



OPINION 6 THE DARK DAYS OF INDIA'S EMERGENCY

WORLD 9 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 Kejriwal incarcerated



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

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. Speaker Bhartuhari 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.

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 begin 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,

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. Continued on Page 8

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Am 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 Central probe 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.



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

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 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 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 Bihar 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. Continued on Page 8



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

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, Baderwah 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 Lakhampur — 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



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

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 Baderwah area of Doda.

Jain said the operation was launched in the Gandoh, Baderwah 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 Terryath village in the Pouni area. He was briefed on the prevailing security situation and the actions of the security forces, it said.

Nagaland holds local polls after 20 yrs



Voters exercise their franchise in the Nagaland civic polls

PTI ■ KOHIMA

Around 80 per cent of the over 2.23 lakh electorate on Sunday exercised their franchise in the Nagaland civic polls, held after a gap of 20 years, a senior official said. Voting for 25 urban local bodies (ULBs) in 10 districts began at 7:30 am amid tight security and continued till 4 pm, he said. The turnout figure is likely to increase as voters were still in queue at

many polling stations, the official said. "Voting has been peaceful... A three-tier security arrangement was put in place in 214 polling stations across the 10 districts," a State Election Commission (SEC) official told reporters here. Instead of EVMS, voting took place through ballot papers in the 420 polling stations, he said. This is a historic election for the northeastern state, as the polling to three municipalities and 36

town councils were conducted after a gap of 20 years. The urban local body polls were also held for the first time with 33 per cent women reservation, the official said. The votes will be counted on June 29. Over 2.23 lakh voters, including 1,13,521 women, will decide the electoral fate of 523 candidates from 11 political parties. The Government had announced elections to urban local bodies several times in the past, but objections from tribal bodies and civil society organisations against reservation for women, and tax on land and properties, created hurdles in conducting the polls. Among the parties contesting the elections are the NDPP, BJP, Congress, Naga Peoples' Front (NPF), Rising Peoples' Party, RPI (Athawale), JD(U), LJP, NCP and the NPP. The Eastern Nagaland Peoples' Organisation (ENPO), however, had declared that six districts in the region would not participate in the elections.

TAJ ON A RAINY DAY



Tourists enjoy rain at the Taj Mahal in Agra

PTI Photo

UP attracted 48 crore tourists last year: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Urging people to advance the possibilities of eco-tourism in the state by connecting with the Eco-Tourism Development Board, Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath said on Wednesday that this initiative would help develop eco-tourism akin to spiritual tourism. The chief minister was speaking at the 'Eco-Tourism-Samwad 2024', organised by the Tourism department at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan. Yogi said that the suggestions from various experts at the one-day dialogue would be taken seriously by the government. He highlighted that the newly constituted board has progressed by releasing its logo on the same day. He acknowledged that Uttar Pradesh, being the most populous state, had almost 48 crore tourists last year, which is double its population. Most tourists were engaged in spiritual tourism, with Kashi attracting 10 crore tourists, Mathura 7.5 crore, and Ayodhya over 5 crore. He also pointed out other popular tourist destinations in UP, including Naimisharanya near

Lucknow, Chitrakoot, Saharanpur, Buddhist sites like Kushinagar, Shravasti, Sarnath, and places associated with the Jain and Sufi circuits. "There are immense possibilities for spiritual tourism in the state, underscoring that UP is a land of human and animal creation, evident from Sonbhadra's Fossil Park, which has fossils over 150 crore years old," he said. Referring to the numerous ponds and wetlands in the state, he said that UP has a forest area of 15,000 square kilometres, with ancient forests still present. "When I visit the Terai region, I realise that the forests are protected here, while they have vanished in Nepal across the border," he added. Yogi stated that the Eco-Tourism Development Board was formed primarily to attract tourists to the various destinations with potential. He attributed the intense heatwave conditions to human greed and the exploitation of nature. Discussing the state government's efforts in restoring the Kukrail river, a tributary of the Gomti, he noted that encroachments had turned it



Chief Minister speaking at the 'Eco-Tourism-Samwad 2024', organised by the Tourism department at Indira Gandhi Pratishthan in Lucknow on Wednesday

into a drain over the last four decades, posing a challenge for Lucknow. "We fought up to the apex

court to restore it as a river, demolishing 8,000 structures and rehabilitating the residents. Post-demolition, we saw

water sources re-emerging in the river," he said. He emphasised that the Eco-Tourism Development Board

warns of the importance of river conservation for future generations. "When one tourist visits a state, it benefits six other people. In eco-tourism spots, development work should be carried out through nature conservation. In places like Sohagibarwa, Dudhwa, and Chuka, tourists enjoy these natural spots. When I enter the interiors of Dudhwa forests, I notice the temperature change. The closer you come to nature, the better nature will respond by providing a clean and beautiful environment," he said. He stressed the need for connectivity to these places, mentioning the state government's plans to develop an airport in Lakhimpur Kheri and improve the holiday train. "We can train local people as guides, which will help improve the ecosystem and advance eco-tourism. Tourism is not only a medium of entertainment but can also strengthen the state's economy and generate employment. We have made efforts in heritage tourism, developing various monuments, and under the UP Tourism Policy, attracting a number of hotels and restaurants to the state," he concluded.

Dalit woman alleges gangrape; one of 7 accused arrested

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A Dalit woman accused seven people of gang-raping her after she was abducted while on her way to collect medicine from a community health centre in the Sushant Golf City police station area. Responding swiftly, a police team apprehended one of the accused, identified as Anwar. He is said to be the prime accused, who allegedly assaulted the woman and forcibly took her mobile phone. In her complaint, the victim stated that the sexual assault occurred on Tuesday afternoon while she was alone en route to the community health centre in the area. After the ordeal, she endured hours of trauma before eventually going to the police station later that night to file a complaint. The police registered a case under various sections, including gang-rape, and launched a manhunt for the other accused.

According to the victim, Anwar of Katra Baksa, along with six companions, intercepted her near Khurdahi market around noon. They allegedly dragged her to a garden where they subjected her to gang-rape. When she resisted, they assaulted her and snatched her mobile phone. Following the incident, the victim managed to return home and informed her family about what had transpired. Later that night, accompanied by her family, she went to the Sushant Golf City police station to file a case against Anwar and six others. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Police (South) Shashank Singh stated that although Anwar's residence was raided, he managed to evade arrest. The victim remains traumatised, and police interactions with her have been limited due to her emotional state.

'Country can't progress without development of MSME sector'

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Minister for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) Rakesh Sachan said on Wednesday that the country cannot progress without developing the MSME sector and achieving the dream of making the state a one trillion-dollar economy hinges on promoting this sector. Speaking at the inaugural session of the two-day 'Uttar Pradesh MSME Conclave' organised by ASSOCHAM, he highlighted the collaborative efforts of Central and state governments to boost MSMEs. Sachan described MSMEs as the backbone of the country's economy, noting that the gov-

ernment is taking several measures to support them. "The state government stands firmly with MSMEs, aiming for Uttar Pradesh to emerge as an enterprising state," he said. He congratulated ASSOCHAM for organising the conclave on the eve of International MSME Day and assured that the government would implement valuable suggestions from the event. He pointed out that the MSME sector is the largest employer after agriculture, providing numerous job opportunities for the youth. "MSMEs contribute 30 per cent to India's GDP and about 50 per cent to exports," he added. The state government is working to register all 90 lakh MSME units on the government portal. The MSME policy of Uttar Pradesh is unique, offering a 50 per cent subsidy on interest for MSMEs up to Rs 1 crore. Additionally, schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, Standup India, and Credit Guarantee Scheme are providing further support. The government is also focusing on marketing support, market

UP minister Rakesh Sachan described MSMEs as the backbone of the country's economy, noting that the government is taking several measures to support them

their industries. It is my humble request that if the attitude of the banking sector is cooperative, things will be better. We want to increase purchasing power so that the economy runs better. We have resolved to make India self-reliant. It should be the dream of every Indian that we become self-reliant in every way," he said. He noted that demand should be shaped according to societal needs and called on MSME units and startups to provide solutions that address these needs. Khanna highlighted the growth in Uttar Pradesh's exports since the BJP came to power in 2017, stating that the state's exports have nearly doubled. Chairperson of ASSOCHAM Business Facilitation and Global Competitiveness Sushma Paul Berlia delivered the welcome address, praising the UP government's steps like interest subsidies and the credit guarantee scheme. Berlia emphasised that increasing the participation and employment of MSMEs is crucial to fulfilling the dream of a developed India.

Bus hits, rolls over cyclist

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

A speeding roadways bus driver allegedly struck a cyclist in Wazirganj on Wednesday, killing him instantly. The victim, Mohammed Rizwan of Nirala Nagar, lost his life when the bus driver fled the scene, inadvertently running over him and crushing him to death near Sahar Nursing Home. According to reports, Rizwan was on his way for some errands when the bus, coming from City Station side, hit his bicycle. Though bystanders flocked to the scene, their focus was on identifying the victim rather than rushing him to the hospital. An eyewitness recounted that the bus rolled over Rizwan, resulting in his death on the spot. In another incident, a young pathology lab worker was found hanging inside his room in Hasanganj police station area on Wednesday. Rahul Kashyap (26), employed at Dr Mahesh Pandey's clinic in Hasanganj, was found hanging from the ceiling by his sister Manisha. Expressing shock over the incident, she said she was unaware of any reason why her brother would take such a step. The police sent the body for autopsy and started an investigation

into the case. Meanwhile, a woman residing with her daughter-in-law in Telibagh under PGI police station area allegedly ended her life by jumping into the Indira Canal at Habua culvert near New Jail in Gosainganj. Her body was recovered from the canal in Achlikhera locality in Nagram. The deceased was identified as Ramkali of Mohanlalganj by her son Sonu. The police, aided by villagers who recognised the missing woman, sent the body for autopsy started further investigations. In a separate incident, the body of a youth, Pramod Yadav (26) of Ahiniwar village in Nigoha, was recovered from the Sae river in Rathi village on Wednesday. Pramod, who was a labourer, had gone missing three days ago. He fell into the river and drowned as he was unable to swim. The bereaved kin refrained from filing a complaint in this regard.

