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INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES 12 SPORTS

## INDIA GETS ITS SPEAKER AND LoP



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE NEW DELHI

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

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

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

## Kejriwal incarcerated

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Am Aadmi Party (AAP) convenor 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. The CBI, earlier on Wednesday, formally arrested Kejriwal in the said case and had sought five-day custody. During the remand period, the court has also allowed Kejriwal's wife Sunita Kejriwal and his lawyer to meet him for 30 minutes every day. Furthermore, the court also allowed them to carry his prescribed medicines and home-cook food during the remand period. Shortly after the arrest, Kejriwal withdrew the petition filed in the Supreme Court challenging the order passed by the Delhi High Court staying his bail in the



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

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

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

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



## WikiLeaks founder Assange returns to Australia a free man

AP ■ CANBERRA

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

## 3 ultras killed ahead of Amarnath Yatra

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, Bhandarwah sector of district Doda. Arms and ammunition have been recovered from their possession." Separate searches were also conducted in the Reasi district after some locals reported the suspected movement of three armed persons in the Kanda area on Tuesday evening, prompting the Army, CRPF, and police to launch the search operation. Though elaborate security

arrangements have been made in Lakhanpur — the gateway to Jammu and Kashmir and along the yatra route to prevent the movement of any suspected persons, the security forces are taking no chances to allow the Pakistan-based terrorists to target the Amarnath yatra. Quick Reaction Teams have been stationed along the highway at vantage locations while separate security checkpoints have been established along the border roads connecting the Jammu-Pathankot highway. To check the movement of suspected persons high-powered CCTV cameras have been installed along the yatra route. Security has been beefed up across the base camp in Jammu, Pahalgam and Baltal in the Kashmir valley to ensure an incident-free yatra. Divisional Commissioner Jammu, Romesh Kumar, along with ADGP, Anand Jain Wednesday supervised the Dry Run of Shri Amarnathji Yatra 2024 amidst tight security and complete protocol from Yatri Niwas Bhagwati Nagar to Yatra camp Lamber at Banihal. Sharing information about the



Security personnel stand 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 Bhandarwah area of Doda.

Jain said the operation was launched in the Gandoh, Bhandarwah Sector of district Doda after receiving intelligence reports about the presence of terrorists in the area.

Six security personnel were injured when terrorists attacked a joint check post at Chattargalla on June 11, while a policeman was injured in a gunfight with terrorists at Kota top in Gandoh area the next day.

After the twin attacks, security forces intensified their anti-terrorist operations and announced a cash reward of Rs 5 lakhs each for four Pakistani terrorists believed to have infiltrated and operated in the district. In addition, Northern Army Commander Lieutenant General MV Suchindra Kumar visited Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district and reviewed the security situation of the region on Tuesday. His visit to the area along with General Officer Commanding (GOC) of 16 Corps Lieutenant General Navin Sachdeva and GoC Romeo Force became important to review the security setup in the wake of the terror attack on a bus carrying pilgrims in the area on June 9. Nine persons, including seven pilgrims from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh and Delhi, were killed and 41 injured in the attack when the terrorists opened fire on the bus carrying pilgrims returning from Shiv Khori shrine near Teryath village in the Pouni area. He was briefed on the prevailing security situation and the actions of the security forces, it said.

## 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



Sacrifice of MISA detainees cannot be forgotten, says CM

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai said on Wednesday that the sacrifice of MISA (Maintenance of Internal Security Act) detainees must not be forgotten as they were true guardians of democracy.

He was addressing a felicitation ceremony of the Loktantra Senani (MISA detainees) to mark the 49th anniversary of the imposition of Emergency.

The MISA detainees suffered "the barbarism of the Indra Gandhi government and they and their families suffered a lot to save democracy", Sai said.



Opposition leaders were jailed and media censorship was imposed during that period, and in memory of those dark days June 25 is observed as black day, he said.

Sai said his government restarted the honorarium to those who were detained under MISA.

The previous government stopped the pension of them, but his government has resumed it, he said.

Sai remembered his own father, Narhari Sai, who was imprisoned during the Emergency.

At the event, MISA detainees and their family members from across the state shared their ordeals.

Under the MISA Act of 1971, the government had the power to detain any person without trial for up to two years. The act was repealed in 1977.

C'garh gears up to tackle monsoon challenges ahead

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

ahead of the opening of dam flood-gates.

She told officials to ensure food supplies, health kits and facilities for primary health checkup to prevent seasonal diseases in areas likely to experience floods for the next few months.

A meeting to assess flood preparedness was held at the Mahanadi Bhawan in Nava Raipur.

Sharma gave directions to closely monitor deteriorating buildings. She also gave directions to issue warnings 12 hours

ahead of the opening of dam flood-gates.

