mandhana is the most experienced of the lot, having played a Test more than her skipper. Both Mandhana and Jemimah Rodrigues were in good form against England and Australia. They would once again back themselves to come up with a solid show with the bat against the South Africans here. The likes of Shafali Verma and Deepti Sharma will also be expected to come good as they are currently the team's second and third-highest



run-scorers respectively in the format. As for bowling, Deepti Sharma and Pooja Vastrakar were lethal forces

that gave the England and Australia a hard time in December. Also, Sneha Rana's off-breaks could be a nightmare for the Proteas, especially on the Chennai track, which is traditionally known to assist spinners. As for South Africa, the women have played just one Test in two years, against Australia in Perth this February, which the latter won comprehensively. Even the South African side has five names in line for Test debuts. However, the team led by Laura Wolvaardt will continue to rely heavily on all-rounders Sune Luus and Delmi Tucker along with Tazmin Brits. With the ball, Masabata Klaas and Anneke Bosch are their top wicket-takers, while spinner Nonkululeko Mlaba can be tricky to face on this track. Chepauk has hosted only one women's Test to date, back in 1976 when India drew against the West Indies.

However, Muzumdar asserted that the team is aware of the demands here and will play accordingly.

**SQUADS:**  
**India:** Harmanpreet Kaur (c), Smriti Mandhana (vc), Jemimah Rodrigues, Priya Punia, Shafali Verma, Shubha Satheesh, Deepti Sharma, Pooja Vastrakar, Meghna Singh, Richa Ghosh (wk), Uma Chetry (wk), Sneha Rana, Saika Ishaque, Rajeshwari Gayakwad, Arundhati Reddy and Renuka Thakur Singh.  
**South Africa:** Laura Wolvaardt (c), Anneke Bosch, Tazmin Brits, Nadine de Klerk, Annerie Dercksen, Mieke de Ridder (wk), Sinalo Jafa (wk), Marizanne Kapp, Masabata Klaas, Suné Luus, Elz-Mari Marz, Nonkululeko Mlaba, Tumi Sekhukune, Nondumiso Shangase and Delmi Tucker.