WOMAN MOTHER HURT WHILE RESISTING CHAIN-SNATCHERS
A woman and her mother were injured when the former resisted two bike-borne men who attempted to snatch her gold near the DGP residence in Hazratganj on Sunday night. The woman's brother, who was following her on another bike, chased the miscreants and managed to catch one of them in Narhi. The other accused attacked the victim's brother and fled the scene. The captured accused threatened the victim's brother and later injured himself by hitting his head against a wall to appear innocent. According to reports, the woman, Anshika Srivastava, and her mother were returning home on a scooter. Behind them, her brother Abhishek and her father Umesh Srivastava were following on another bike. When the accused struck, Abhishek immediately decided to chase them and managed to catch one while the other escaped after attacking him. The police were called, and the accused was handed over to them. The accused identified himself as Ashish Sahni of Para, while the absconder was identified as Ritesh Rastogi. Anshika and her mother were injured due to the sudden fall from the scooter during the attack. It was not clear if the police recovered the looted gold chain. A case was registered at Hazratganj police station on Monday night.

Apollo acquires Da Vinci Xi

Lucknow (PNS): Apollo Hospitals, Lucknow, has acquired the Da Vinci Xi, India's most advanced robotic-assisted surgery system, which is expected to bring significant economic benefits to the state by stimulating medical tourism, fostering healthcare business development, and elevating patient care standards. Addressing mediapersons at the launch event in Lucknow, MD & CEO of Apollo Hospitals, Lucknow, Dr Mayank Somani said: "We are immensely proud to introduce the Da Vinci Xi robotic-assisted surgical system in Uttar Pradesh. This is India's most advanced surgical system, and we are the first private hospital to have it in Uttar Pradesh outside of NCR. The Da Vinci Xi system allows surgeons to perform complex procedures with greater precision and minimal invasiveness, translating to quicker recovery times, less scarring, and improved patient outcomes. With the addition of the Da Vinci Xi system, we aim to expand our robotic-assisted surgery services across specialties including oncology, urology, cardiology, bariatric surgery, gynecology, general surgery, thoracic surgery, and pediatric surgery."

CLASSIFIEDS

NOTICE

I, Shivam Verma S/o Yogendra Singh R/o Vill. Ruppur Post Viviva Jalapur, Kannauj U.P.-209729 have changed my name from Verma Shivam Yogendra Singh to Shivam Verma for all future purposes vide affidavit dated 26 June 2024 before Kanpur (UP).

NOTICE

Notice- I have changed the name of my son VIHAAN (whose date of birth is 14-09-2015) to VIHAAN KUMAR. Hereinafter he will be known with his new name. Amit Kumar (Father) 128/594, K-Block, Kidwai Nagar, Kanpur-208011

NOTICE

I have changed my name from AFLAQ AHMAD to AFLAK AHMAD. In future I shall be known as AFLAK AHMAD. AFLAK AHMAD S/o Mushtaq Ahmad, 85/127, Shilakhana, Teliyarganj, Prayagraj

NOTICE

I have changed my daughter's name from ANURA TO ANSHULA AADYA SINHA For all future purpose, Abhishek Kumar R/o 84/58, J.K. Quarters No.85/7, Anwar Ganj Kanpur Nagar

NOTICE

Jaya Dwivedi and Jaya Devi both names are mine, in future, I will be known as Jaya Devi and it is also recorded in the records. Jaya Devi W/o Chandra Prakash R/o Gayatri Nagar, Bhatu Farm, Shuklaganj, Thana Gangaghat, Unnao

NOTICE

Notice given to public at large that original allotment letter and original possession letter related to Flat No. SU/3074/B-3, Block-B-3, Type-C, Situated at Saryu Apartment, Sector-1, Gomti nagar Extension, Lucknow had been lost by me and which is not traceable till date. So if any person found above said document please return to me and if any person misuses the above said document, he will be liable for legal consequences. Informant Mrs. Saumya Tripathi D/o Mr. K.N. Tripathi R/o- 4/156, Vivek Khadd, Gomti Nagar, Lucknow Mob. 9670145993

LDA plans to sell properties lying unsold for decade

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Once again, the Lucknow Development Authority has announced plans to sell its properties, lying unsold for a decade. The LDA will offer a rebate of at least Rs 10 lakh on residential properties and Rs 15 lakh on commercial properties. LDA Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi said that the proposal would be a key agenda item for the upcoming board meeting scheduled next month for approval. This rebate is expected to attract potential buyers who have been considering purchasing these unsold properties. In 2019, LDA engaged a real estate agency to expedite the sale of these properties, but it failed to deliver on its promise, leading to the cancellation of their agreement in 2022. Despite some properties being sold in recent years, official records indicate that

unsold residential and commercial properties worth over Rs 12,000 crore are still on the market, while properties worth Rs 5,000 crore have been successfully disposed of. Tripathi said LDA is facilitating visits to these properties, allowing potential buyers to assess them firsthand. Meanwhile, the Uttar Pradesh Housing Development Board has announced plans for a township near Kisan Path on Sultanpur Road, according to an official communication issued by Secretary SN Shukla on Tuesday. The proposed township will span 2,600 acres of land located between the Lucknow-Sultanpur and Varanasi railway tracks and Sharad Canal (also known as Indira Canal). A press release stated that the Board has issued notices to 1,800 farmers across 11 villages under clause 29A of the Land Acquisition Act. The circle price for compensation

is set at the 2013-2014 rates, despite significant increases in district circle prices since then. Current land prices are reported to be Rs 3 lakh per bigha for plots along the main road and Rs 1.50 crore for those further away. The circle price for compensation purposes is Rs 6 lakh per bigha. The response of the farmers to the Board's offer remains uncertain. The communiqué mentioned that the Board plans to invite farmer leaders for discussions by next week to seek an amicable settlement. Farmer leaders have historically been dissatisfied with compensation packages, often prolonging negotiations for proposed projects. Furthermore, the Board is in the process of seeking permission from Indian Railways to develop the proposed township and acquire land along a 15-kilometer stretch of railway track.

Divisional commissioner takes stock of Jurassic Park, Nakshatra Vatika

Lucknow (PNS): Divisional Commissioner Roshan Jacob took stock of the construction and beautification of Jurassic Park and Nakshatra Vatika (Dev Van) on Wednesday. Lucknow Development Authority Vice-Chairman Indramani Tripathi, and other officials concerned were present during the inspection. Jacob first visited Jurassic Park, located within Janeshwar Mishra Park in Gomti Nagar Extension. Officials apprised her that the park is currently

80% complete. The divisional commissioner emphasised the need for timely completion of the remaining construction by July 15, with strict adherence to quality standards. She said that once finished, the park should promptly open to the public to enhance their experience at Janeshwar Mishra Park. She highlighted that Jurassic Park has been developed without cutting any trees. Moving on to Nakshatra Vatika, Jacob urged officials to

expedite the ongoing work and ensure it meets the deadline, minimising unnecessary delays. "The horticultural and plantation work must be executed meticulously. All tasks should be finalised by July 13, and Nakshatra Vatika (Dev Van) should operate regularly. The construction of the entrance gate should be completed with grandeur and speed," she said, noting that the lighting, benches, and pathways in the park were fully completed.

Clean all drains in 72 hours: DC

Lucknow (PNS): A meeting was convened on Wednesday at the Smart City Auditorium under the chairmanship of Municipal Commissioner Inderjit Singh, aimed at ensuring Lucknow is kept free of waterlogging during the rainy season for public convenience. Singh issued directives to officers concerned and staff to launch an intensive 72-hour campaign to promptly address issues such as waterlogging arising from the rainy season. As part of this initiative, all engineers from the engineering

department, officials from the municipal health department's sanitation and field inspection (SFI) team, and responsible personnel from the roads and drains (RR) department were instructed to ensure the thorough cleaning and monitoring of both major and minor drains over the next 72 hours. Engineers were specifically tasked with identifying drains where cleaning has not commenced, is incomplete, or has yet to begin, and to initiate necessary actions through respective contractors without delay.

Additionally, Singh emphasised the importance of raising awareness among city residents to prevent littering in drains. He warned that individuals found violating cleanliness directives would face disciplinary action. To enhance monitoring efforts, it was decided to use drone cameras for surveillance of all major and medium drains. Officials were also directed to engage with local residents in areas affected by waterlogging, address their concerns promptly, and ensure effective drainage

solutions. Furthermore, instructions were issued to implement the e-Patrawali system across all departments of the municipal corporation with immediate effect. Singh emphasised that henceforth, only files processed through the e-Patrawali method would be accepted. Finally, adverse action was taken against Vijeta Dwivedi of SFI Zone-7 for non-attendance at the meeting and for failing to address complaints related to cleanliness responsibilities, reflecting negligence in duties.

Scientists help entrepreneur produce ice-cream from mango pulp

Lucknow (PNS): Scientists at the Central Institute for SubTropical Horticulture (CISH) have assisted an entrepreneur from Malihabad in producing ice-cream from waste mangoes, achieving remarkable success in making his business sustainable. Scientist Manish Mishra from CISH highlighted that all the ice-cream produced by the entrepreneur has been sold out in Malihabad. The initiative was launched under the Farmers First project. Mishra explained that mango ice-cream is not commonly available due to the scarcity of mango pulp. To address this, they acquired a pulper machine at the institute and encouraged farmers to process their mangoes into pulp, teaching them techniques for long-term storage. Traditionally, mango pulp used in mango products across the country has been sourced from Totapuri mangoes from the south. Mishra emphasised that there was a need to utilise the pulp of Dussehri mangoes. Undersised Dussehri mangoes, which otherwise have

minimal value during peak season and sell for Rs 4 per kg, were selected for making the ice-cream to enhance the economic viability of the venture. Using larger mangoes priced at Rs 45 per kg would not have been economically feasible for ice cream production. Subsequently, they partnered with ice-cream vendor Mussahuddin, who established a factory in Thakua village with over 20 workers. This endeavour quickly gained popularity, leading to a turnover of Rs 15-30 lakh from the sale of mango ice-cream. Mussahuddin sources these undersized waste mangoes, processes them into pulp, and utilises it year-round for making ice-cream. Mishra emphasised that utilising 20-30 per cent of mangoes that typically go to waste can significantly boost profitability for entrepreneurs. Furthermore, Mishra pointed out that most mango ice-creams in the market are essence-based rather than pulp-based, giving added value to their product.