She told officials to ensure food supplies, health kits and facilities for primary health checkup to prevent seasonal diseases in areas likely to experience floods for the next few months.

A state-level flood control room has been established and

can be reached at 0771-2223471 and 0771-2221242.



Rahul's election as LoP to strengthen democracy: Cong

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR



The Congress in Chhattisgarh on Wednesday said the election of Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha will strengthen democracy in the country.

In a statement, PCC chief Deepak Bajji said Gandhi had now become a voice of the common man and is continuously raising issues of public interest.

"Gandhi had ended the fear of 'dictator' Modi government and is standing firmly against the oppressive policies of the Modi government," Bajji said.

"Now, after election as a Leader of Opposition, he will fulfill his duty more efficiently and will continue to raise issues of national interest," he added.

'Shala Pravesh Utsav' kick off academic session 2024-25

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

Welcome ceremonies called 'Shala Pravesh Utsav' were held across schools in Chhattisgarh on Wednesday to encourage schoolchildren at the start of the academic session 2024-25.

Ministers, MLAs, public representatives and teachers welcomed schoolchildren by applying tilak, garlanding them and presenting them sweets. Study materials were



Meritorious students who excelled in board exams were honoured. Parents were urged to be actively involved in school affairs. Woman and Child Development Minister Laxmi Rajwade felicitated children at her home village Birpur in Surajpur district.

NIA searches locations in Bastar over BJP leader's murder

STAFF REPORTER RAIPUR

The NIA on Wednesday conducted extensive searches in a dozen locations in Chhattisgarh's Naxalite-hit Bastar region as part of its probe into the murder of BJP leader Ratan Dubey by suspected Maoists.

Dubey was axed to death on November 4 during the 2023 Assembly election campaign in the Kaushalnagar weekly market in Chhattisgarh's Naryanpur district.

The NIA said it conducted elaborate searches at 12 locations in Toynar, Kaushalnagar, Badenhod, Dhauadi and Kongera villages.

Several mobile phones, a tablet and Rs 9.90 lakh in cash were seized along with pamphlets and literature propagating Naxalite ideology, a NIA statement said.

The NIA took over the probe from the police in February. The agency has already charge-sheeted one accused.

Advertisement for Punjab National Bank featuring a 'POSSESSION NOTICE (For Immovable Properties)' table with details on branch names, dates, amounts, and descriptions of properties.

Advertisement for Form No. URC-2 regarding registration under Part I of Chapter XXI of the Act, detailing the rules and procedures for companies.

Advertisement for Hinduja Housing Finance Limited, including a 'PUBLIC NOTICE FOR E-AUCTION CUM SALE (APPENDIX - IV A) (RULE 8(6))' table listing property details, loan amounts, and auction dates.

Advertisement for the Government of Chhattisgarh, Water Resources Department, Office of the Executive Engineer, Water Resources Division, Pendraroad (C.G.), regarding a procurement tender.

Advertisement for Hinduja Housing Finance Limited, detailing terms and conditions of online e-auction sale, including rules for bidding and payment.

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# 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.

# Assam flood situation improves, nearly 1.5 lakh still affected



PTI ■ GUWAHATI

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

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

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

The number of affected people was 1.53 lakh on Tuesday.

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

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

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

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

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



# Incessant rain causes extensive damage in Kerala

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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

High tides and sea incursions were reported in districts like Thrissur and Ernakulam, and landslides wrecked havoc in the high ranges of Kozhikode. Several houses have been damaged in Alappuzha, Kannur and Idukki districts following heavy downpour and winds since on Tuesday night, authorities said. A portion of the "annadana mandapam" (dining hall) at the famed Ochira Parabrahma Temple in Kollam district collapsed in incessant rains. A number of trees reportedly got uprooted on the banks of Periyar River in Aluva near Ernakulam. Shutters at a number of dams, like Malankara, Pambala, and

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



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ IMPHAL

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

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

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

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

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

The chief minister flagged off the International Day against Drug Abuse and Illegal Trafficking from his secretariat.

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

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

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ PANAJI

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

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

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



dumped them in the village, an official said on Tuesday. He along with a team of government officials visited the spot and met the affected family.

Local MLA Delilah Lobo and Calangute legislator Michael Lobo were also present during the CM's visit.

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday said no

one would be spared. Government officials visited the spot and met the affected family.

Local MLA Delilah Lobo and Calangute legislator Michael Lobo were also present during the CM's visit.

After meeting the affected

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

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

# HC refuses to interfere in hijab ban decision of Mumbai college

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

The petitioners claimed such a directive was against their fundamental rights to practice their religion, right to privacy and right to choice. The plea termed the college action as "arbitrary, unreasonable, bad-in-law and perverse".