Court orders Rahul Gandhi to appear on July 2

Sultanpur (PTI): An MP-MLA court here on Wednesday asked Congress leader Rahul Gandhi to appear before it on July 2 in a defamation case filed against him for alleged objectionable remarks against Union Home Minister Amit Shah. Complaint lawyer Santosh Kumar Pandey said that one Ram Pratap had demanded that he be made a party in the case. Opposing the plea, Pandey said Pratap is neither a victim nor has anything to do with the matter. Gandhi's lawyer Kashi Prasad Shukla,

who was present in the court, also opposed the petitioner's plea. However, the court dismissed the prayer and called for personal appearance of Gandhi on the next date of hearing. A defamation case was filed against Gandhi in 2018 over his alleged objectionable remarks against Shah. The defamation complaint against Gandhi was filed by BJP leader Vijay Mishra. Gandhi had halted his "Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra" in Amethi on February 20 this year and appeared in court, which had granted him bail.

"e" Tender Notice
PANCHAYAT SAMITI, BHUBANESWAR
E-mail- ori-bhubaneswar@nic.in
No- 2881 Date: 26.06.2024
DETAIL TENDER CALL NOTICE NO. 01/BPS/2024-25

- Number of Civil works : 01 (One)
- Estimated Cost : 650.65344 Lakh
- Period of completion : 18(Eighteen) Calendar Months
- Availability of Tender online for bidding: 28.06.2024 at 11.00 AM to 18.07.2024 up to 5.00 P.M.
- Last Date / Time of seeking Tender Clarification: 18.07.2024 up to 5.00 P.M.
- Date & time of opening of Tender: 19.07.2024 at 11.00 A.M.
- Further details can be seen from the web site (<http://www.tenderordisha.gov.in>)

Sd/-
Block Development Officer
Bhubaneswar
OIPR-19005/11/0001/2425

Battle royal for Dalit vote bank in offing in UP

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Battle royal for the Dalit vote bank is in the offing in Uttar Pradesh as Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram) president and newly-elected MP from Nagina, Chandrashekhar Azad, has staked his claim as the front runner leader of the deprived section of society. Azad has announced to contest the bypolls to 10 assembly seats in UP. Bahujan Samajwadi Party, the sole representative of the underprivileged section of society for over four decades, is bracing for the challenge posed by the 'greenhorn' of UP poli-

tics. The reinstatement of Akash Anand, nephew of BSP supremo Mayawati, as her successor is seen as an effort to counter the challenge posed by Chandrashekhar Azad. Mayawati also appointed Akash Anand as the party's national coordinator. She decided to reappoint her nephew following a sustained campaign on social media platforms by the BSP supporters for giving key responsibility to Akash Anand. Akash Anand, who was removed from the position of BSP national coordinator and his apparent of Mayawati on

May 7, 2024 at the peak of the Lok Sabha campaign, months after being appointed to the post in December 2023, faces a resurgent Azad Samaj Party (Kanshiram) leader Chandrashekhar Azad. Mayawati restored the position of Akash Anand in the party nearly three weeks after the results of the Lok Sabha elections were announced on June 4. BSP recorded its worst-ever performance in the recently-concluded Lok Sabha elections by polling only 9.39 per cent votes, the lowest in three decades, and it failed to win even a single seat. "BSP president Mayawati ji



has once again given Akash Anand a chance to work in the party with full maturity. He will continue to hold all his posts in the party as before. That is, he



will remain Mayawati's only successor along with being the party's national coordinator," read a statement issued by the BSP after a meeting of nation-

office-bearers to review the 2024 Lok Sabha verdict here on June 23. Akash Anand, the 28-year-old future face of the BSP, faces a new challenger in Nagina MP Chandrashekhar Azad who is trying to make deeper inroads among the younger generation of Dalit voters and has been able to achieve success as evident from his election to Lok Sabha from Nagina in Bijnor district. In the recent Lok Sabha election, Chandrashekhar Azad won from Nagina, a reserved constituency in western Uttar Pradesh having a sizable Dalit electorate, by over 1,50,000

votes in a highly charged election, defeating his nearest rival Om Kumar of the Bharatiya Janata Party. BSP candidate Surendra Pal Singh polled only 13,272 votes in Nagina despite a focused campaign by the Dalit-centric party, trying hard to stop Azad. All the five assembly segments of Nagina Lok Sabha constituency are part of Bijnor district. Mayawati, who served four times as chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, had won from the Bijnor Lok Sabha seat in 1989, making her first parliamentary debut. The Mayawati-led BSP remained a key political play-

er in the electoral horizon of Uttar Pradesh during the last over three decades. The BSP formed the government in UP on its own strength by winning a simple majority in the 2007 UP assembly elections, by winning 206 out of total 403 seats in state assembly. The BSP witnessed a sharp decline in the last decade. In the 2009 Lok Sabha polls, the BSP polled 27.42 per cent votes, winning 20 seats, while in 2024 its vote share dipped by two-thirds to 9.39 per cent, with more than 70 out of its 80 candidates failing to save deposits.

India won't see Emergency again in any circumstances: Dhankhar

PTI ■ LUCKNOW

Remembering the Emergency imposed in the country in 1975, Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar said on Wednesday that in any circumstances such a day will not be witnessed in the country now. Addressing the golden jubilee celebrations of Central Electronics Limited (CEL) in Ghaziabad district, Dhankhar said, "The country has never seen dense black clouds, which this day saw (in 1975). The biggest democracy of the world had gone in the dark in 1975. In any circumstances, India will not see such a day.



Vice-President Jagdeep Dhankhar unveiled the Golden Jubilee Logo of Central Electronics Limited and inaugurated the Multipurpose Hall 'Swarn Mandapam,' in Ghaziabad.

"We are strong. The foundation of Indian democracy has become so strong that there is democracy in villages, Nagar Palika and districts," he said. On June 25, 1975, at midnight, then President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed declared a state of Emergency in India following advice from the then prime minister Indira Gandhi. Dhankhar, who reached the CEL campus and planted a sapling first, said as Rajya Sabha Chairperson he has asked the MPs to plant 100 saplings. "I follow this. I remember the prime minister on an occasion said... 'Ma ke naam ek ped' (A sapling in the name of mother) should be our mission because it will impact our lives," he said. Hailing the

work of CEL officials and employees, he said, "The world is changing very fast. We are on the cusp of another industrial revolution. "It is required of us to focus incrementally on technological innovations. You are part of it and will move ahead in this regard," the vice president said. Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh today announced the grant of 'Mini RATNA' status (Category-1) for CEL on the occasion.

Singh, while highlighting CEL's performance, said over the last few years, especially in the last five years, CEL's financial stability, profitability and operational excellence have touched new heights. CEL's performance in terms of the numbers in turnover, net worth, reserves, net profit and the likes are also remarkable, he added. "CEL has transformed from a loss-making PSU to a dividend-paying PSU and this is the third

consecutive year that CEL has paid dividends, that too at increasing rate, to the Government of India," he said. "Our aim is to increase indigenisation of technology and boost manufacturing by capacity building and skill development. CEL's contributions in the fields of defence, railway, security, surveillance and solar energy shows its vital role in promoting indigenous technologies and manufacturing capabilities," he said.

Ram Janmabhoomi Trust denies water leakage in Ram temple

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Ram Janmabhoomi Teerth Kshetra Trust general secretary Champat Rai has denied reports of leakage of water from the roof of the Ram temple. Speaking to reporters here on Wednesday, Rai stated that not a single drop of water has dripped from the roof of the sanctum sanctorum, where Ram Lalla is seated, and emphasised that there are no structural flaws in the temple. "In the sanctum sanctorum where Lord Ram Lalla is seated, not a single drop of water has dripped from the roof nor has water entered the sanctum sanctorum from anywhere," Rai assured. He clarified that water had dripped from a pavilion in the eastern direction in front of the sanctum sanctorum. "After the completion of the roof work on the second floor of the temple, a dome will be added, and the roof of the pavilion will be closed," Rai explained. Rai further elaborat-

ed on the construction process, noting that in temples made of stone, electrical conduit and junction boxes are typically installed on top of the stone roof, with the conduit brought down through holes in the roof to provide lighting to the ground floor ceiling. These conduits and junction boxes are made watertight and hidden in the surface during the flooring above. "Since the work of electricity, waterproofing and flooring is in progress on the first floor, water entered all the junction boxes and fell on the ground floor from the conduit. From above, it seemed that water was dripping from the roof, but in reality, the water was coming out on the ground floor through the conduit pipe. Once the flooring on the first floor is completed and made completely watertight, there will be no entry of water from any junction, preventing water from reaching the lower floor through the conduit," Rai said.

He also highlighted the temple's drainage system, stating that excellent arrangements have been made for rainwater drainage in the temple and rampart complex. The work is ongoing to ensure there will be no water-logging anywhere in the temple and rampart complex, he added. "The entire Shri Ram Janmabhoomi complex has been arranged for zero water discharge for rainwater. Recharge pits are also being constructed in the complex to keep the rainwater completely inside," Rai added. Since the Pran Pratishtha day, nearly 1,00,000 to 1,15,000 devotees have been visiting daily to have darshan of Ram Lalla. The entry for darshan is from 6:30 a.m. to 9:30 p.m., with each devotee taking a maximum of one hour for darshan, walking on foot and exiting to receive prasad. Mobile phones are prohibited inside the temple to ensure smooth darshan and maintain security.

2 SP leaders booked for roughing up BJP man

Ballia (PTI): Police have booked two local leaders of the Samajwadi Party for allegedly assaulting a BJP leader, officials said on Wednesday. They said a case was registered against the SP's regional president Ramji Yadav and local leader Anant Mishra under IPC sections 323 (punishment for voluntarily causing hurt), 504 (intentional insult with intent to provoke breach of the peace), 506 (punishment for criminal intimidation) and 308 (attempt to commit culpable homicide). The officials said the case was registered at the Sikandarpur police station on Tuesday based on a complaint by local BJP leader Lal Bachan Sharma. They said Sharma alleged in his complaint that Yadav and Mishra grabbed his throat and shoved him against the wall at the sub-district magistrate's office, following which he fell unconscious.

Cong throttled democracy by imposing Emergency: Yogi

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has endorsed the censure motion read by Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla in Parliament against the Emergency and said the Congress had "throttled" democracy. Speaking to the media at his official residence here on Wednesday evening, the chief minister expressed his gratitude to the Lok Sabha speaker and emphasised that the current generation has the right to

know how Congress acted against democracy and the Constitution post-independence. Chief Minister Yogi noted that while the faces in Congress may have changed, its character remains authoritarian. He said, "Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla deserves heartfelt congratulations for reading a censure motion against the Emergency. We all know that on the night of June 25, 1975, the Congress-led government under Indira Gandhi attempted to strangle the very Constitution she had sworn to

uphold as prime minister." He added, "This was an attempt to murder the country's democracy. It is essential to inform the public about this dark deed of the Congress. The current leadership of Congress continues to mislead the country in the name of the Constitution and promises to end reservations." Continuing his attack on the Congress, Chief Minister Yogi added, "Congress still does not believe in democratic values and constitutional institutions. It is their nature to question every constitutional institu-

tion of India and to cast doubts on India's democracy and electoral process in foreign countries." "They have amended the Constitution 75 times and, by misusing Article 356, have dismissed democratically elected governments 90 times, compromising the country's integrity. The Emergency is also among their dark deeds. This censure motion has been read to inform the present generation of these actions. This is a bold step, and Om Birla deserves congratulations," he concluded.

Yogi congratulates Birla on being elected LS speaker for second time

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath congratulated Om Birla on being elected Lok Sabha speaker for the second time in a row. In a post on his official social media account 'X', Chief Minister Yogi expressed his heartfelt congratulations to Om Birla, calling him a popular and soft-spoken leader. He wrote, "I have full faith that under your successful leadership, the dignity of Parliament, the temple of Indian democracy, will reach new heights. Best wishes for your golden tenure!"

Yogi performs gau seva



PNS ■ LUCKNOW

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath and Gorakshpeethadhiswar Yogi performed gau seva (cow service) at the gaushala (cowshed) on Gorakhnath temple premises amid heavy monsoon showers. Yogi arrived in Gorakhpur on Tuesday and spent the night at

the Gorakhnath temple. On Wednesday morning, the chief minister followed his usual routine, worshipping Guru Gorakhnath at the Gorakhnath temple and paying obeisance to his guru Mahant Avaidyanath before his statue. Subsequently, he visited the cowshed and called the cows by their names such as Shyama, Gauri, Ganga and Bhola. Hearing his affection-

ate call, many of the cows eagerly ran towards him. Yogi lovingly patted their heads and also fed them bread and jaggery. Yogi also enquired about the health and nutrition of the cows from the workers and gave them necessary instructions for their care. Notably, cow service is an integral part of Yogi's routine when he is at Gorakhnath temple.

BA student gang-raped in Bareilly

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

In a shocking incident in Bareilly's Fatehganj East area, an 18-year-old BA student was given a cold drink laced with intoxicants and gang-raped by the accused. The victim was later thrown at a secluded place after her condition turned critical. She was finally admitted to a hospital and information was also sent to the local police by the doctors but the cops took no cognisance. Only after the district magistrate intervened in the matter on Tuesday evening, the cops registered a case and also claimed to have picked up one of the accused. Reports said that the victim, a BA first year student from a vil-

lage under Fatehganj East police station of Bareilly, was lured by some youths known to her when she was going to college on June 19 last. The youths took her to a restaurant on the highway and drugged her by mixing some intoxicant in her cold drink. When she fell unconscious, they took her to a secluded place and gang-raped her. The accused also allegedly put some object on her private part following which she started bleeding heavily, and fearing that she might succumb, the youths threw her on the highway in Fatehganj East area and escaped. Meanwhile, some passersby rescued the girl and also informed her family before

shifting her to a hospital. The doctors, who saw the girl in critical state after being gang-raped, immediately sent a memo to the local police station finding it to be a medico legal case. The cops, however, took no cognisance of the memo. After the girl's condition deteriorated on Tuesday evening, the hapless parents met the district magistrate of Bareilly and requested him to take cognisance of the matter and also ensure proper treatment of the victim. The family claimed that when the district magistrate intervened in the matter and directed police to take action, the local cops and the team of Special Operation Group

picked up one the accused and grilled him on Tuesday night. Sources said that the inspector general of police of Bareilly range and other senior police officers also visited hospital and enquired about the health of the victim. They claimed that there was a possibility of not one but two to three accused being involved in the incident. The police are investigating the entire matter. Inspector-in-charge of Fatehganj East police station, Madan Mohan Chaturvedi, said a case has been registered in the case of rape of the student and a youth from the same village had been taken into custody and was being questioned. The student is undergoing treatment in the hospital.

SI arrested for suicide by two brothers in Agra, sent to jail

PNS ■ LUCKNOW

After CM Yogi Adityanath took cognisance of suicide by two brothers in Agra, the local officials finally swung into action and on Tuesday night they arrested accused Sub-Inspector Hariom Agnihotri and sent him to jail after taking legal action against him on Wednesday morning. Another accused inspector of Sadabad police station, Mukesh Kumar, who was placed under suspension by Superintendent of Police of Hathras, Nipun Agarwal, is still at large. In Kumar's place, Crime Inspector Naresh Singh posted at Kotwali Hathras Junction has been made the in-charge inspector.

Earlier, Sub-Inspector Hariom Agnihotri was also suspended. Additional Superintendent of Police Ashok Kumar Singh is investigating the case. Police have been deployed in the area to maintain peace and order. Meanwhile, Union Minister of State Prof SP Singh Baghel also reached Agra and consoled the family of the victims. He instructed the police to send the accused inspector to jail with immediate effect. Along with this, he reprimanded the tehsildar and sub-divisional magistrate and directed them to initiate proceedings of allotment of land on lease to the family. Baghel also met the victims' family and gave them cheques of Rs 5 lakh each and also assured them of a government job to the

son of deceased Home Guard Pramod after he becomes an adult after 20 days. It is noteworthy that a teenage girl from the town was lured and taken away by a youth from another community on May 22. After the teenager left, her brother-in-law and sister, residents of the town, left their house and went somewhere else. On the complaint given by the girl's father, the police registered a named case against the accused and his sister on May 25/26. In connection with the same case, the Sadabad police took the accused's second brother-in-law, Sanjay Singh of village Rogdhanu under Bahran Agra police station, into custody and questioned him. After this, Sanjay's elder brother Pramod

and his son were questioned. They were released after questioning. Eleven days later, Sanjay committed suicide by hanging himself from a tree in the village last Friday. About 72 hours later, Pramod also committed suicide by hanging himself from the same tree on Monday morning. After Sanjay's suicide, his brother Pramod accused the police of harassing him and taking Rs 50,000 for releasing him. The superintendent of police suspended the then Sadabad police inspector Mukesh Kumar and got a case registered against them after the local residents and the family members staged a huge demonstration after keeping the body on road and demanded action against the cops.

20 passengers injured as bus falls into ditch in Baghpat

Baghpat (PTI): Twenty passengers got injured when a roadway bus fell into a roadside ditch after hitting a car in Daula village here on Wednesday, police said. The incident took place when the driver of the bus en route to Baghpat from Meerut lost control when a car in front of it suddenly applied brakes, they said. The bus hit the car and fell into the ditch, injuring 20 people, Circle Officer Harish Singh Bhaduria said. The injured were rushed to the

hospital where their condition was stated to be stable. Meanwhile, a 49-year-old Chinese national trying to cross over to India without a visa was arrested, in Maharajganj police said on Wednesday. The arrest was made in the Sonauli area on the Indo-Nepal Border Tuesday night. Cai Xiaohong was on her way to India from Nepal when she was nabbed during a routine check by the Sashtra Seema Bal (SSB), police said. Xiaohong had a Chinese pass-

port but no Indian visa and no other valid documents, said SSB Inspector Pradeep Kumar. Sonauli is located on the Indo-Nepal Border and is a well known transit point between India and Nepal. A case has been registered in the matter and the Intelligence Bureau has been informed, Kumar said.

2 ARRESTED WITH FAKE CURRENCY NOTES Muzaffarnagar: Two people, including a coach of a local stadium, were arrested with more than Rs 77,500 in fake currency on Wednesday, police said. Additional Superintendent of Police (City) Satyanarain Prajapati said police made the seizure on a tip-off from Fulendra, a coach at a local stadium, and Saddam from the city area. The two, during interrogation, revealed the names of two other people involved in the fake currency trade. A hunt is on for the other two, the superintendent of police said.

Heavy rain in Varanasi causes waterlogging

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Heavy rain paralysed normal life badly, especially in the morning hours, on Wednesday leaving many areas of the city waterlogged. But it has raised hopes among the farmers to begin sowing paddy nursery and other Kharif crops. There was no rain after morning and the situation became normal in most of the waterlogged areas by the time the office hours begin. According to the report of the Middle Ganga Division-III of Central Water Commission (CWC) by 8 am, the city received 95.4 mm rain. The rain started in the wee hours and continued with good intensity for almost two hours,



leaving many areas and localities waterlogged, forcing most of the morning walkers to stay indoors. Though the rain also lashed some adjoining districts, there was not much rain there as Jaunpur received 17.4 mm rain and Ghazipur 12.2 mm. The rain brought down temperature sharply but increased the humidity. The rain also brought good news for environment lovers as the level of Ganga river which was receding alarmingly in the recent weeks, recorded a rise in Varanasi and Mirzapur by 10 mm per hour. However, the river is still constant upstream in Prayagraj and downstream Ghazipur and

Ballia. In Varanasi, the river was away from ghats at many places as its level was at 57.66 metres, far below the warning level of 70.262 metres. The water level of Gomti river was also rising at Jaunpur and Maighat. However, rain left several localities, including Andhrapur, Teliabagh, Nagwa, Sammeghat, Dashedwamedh, Godowlia, Luxa, Nai Sarak and the roads of many other markets and colonies waterlogged. Rain water entered several shops in Englishia Line area. Power supply remained badly disrupted in some parts of the city. The air services were also affected especially during the morning hours.

Sangam city gets relief from heat and humidity

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

The people of Sangam city got relief from the continuous heat and humidity. Rain started with thunder and lightning around 12 o'clock on Tuesday night. Lightning also struck in different parts of the city. The heavy downpour started at night and continued till Wednesday morning. However, the drizzle also continued till 12 noon on Wednesday. The rain has given a lot of relief to the common people from sultry weather. Happiness is also visible on the faces of the farmers. According

to the Meteorological department, the temperature here was recorded at 34 °C. The weather remained cool throughout the day on Wednesday and the minimum temperature was recorded at 28 °C. According to the Meteorological department, the rainy season has started. There is a possibility of heavy rain on June 27 and 28 as well. Similarly, due to the change in weather, the temperature will also decrease further. Meanwhile people of many areas had to face untold hardship due to waterlogging and erratic power outages.

ZP chairperson inaugurates Vit-A supplement programme

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

Zila Panchayat (ZP) Chairperson Poonam Maurya inaugurated the 'Vitamin A' supplement programme at Veerapatti Anganwadi Centre located in Mohanpur village of Harhua development block here on Wednesday. Addressing the function, she said that due to Vitamin A deficiency children may have to face many diseases and to meet these deficiencies it is very important to give Vitamin A supplements to children as it works to increase immunity in children. On the occasion, she administered Vitamin A supplements to children between nine months to five years and appealed to all mothers and family members to make sure that all children of the age group are given Vitamin A supplements every six months. Also, they should get all the vaccines on time according to their age, she added. The nodal officer of the programme and district immunisation officer Dr AK Maurya said the Vitamin A supplement



Zila Panchayat Chairperson Poonam Maurya giving Vit-A supplements to a child in Varanasi on Wednesday.

programme will be conducted for a whole month. For this, a target has been set to give Vitamin A to 3.88 lakh children in the district. This includes 42,955 children between nine to 12 months, 82,252 children between one to two years and 2.62 lakh children between two to five years. He said that all children will be given Vitamin A supplements with separate spoons on the Rural Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day (VHSND) and Urban Health Sanitation and Nutrition Day

(UHSND) sessions organised every Wednesday and Saturday. Medical officer in charge Dr Santosh Kumar, Block Development Officer Rajesh Bahadur Singh, ADO Panchayat Mayank Mohan Gaur, Health Education Officer Satish Kumar Gupta, BPM Vasant Srivastava, WHO SMO Dr Chelsea, ICDS supervisors Makhan Sharma and Pankaj Singh, ANM Vidya Bharti, CHO Shalini Singh, ASHA and Anganwadi workers and others were also present.

Ensure compliance of NGT orders for revival of Assi river: DM

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

District Magistrate (DM) S Rajalingam held an important meeting with the officials of Nagar Nigam, Varanasi Development Authority (vda), Irrigation and Revenue departments in Vikas Bhawan here on Tuesday and directed the officers concerned to remove the encroachment on the Assi river and ensure strict compliance of the National Green Tribunal (NGT) orders. "All encroachments on the flow of the river along with Kanchanpur, Karmajitpur, Sarainandan, Nagwa, Ravidas Park etc should be removed immediately", he said, directing the engineers of the Irrigation department to immediately determine the Assi river flood plain zone so that the encroachment within its limits can be surveyed and further necessary action can be taken. The district magistrate said strict compliance of NGT orders should be ensured for the revival of Assi river. On the occasion, V-C VDA Pulkit Garg, Municipal Commissioner Akshat Verma, ADM (City) Alok Verma, Additional Municipal



District Magistrate S Rajalingam holding a meeting of officers in Varanasi on Tuesday.

Commissioners Rajiv Rai and Sunita Yadav and other concerned officers were present. At another meeting at the same place, the district magistrate instructed the PWD and related officials to accelerate the pace of widening and strengthening of major roads work being done in the district. Rajalingam said the identified religious places falling on the route should be respectfully

shifted to suitable places and during this time senior officers of the concerned departments should be present. He said by establishing coordination with the Electricity department and taking shut-down as per requirement, the trees coming in the way of widening of roads should be cut immediately. He gave strict instructions to get the remaining electric poles removed

immediately, resolve all the obstacles immediately and complete the construction work speedily. Besides, at the monthly review meeting of development works also held at Vikas Bhawan, the district magistrate directed the officers and engineers of the implementing agencies to take action to complete all the ongoing projects in the district by working speedily. Along with

timeliness, special attention should also be paid to quality in the construction of projects, he said, adding that unnecessary delay or laxity in any project will not be tolerated. He said all preparations should be made to start organising chaupals by preparing a roster immediately at the district level as well as the development block level. He said the departmental officers concerned should ensure that the beneficiaries of various government schemes should attend these chaupals. He said in view of tree plantation in the district, all the departments concerned should select suitable sites as per their allotted target and ensure digging of the prescribed number of pits. Keep all preparations complete, including the arrangement of plants from the nursery for tree plantation, he added. On the occasion, Chief Development Officer (CDO) Himanshu Nagpal, Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr Sandeep Chaudhary, officers of the departments concerned and engineers of the implementing agencies were also present.

PMG releases spl cover on 'Jaunpur Imarti'



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

The Postal department organised a 'Special Cover and Cancellation' release programme on GI product on Wednesday at Hindi Bhawan, Jaunpur. The chief guest and Postmaster General (PMG) of Varanasi Region Krishna Kumar Yadav released a special cover and cancellation on 'Jaunpur Imarti', the first product of Jaunpur district that has received Geographical Indications (GI) certification. Addressing the function, Yadav said that along with its historical value, Jaunpur has also been rich in terms of cuisine. "The history of Jaunpur's Imarti dates back to the British rule period (about 200 years). It is in high demand in the country and abroad. In view of its geographical uniqueness, it has been granted GI on March 30 last. It is the first product of Jaunpur to receive this status", he said, adding that the special cover on it will lead to its global branding and wide publicity and this also takes forward the Prime Minister's concept of "Vocal for Local". The PMG said the Postal department has an important role in transmitting India's rich heritage to the next generations through postage stamps and special covers. According to him 34 products around Varanasi have received GI and this is the highest in any region of the world. These GI products have an annual turnover of about ₹25,000 crore and 20 lakh people are directly and indirectly benefited. He also said that Jaunpur Imarti is completely different from ordinary Imarti. It is specially cooked on low flame and the ingredients used in it include desi sugar (Khandsari), desi ghee and

urad dal. It is so soft that it melts in the mouth, he added. Superintendent of Post Offices Parmanand Kumar said the said special cover with cancellation issued on Jaunpur Imarti will be available at Jaunpur Head Post Office and Varanasi Philatelic Bureau for ₹25. **BIO SAFETY COMMITTEE:** The Banaras Hindu University (BHU) has reconstituted its Institutional Biosafety Committee. The biosafety committees are mandated with assisting the institutions handling risk-inherent microorganisms or GE organisms, in preparing on-site emergency plan. BHU's Institutional Biosafety Committee is chaired by Prof Gopal Nath, Department of Microbiology, Institute of Medical Sciences (IMS) and will work on ensuring personal and environmental safety in the use of any kind of transgenic organisms during the course of research. Dr Bhupendra Narain Singh, Senior Principal Scientist, CDRI, Lucknow, is the DBT nominee in the committee while Dr Richa Arya, Department of Zoology, Institute of Science, is the member secretary. Dr Vinod Tiwari, Department of Pharmaceutical Engineering, IIT-BHU, has been inducted as the outside expert and Prof Pradyot Prakash, Department of Microbiology, IMS, has been named the Biosafety Officer. The internal experts are Prof Pawan Kumar Singh, Department of Genetics and Plant Breeding, Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Prof Rajesh Kumar Mall, Institute of Environment and Sustainable Development, Dr Samer Singh, Centre of Experimental Medicine & Surgery, IMS, and Dr Akhilesh Kumar, Department of Botany, Institute of Science.

Train accident averted

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ PRAYAGRAJ

A major train accident was averted on the Delhi-Howrah rail route on Wednesday evening. A goods train going from Kanpur to Pt. Deendayal Upadhyaya Junction derailed in the yard of Prayagraj Junction near the Niranjn bridge. Three wagons of the goods train i.e. 16 wheels came off the track. After this incident on the down track line, trains coming on this route were stopped wherever they were. More than two dozen trains were affected by this derailment. The Delhi-Howrah route up-down was completely disrupted. While the operation of trains on Prayagraj-Varanasi rail route, Prayagraj via Prayag Lucknow and Pratapgarh route also stopped. On getting information railway officers immediately reached the spot. Technical teams were pressed into service in the rescue work. The derailed wagons were cut and separated with the help of gas kit. One part was moved towards PK Chheoki and the other part towards Prayagraj Junction.

Around 5 pm Gorakhpur Vande Bharat was sent to the junction via another line. While people got off the trains that had stopped before the incident site and started walking home. PRO of Prayagraj division of NCR Amit Kumar Singh said as soon as the information was received, railway rescue teams reached the spot immediately. The route was restored after around three hours. **CRITICAL:** Ambrish Tiwari (36), a law student, was reported to be critical after he shot himself due to unknown reasons in Katju Bagh Colony under Colonelganj police station. He used to work as a delivery boy along with studying law. On suddenly hearing the sound of a gunshot from his room, his family members rushed there and found him lying in a pool of blood. On getting information the police immediately reached the spot. He was rushed to a hospital. On information, the field unit team reached the spot and investigated the matter. Colonelganj police station in-charge PK Singh said the injured man had attempted suicide two years

ago as well. Investigation is being done. His statement will be recorded. Meanwhile a youth was injured when he was attacked in his ear by his brother-in-law in an area under Kareli police station. The brother-in-law allegedly cut off the youth's ear. When the victim's wife came to intervene, she was also beaten up. During this, an attempt was also made to attack a 5-year-old girl. Victim Mohd Parvez alias Raju of Arshadi Mazar area of Kareli police station area registered a case in this connection. In the complaint given to the police, the victim told that his five-year-old daughter was playing in the courtyard. Meanwhile, his brother-in-law Mohd Shahid got angry and started beating her. The victim said when he protested his brother-in-law Mohd Shahid brought a knife. He attacked his ear several times. It is alleged that when Parvez's wife Roshni came to intervene, she too was attacked. Kareli inspector Amarnath Rai said there is a dispute going on within the family. A report has been filed and a search for the accused is on.

IIT Kanpur to host 57th convocation on June 29

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

The Indian Institute of Technology Kanpur (IIT-K) is all set to host its 57th convocation ceremony on June 29 and celebrate the academic success of its graduating students as they embark on the next chapter of their lives. The momentous occasion will be graced by the President of Oregon State University, USA (OSU), Prof Jayathi Y Murthy, an IIT-K alumna, as the chief guest. Dr K Radhakrishnan, Chairperson, Board of Governors (BoG), IIT Kanpur; and Prof Manindra Agrawal, Director, IIT Kanpur, will preside over the ceremony. Prof Jayathi Y Murthy completed her Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from IIT-K and was honoured as a Distinguished Alumna in 2012. She was appointed as OSU's 16th President in 2022, becoming the first woman of colour

to lead the University. Prof Murthy is a renowned leader in engineering education and is known for her focus on diversity, equity and inclusion. The convocation ceremony for 2,332 students graduating this year will be held in two sessions with first session being conducted in the main auditorium of IIT-K, which has a capacity of 1,250 awarding the high achievers. The second session will be the conferring of degrees by individual departments to the students across the different lecture halls led by the chairperson, Senate Post-Graduate Committee (SPGC) and the chairperson, Senate Under-Graduate Committee (SUGC). The ceremony is being held in two sessions to ensure that all the graduating students can participate in this celebration of their academic achievements. The graduating students include 226 PhD recipients, 457 MTech recipients

and 842 BTech recipients. The ceremony will also see 165 students from MSc (2-year), 36 from MBA, 12 from MTech-PhD (Joint Degree), one from MDes (Joint Degree), 17 from MDes, 77 from MS (by Research), 40 from PGPEX-VLFM, 26 from double major, 89 from dual degree, 14 from MS-PD (MS part of the dual degree), 125 from BS, and 205 from the eMasters degree programmes. This diverse group of graduates is representative of IIT-K's broad academic offerings in line with its commitment to fostering a multidisciplinary academic environment. The ceremony will witness continuation of IIT Kanpur administration's dress code recommendation with male students wearing a cream-coloured kurta paired with white pyjamas and female students in a cream-coloured kurta with white churidar or leggings, along with formal footwear.

NER PCEE conducts safety inspection

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ VARANASI

A day prior to the proposed final safety inspection by Commissioner of Railway Safety (CRS), Eastern Circle, Pranajeev Saxena, on Wednesday, Principal Chief Electrical Engineer (PCEE) of North Eastern Railway (NER) Sanjay Singhal conducted an inspection between Kiriharapur and Belthara Road (14.17 km) stations under the Bhatni-Aunrihar (116.95 km) rail section of Varanasi Division of NER where electrification along with doubled lines work has been completed. During his inspection, the PCEE was accompanied by Chief Project Manager of Rail Vikas Nigam Limited (RC mm VNL) SPS Yadav, Additional Divisional Railway Manager (Infra) of Varanasi Division Roshan Lal Yadav, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (Traction) RN Singh, Senior Divisional Electrical Engineer (General) Pankaj Kesharwani, along with the branch officers

concerned. Singhal first inspected Belthara Road railway station and checked the safety of yard plan, neutral section, power substation, station working rule, platform clearance, point crossing, signaling, earthing track, height of overhead traction, block overlap, fouling mark, sand hump, feeder power supply distribution system and control feeder isolation etc as per the standard of electrified railway section. He also inspected various works developed as per electrification of the doubled railway section and found all the works to be as per the standard. Thereafter, in a tower wagon he reached the Sub Switch Point (SSP) falling in the block section and found all the works to be as per the standard. During the inspection, he measured the block section traction and overhead line crossing and ensured the standard distance of high tension power line from the traction line.

14-yr-old boy dies after being struck by lightning

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ KANPUR

An adolescent boy died after being struck by lightning on the bank of Pandu river in Bharu Bangla village under Vidhnu police station area on Tuesday evening. The incident took place when the 14-year-old was grazing the goats. Jagram, son of farmer Dharmu Nishad of Pipargawa under Sen Pashchimpara police area, was a student of class VIII. On Tuesday evening he had gone to graze goats on the bank of Pandu river near Bharu Bangla village. Suddenly when it started raining he stood under a tree when the lightning struck him causing him serious burns. On seeing him lying unconscious, villagers informed the kin of the boy who took him to the nearby hospital where the doctors declared him dead. Majhawan outpost in-charge Geeta Singh said the body had been sent for an autopsy. Mother Sunita was distraught by the sudden demise of her son. **CAUGHT:** The anti-corruption squad caught a lekhpal red-handed accepting a bribe of ₹50,000 from a farmer in Amauli village under

Ghatampur police area on Tuesday evening. District Magistrate Rakesh Kumar Singh after suspending the lekhpal has set up a departmental inquiry against him. He was demanding a bribe to facilitate mutation of a plot. After lodging FIR at the Hanumant Vihar police station, the accused will be produced in the court on Wednesday. The anti-corruption team arrested the lekhpal Pankaj Kumar posted in Sargawa, Ghatampur Block, immediately after he had collected ₹50,000 in cash in Amauli on Tuesday. Inspector Jata Shanker Singh said Mohd Raza of Bhadrasa, Ghatampur, had lodged a complaint that he had purchased a plot near Amauli village. For executing 'dakhil kharij' (mutation) of the plot, the lekhpal had demanded a bribe of ₹50,000 from him. At the instance of the anti-corruption officials, Mohd Raza called the lekhpal near the plot to hand over the money. Immediately after the lekhpal Pankaj collected the cash, the team caught him red-handed. In the litmus test, his palms also turned red. Inspector said an FIR against the lekhpal had been registered at

the Hanumant Vihar police station under Prevention of Corruption Act. **CONSTRUCTION OF METRO TRACK:** Under Corridor-1 (IIT - Naubasta) of the Kanpur Metro Rail Project, construction of the metro track has been commenced in the ramp area near Brijendra Swaroop Park. This ramp area connects the Priority Corridor (IIT - Motijheel) to the underground section of Kanpur Metro. In April a 45-meter-long steel span was successfully erected over the Sisamau drain at McRobertganj. Subsequently, Kanpur Metro has initiated track construction across the entire 600-metre ramp area, encompassing this newly erected steel span. On Tuesday UPMRC MD Sushil Kumar visited the underground stations of the Balance section, including the ramp area, to oversee the ongoing construction progress. After completing the track construction work on the up line from Chunniganj station to Nayaganj station, now this work has been extended from Chunniganj station towards the ramp area at McRobertganj. The process of

welding by the FBW (Flash Butt Weld) plant and laying of rails for track construction in the ramp area has already been completed and the process of track slab casting is underway. As soon as the track construction in this area is completed, the metro route from IIT to Nayaganj on the up-line will be ready. MD Sushil Kumar along with Director/Works and Infrastructure CP Singh, and Director/Rolling Stock Navveen Kumar, accompanied by senior officials from various departments, visited all under-construction stations from the McRobertganj ramp area to Kanpur Central on Tuesday. They inspected the ongoing construction of the third rail and metro track inside the underground tunnel and provided necessary instructions to the contracting agency officials. MD Sushil Kumar remarked, "The Kanpur Metro team is making commendable progress in construction work. Recently, we achieved a significant milestone by successfully installing steel spans over the Delhi-Kolkata highway at Naubasta intersection and the Sisamau drain near Brijendra Swaroop Park."

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



Minister of Information and Public Relations, Anupam Mishra, speaking at a press conference.

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 Kodikunni 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.



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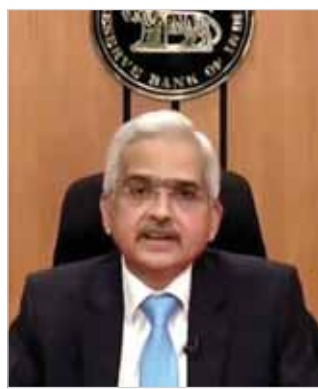
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PAPER WITH PASSION

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.

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The dark days of India's Emergency



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

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

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 Akashvani 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 Namboodirippadu. 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 sterilized. 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)

PICTALK



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

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

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.



education, 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



AKSHAY JAIN

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)

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



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



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

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



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 food. 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 TheatreKhusi 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)

Sants, monks, acharyas seek disqualification of Asaduddin

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

Delegates of the Hindu Rashtra convention organised by Hindu Janjagruti Samiti, consisting of Sants, Monks, Acharyas and authors at Goa has unanimously demanded the disqualification of Asaduddin Owaisi, AIMIM chief from Lok Sabha. The Sants and Acharyas also wanted Owaisi to be banned from contesting future elections in India.

While taking oath as a member of Parliament on Tuesday, the firebrand Owaisi raised slogans "Jai Bhim, Jai MIM, Allahu Akbar, and Jai Palestine". The delegates pointed out that Article 102 (d) of the Constitution states that a person shall be disqualified from being a member of either House of parliament if he shows allegiance to a foreign State. It is not only treason to flaunt allegiance to a foreign State while taking an oath to serve this nation but also a national insult. The devout Hindus participating in the Vaishvik Hindu Rashtra Mahotsav unanimous-



ly condemn this outright treachery and demand the disqualification of Owaisi from the 18th Lok Sabha as possible," said the resolution. According to Ramesh Shinde, the national spokesman, HJS, the resolution would be sent to Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs for his deliberation and disciplinary action. The conclave felt that the

action of Owaisi would be a wrong precedence if no strict action is taken against such anti-national individuals. "may also lead to slogans of Jai Hamas or Jai Pakistan being raised in Parliament, the sanctum sanctorum of democracy. The devout Hindus also demand that Asaduddin Owaisi be permanently debarred from contesting elections in India,"

the resolution stated further. The delegates enthusiastically chanted "Har Har Mahadev" while the resolution was moved and announced that it has been passed unanimously. Rambalak Das Mahatyagi Maharaj, Sanchalak, Shri Jamdi Pateshwar Seva Sansthan, Chattisgarh, in his keynote speech asked the ascetics and saints to leave their Ashrams/Mutts and spread Dharma in tribal areas.

"Tribals are being instigated with indoctrination that they are not Hindus and are being fed incorrect information about Sanatana Dharma, saints, monks and Hindu organisations. "Therefore it is necessary for the ascetics and monks to leave their Ashrams and go to the society and propagate Dharma," said Rambalak Das Mahatyagi. He also stated that Hindus in the tribal regions of the country were being terrorized and threatened by proselytizers by spreading falsehoods. A serious situation is developing in these tribal belts spread across India, he said.

HC refuses to interfere in hijab ban decision of Mumbai college

T N RAGHUNATHA ■ MUMBAI:

The Bombay High Court on Wednesday dismissed a petition filed by nine girl students challenging the dress code prescribed by a college in Mumbai that restrained them from donning hijab or nqab on the ground that the dress code prescribed by the college did not violate the provisions of the Constitution. While dismissing the petition filed by group of girl students challenging the dress code prescribed by Chembur Trombay Education Society's NG Acharya and DK Marathe College for its undergraduate students, a HC division bench of Justices A S Chandurkar and Justice Rajesh Patil did not violate the provisions of Article 19(1)(a) and Article 25 of the Constitution of India.

"We are satisfied that the Instructions issued by the College under which a dress code has been prescribed for its students does not suffer from any infirmity so as to violate provisions of Article 19(1)(a) and Article 25 of the Constitution of India. The object behind issuing the same is that the dress of a student should not reveal his/her religion which is a step towards ensuring that the students focus on gaining knowledge and education which is in their larger interest," the HC bench ruled.

"The Instructions have been issued by the College Administration in exercise of its right to administer the educational institution under Article 19(1)(g) and Article 26 of the Constitution of India. The writ



petition therefore fails. It is accordingly dismissed with no order as to costs," the two judges noted in their order dismissing the petition. In their petition, the nine students studying in second and third year undergraduate students at the Chembur-based college had alleged that the prescription of dress code "as a result of which they are restrained from donning a hijab or nakab is arbitrary and discriminatory. It affects their fundamental rights guaranteed especially under Article 19(1)(a) and Article 25 of the Constitution of India". In its ruling, the HC bench said: "...it has been pleaded that the petitioners have

been donning a hijab and/or nakab for the last few years. The pleadings in the writ petition to support the plea that donning of a hijab or nakab is an essential religious practice however are insufficient"

"Except for stating that the same constitutes an essential religious practice on the basis of the English translation of Kanzul-Iman and Suman Abu Dawud, there is no material placed to uphold the petitioners' contention that donning of Hijab and Nakab is an essential religious practice," the judges noted.

In its concluding part of their verdict, the judges observed: "In the passing, we may note that the learned Counsel for the petitioners was not able to justify the action of the petitioners, who are students, in seeking publicity of filing of the present proceedings even prior to the writ petition being considered for admission. This led to the College questioning the bonafides of the petitioners. Since the petitioners are students, we say nothing more and let the matter rest at that".

Reacting to the judgement, the lawyer for the petitioners Altaf Khan said: "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".

Asked if the petitioners would challenge the high court's ruling in an upper court, the petitioners' lawyer said: "I will consult the parents of students and take a final call on moving the Supreme Court in the matter".



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 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.

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 Satheesan 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.

Rain expected in Delhi by June 29: IMD

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The upcoming weekend in the national Capital and surrounding areas promises to be enjoyable for Delhiites with the arrival of the Southwest Monsoon bringing much-needed rain and relief from the heat wave conditions.

The India Meteorological Department (IMD) said that pre-monsoon showers are anticipated from Friday with the Southwest Monsoon expected to reach the National Capital Territory of Delhi, bringing heavy showers over the weekend.

According to the latest updates from IMD, the monsoon has reached the border of Uttar Pradesh by Tuesday. In Delhi the monsoon is expected to arrive by June 29. Private weather agency Skymet too said, the capital and suburbs can expect some heavy showers during the weekend. Pre-monsoon showers are likely over Delhi till the arrival of the monsoon over the weekend, Skymet said. Delhi has witnessed nearly drought-like conditions in the pre-monsoon months of March, April, and May as rainfall was below normal by 75%, 54% and 99%

respectively, it said. On the similar line, the IMD forecasts rain, thunderstorms, and lightning in Delhi and adjoining areas from June 26 to 28, signaling the onset of monsoon activity in northern India. On Wednesday, amid ongoing sultry weather conditions, Delhi experienced light rains with the minimum temperature settling at 31.6 degrees Celsius, 3.7 notches above the season's normal, according to the IMD. It said the city's humidity level stood at 62 per cent at 8.30 am. The rainy weather is expected to prevail over the national capital till July 1, according to the IMD's seven-day forecast. It said the maximum temperature is expected to hover around 39 degrees Celsius.

Delhi had experienced significant rainfall deficits in March, April, and May, with below-normal rainfall by substantial margins. In Delhi these days, amidst the rumble of clouds, there is a suffocating heat and stagnation in air due to high humidity. Additionally, there is no breeze, which is causing discomfort to people. The city's record-breaking heat wave spells in the past three months with high intensity in the past few days has

clocked a death toll of 275, with an additional 29 deaths recently. Among the victims, 154 people were "brought dead to various hospitals," underscoring the gravity of the situation while prompting the health authorities to issue a slew of measures to check casualties and heat-related illness.

Regarding the weather situation elsewhere, the IMD said the Southwest Monsoon is expected to make headway into additional regions of the North Arabian Sea, bringing rainfall to several areas in central Maharashtra, Goa, Konkan, and Karnataka from June 26.

Isolated very heavy rainfall is likely over parts of Uttarakhand on June 28 and 29, as per the weather department. The Southwest Monsoon also reached Rajasthan on Tuesday, according to the Met. Meanwhile, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Maharashtra, South Interior Karnataka, and Coastal Karnataka are also likely to experience a wet spell from June 25 to June 26. Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Uttarakhand, Bihar and Gujarat will also see increased metrological activity in the coming days.

Kejriwal incarcerated

From Page 1

During the hearing on Wednesday, Kejriwal addressed the Court in person and maintained that he and other AAP leaders including Manish Sisodia who have been implicated in the case, are innocent. He also rebutted the CBI's claim that Kejriwal had shifted the entire blame on Manish Sisodia. "Maine aesa koi bayan nahi diya hai ki Manish Sisodia doshi hai. Manish Sisodia nirdosh hai, AAP nirdosh hai, main nirdosh hu. Unka saara plan hai hame media main

badnaam karne ka. CBI k sources n chalwaya... Inke saare aarop jhute hain (I have never testified that Manish Sisodia is guilty. Manish Sisodia is innocent, AAP is innocent, I am innocent. Their aim is to malign us through media. CBI has activated its 'sources'. All their claims are false)," he said.

He alleged that the CBI's objective is to ensure that media headlines are manipulated to reflect that Kejriwal has put the entire blame on Sisodia. "Inka idea ye hai ki kal front

page pe top headline honi chahiye ki Kejriwal n saara theekra Manish Sisodia pe foda. They are sensationalising the issue. Ye kal top headline hogi har akhbaar me. Inka aaj kewal ye maqsad hi hai (Their idea is to ensure that front page headlines should be 'Kejriwal has put all blame on Manish Sisodia. They want this headline in all newspapers. That is their sole aim)," Kejriwal said.

The Court too agreed with Kejriwal and said that Kejriwal had not stated what the CBI was attributing to

him. "Apki statement maine padh li hai, apne aesa nahi kaha hai (I read your statement. You have not said what CBI has claimed (on Sisodia)," the judge said. Kejriwal then explained what he had said in his statement to the CBI. "Maine kaha tha 3 objectives hain excise policy ke. Hame revenue badhana tha aur jo lambi lines lagti hain wo khatam karni hain aur equitable distribution... Maine Manish Sisodia ko bula ke ye 3 directions diye the. They asked ki privatisation kiska idea tha? I said, mera idea nahi tha," the Delhi CM

stated. "Media picks up one line. It is very difficult to control media that way," the Court remarked while reserving its order.

The defence also requested the judge to provide documents related to the CBI proceedings against Kejriwal, including the court order related to his interrogation in Tihar prison on Tuesday evening.

The CBI had registered a case of corruption under the Prevention of Corruption Act (PC Act) back in 2022, but it did not name Kejriwal as an accused.

INDIA GETS ITS SPEAKER AND LoP

From Page 1

Birla on his first duty recognised Rahul as the Leader of Opposition on Wednesday, a day after the Congress communicated its decision to name him for the position to the Lok Sabha

Secretariat. In a notification issued on Wednesday, the Lok Sabha Secretariat said Rahul Gandhi, leader of the Indian National Congress, had officially been recognised as the leader of opposition in the Lok Sabha with effect

from June 9. Earlier in the morning, after the election, the prime minister and Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi escorted Birla to the Speaker's chair. In his address, the first in the 18th Lok Sabha, Modi

said Birla's work as a parliamentarian should be an inspiration for new Lok Sabha members.

Congratulating Birla, Rahul Gandhi said the opposition wanted the House to function "often and well" and added that it was very important that cooperation happens with trust. "The opposition would like to assist you in your work. I am confident you will allow us to speak in the House," he said.

Rahul Gandhi also pointed out that the opposition this time represents significantly more voices of the Indian

people than last time. Samajwadi Party chief Yadav hoped that actions like suspension of MPs would not be taken as they hurt the dignity of the House. Trinamool Congress leader Sudip Bandyopadhyay and DMK leader T R Baalu echoed the sentiment. Bandyopadhyay said the functioning of the House always depends on the attitude of the treasury benches.

Birla, 61, the BJP's MP from Kota, has risen through the ranks of the party. He is a third-term MP from Kota in Rajasthan and been a

member of the Rajasthan Legislative Assembly thrice. "Treasury and opposition benches run the House together, the strength of Indian democracy is in listening to everyone, and running the House with everyone's agreement. I will expect that I run the House with everyone's agreement. Even if there is lone member from a party, they should get sufficient time," Birla said.

With the NDA having 293 MPs in its kitty and the INDIA bloc 233 in the Lok Sabha, the numbers were clearly in favour of Birla. The Lok Sabha currently has

542 members after Rahul Gandhi resigned from one of the two seats he was elected from. At least three independent members also support the opposition. Balam Jakhar is the only presiding officer to have served two complete terms extending seventh and eighth Lok Sabha.

Rahul Gandhi, who earlier in the day joined Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju in escorting the newly-elected Birla to the speaker's chair, thanked Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge for his

appointment to the role. AIMIM MP Asaduddin Owaisi meanwhile said, "The character of the House has changed and BJP won't be able to steamroll... I hope that the government will lessen your burden by selecting a Deputy speaker."

Similar concerns were expressed by Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP Amraam, Shiv Sena (UBT) leader Arvind Sawant, Nationalist Congress Party (SP) MP Supriya Sule, RSP MP N K Premchandran. All of them hoped that the opposition's voice will not be crushed.

Julian Assange returns to Australia

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. "I had a very warm discussion with him this evening. He was very generous in his praise of the Australian government's efforts."

Assange was accompanied on the flights by Australian Ambassador to the United States Kevin Rudd and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Stephen Smith, both of whom played key roles in negotiating his freedom with London and Washington.

The flights were paid for by the "Assange team," Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said, adding his government played a role in facilitating the transport.

Albanese told Parliament that Assange's freedom, after he

spent five years in a British prison fighting extradition to the US, was the result of his government's "careful, patient and determined work."

Assange's lawyer Jennifer Robinson, speaking outside the Saipan court, thanked Albanese "for his statesmanship, his principled leadership and his diplomacy, which made this outcome possible."

It is unclear where Assange will go from Canberra and what his future plans are. His South African lawyer wife and mother of his two children, Stella Assange, has been in Australia for days awaiting her husband's release.

Another of Julian Assange's lawyers, Barry Pollack, expected his client would continue vocal campaigning. "WikiLeaks's work will continue and Mr Assange, I have no doubt, will be a continuing force for freedom of speech and transparency in government," Pollack told reporters outside the Saipan court.

After 22 killed in protests, Kenya prez says won't sign finance bill

AP ■ NAIROBI

Kenyan President William Ruto said Wednesday he won't sign into law a finance bill proposing new taxes, a day after protesters stormed parliament and several people were shot dead. It was the biggest assault on Kenya's government in decades.

The government wanted to raise funds to pay off debt, but Kenyans said the bill caused more economic pain as millions struggle to get by. The chaos on Tuesday led the government to deploy the military, and Ruto called protesters' actions "treasonous." The president now says the bill caused "widespread dissatisfaction" and he has listened to the people and "conceded." It's a major setback for Ruto, who came to power vowing to help Kenyans cope with rising costs but has seen much of the country unite in opposition to his latest attempt at reforms. "It is necessary for us to have a conversation as a nation on how to do we manage the affairs of the country together," the president said.

Kenyans faced the lingering smell of tear gas and military in the streets a day after the latest protests saw thousands storm parliament, an act of defiance that Ruto called an "existential" threat. At least 22 people were killed, a human rights group said.

Ruto acknowledged deaths, calling it an "unfortunate situation," and offered condolences.

The capital, Nairobi, has seen protests in the past, but activists and others warned the stakes are more dangerous. Ruto on Tuesday vowed to quash unrest "at whatever cost," even as more protests were called at State House on Thursday. Soldiers patrolled alongside police, who were accused of shooting several people dead on Tuesday.

Kenyans united beyond tribal and other divisions in a youth-led effort to keep the finance bill from becoming law. It would have raised taxes and fees on a range of daily items and services, from egg imports to bank transfers. The government wanted the revenue to pay off debt in East Africa's economic hub.

There were no reports of violence Wednesday, but there was fear. Civil society groups have reported abductions of people involved in recent protests and expect more to come.

"We are dealing with a new phenomenon and a group of people that is not predictable. If it would have been the normal demonstrations, I'd say it will fizzle out with time, but we don't know whether these people will fear the army," said Herman Manyora, an analyst and professor at the University of Nairobi. He said Kenya's president missed an opportunity in his

national address Tuesday night to calm tensions and 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."

Many young people who helped vote Ruto into power with cheers for his promises of economic relief now object to the pain of reforms. Part of the parliament building burned Tuesday, and clashes occurred in several communities beyond the capital.

At least 22 people were killed, the Kenya National Human Rights Commission said. Commission chairperson Roseline Odede told journalists that 300 others were injured and 50 people were arrested.

The mother of a teenager who was killed, Edith Wanjiku, told journalists at a morgue that the police who shot her son should be arrested and charged with murder because her 19-year-old son had been unarmed.

"He had just completed school and was peacefully protesting," she said. Parliament, city hall and the supreme court were cordoned off Wednesday with tape reading "Crime Scene Do Not Enter." Authorities said police fired over 700 blanks to disperse protesters in the Nairobi suburb of Githurai overnight.

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.

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.

Heatwave kills 450 in Karachi region

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 morgues and 128 on Monday. Karachites 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.

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.

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

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.

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-

pened 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."

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US journo 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-pres-

idential 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 govern-

ment-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 Karelina, 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 Uralgongzavod, a plant about 150 kilometres north of Yekaterinburg that produces and repairs tanks and other military equipment.

Zelenskyy scolds officials who shirk their duties

AP ■ KYIV

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signalled 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. His said his trip to the Donetsk region was to introduce the new commander of the Joint Forces Command, Andrii Hnatov.

Hnatov replaced Yurii Sodol, 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 Krotevych, 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 Sodol. 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.

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. During the day, it rallied 705.88 points or 0.90 per cent to hit a fresh all-time high of 78,759.40. 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 DGEP, 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 (DGEP) 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 successfully. 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.

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.



FHRAI seeks infra status for hotels, convention centres

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India has asked the government 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. 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 fillip to the budget segment in the hotel industry."

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.

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 (TSA) 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 airspace. "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 pittable 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, Jamshedpur, 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 transgender 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 Adille 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 Shailesh Singh are also set to be seen in action. National record holder Manikanta Hoblihdhar is also set to be back in action after missing the Federation Cup and his 100m dash duel with Kujur, Amlan Borgohain and Gurinder 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 medalist 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.



Harmanpreet named captain as Hockey India announces 16-member squad for Olympics

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Harmanpreet Singh was on Wednesday 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 Suresh 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, Shamsheer 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 uninspired 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 ■ NEW PORT

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 lineup 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 ball ended up right at me and I was able to convert it," said Martínez, who scored the second goal in last week's opening 2-0 win over Canada. Messi started the leadup to the goal with a corner kick that was sent sent toward goal with a glancing header by defender Lisandro Martínez. The ball landed in front of goalkeeper

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. Canada (1-1), in its first Copa America, rebounded from an opening 2-0 loss to defending champion Argentina, and Peru began with a 0-0 draw against Chile. The Canadians close Group A on Saturday against Chile at Orlando, Florida, the same day Peru (0-1-1) face Argentina at Miami Gardens, Florida. The top two teams advance to the quarterfinals. Peru reached the semifinals in

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 have 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, Mubeeb Ur Rahman, Noor Ahmad, Naveen-ul-Haq, Fazalhaq Farooqi, Fareed Ahmad Malik. Reserves: Sediq Atal, Hazratullah Zazai, Saleem Safi.
South Africa: Aiden Markram (c), Otniel Bairstman, 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.

I can't see India losing this time, England will need something extraordinary: Collingwood

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

England will have to come up with an extraordinary performance to beat an in-form India in the T20 World Cup semifinal, according to former all-rounder Paul Collingwood, who feels that the 'Men in Blue' are unlikely to lose the grudge match against the defending champions. India and England are set to clash on Thursday in a repeat of the 2022 last four stage match in Adelaide which Jos Buttler and his men won by 10 wickets. "Honestly, I can't see India losing this time. England will need something extraordinary to beat them," Collingwood



said on Star Sports Press Room. Jasprit Bumrah has been in sensational form with teams including the likes of former champions Australia and Pakistan struggling to score against him. Collingwood reckons the pacer's four overs would decide the complexion of the game. "India, with their well-rounded squad, stands out particularly for Jasprit Bumrah's current form. He's fit, accurate, fast, and highly skilled. No team seems to have an answer for him, "In a 120-ball game, having someone like Bumrah with his pace for 24 balls makes a huge difference. India has looked confident even in tough

favoured the bowlers in the past by slowing down as the game goes on. Spinners have dominated at this venue, and the pacers get some help early on but teams have reached scores of 170-180 in the ongoing World Cup. "The match-up will be magnificent, with both sides adopting an ultra-aggressive approach. The surface in Guyana will be crucial. On a flat pitch, England has the upper hand with their ability to overpower teams. However, a slow, turning pitch would favour India." Collingwood feels India have moved on from their conservative approach, which led to their downfall at the 2022 edition.

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

"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.

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