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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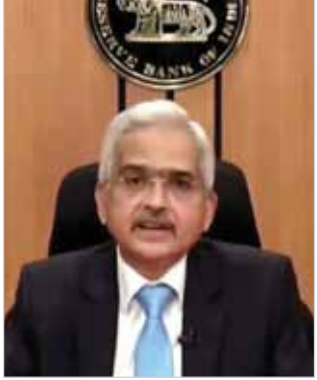
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PAPER WITH PASSION

## Optimistic outlook

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

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



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

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

### PICTALK



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

# The dark days of India's Emergency



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 Nambudirippadu. In his autobiography 'Wandering in Many Worlds' Iyer has disclosed how EMS was instrumental in getting him appointed as a judge in Kerala High Court. The Communist infiltration of the Indian judiciary and other constitutional establishments is nothing new. Immediately after the proclamation of the emergency, the Constitution was amended by both houses of Parliament to put the election of the Prime Minister and President of India beyond the powers of Courts with retrospective effect. This was the infamous 39th Amendment of the Constitution (which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). What happened during the Emergency is known to most of the literate people. State Governments not friendly to



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

the Centre were summarily dismissed making use of the provisions under Article 356 of the Constitution. Press Censorship was imposed which made newspapers get prior sanction from censoring officers to publish news. To date, India has not experienced the kind of dictatorship that was in force during the days of internal emergency. The Constitution was distorted and misinterpreted while Courts of law were sterilised. The Preamble of the Constitution itself was amended unconstitutionally and terms like Socialism, secularism and unity of the Nation were inserted in it. This was done after putting all opposition members of parliament in prison under the DIR (Defense of India Rule 1962) and the Maintenance of Internal Security Act 1974, the statutes that gave power to the government to jail anyone daring to question Indira Gandhi's superiority. Lalu Prasad Yadav named his daughter Misa Bharati to commemorate his arrest under the said Act during the emergency. Now Lalu and his family members are singing a paean to the Nehru-Gandhi clan! Indira Gandhi and the Congress failed to learn anything from the drubbing they got for subverting the Constitution. In 1984, the Congress again derailed peo-

ple's mandate by getting the N T Rama Rao-led TDP government in Andhra Pradesh dismissed and anointing a faction led by Bhaskara Rao as chief minister. But NTR succeeded in getting his chair back thanks to the initiative by the opposition parties that included Janata Party, BJP and anti-Indira forces. Rajiv Gandhi during his tenure as Prime Minister tried in vain to muzzle the media by attempting to enact a legislation "Defamation Bill" to curb any kind of reports against the Government. This had to be dropped midway through due to massive protests against the same. One has lost count of the number of times State governments were dismissed by the Congress-led Government at the Centre misusing the provisions of the Constitutions. B R Ambedkar, the architect of the Constitution, was against the terms socialism and secularism for obvious reasons. Though we claim in the preamble of the Constitution that it was adopted on 26th November 1949, what we cover-up is the date on which it was amended by including the terms socialism and secularism in 1976. Congress pontificating the Constitution could be described as the devil quoting the scripture. (The writer is a special correspondent with The Pioneer; views are personal)

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### SUBSTANCE OVER SPECTACLE

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

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

### THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE

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

### Record crop but prices rising



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

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

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

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

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

### ROOF LEAKAGE AT RAM TEMPLE

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

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

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

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

## India will be a true welfare state when it eliminates discrimination

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



AKSHAY JAIN

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



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

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

Similarly, the employment scenario for persons with disabilities is bleak. Despite efforts to promote inclusivity, the private sector remains largely indifferent, often citing concerns about productivity, costs, and a perceived lack of talented resources. Consequently, unemployment rates among the disabled population are disproportionately high, exacerbating their economic vulnerability and reliance on social welfare schemes. Healthcare, another critical aspect of a welfare state, presents its own set of challenges for persons with disabilities. Limited access to specialized care, the high cost of assistive devices, and stigma within healthcare settings contribute to their marginalized status. Amidst these challenges, the notion of India as a welfare state falls short for millions of disabled citizens. The true measure of a welfare state lies not in lofty ideals or legislative frameworks alone but in tangible improvements in the lives of its most vulnerable members. It is crucial for the government, civil society, and the private sector to bridge the gap between rhetoric and

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



## FIRST COLUMN

## BENEFITS OF REMAINING IN SHELTER OF GOD

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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

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

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



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

This is what normally happens to us human beings. We must curb our egos; God and ego do not go together. Can you imagine what privileged status we would have achieved if we heed God's instructions? Life will become smooth (theek chalegi). We will wholeheartedly take shelter in God, as instructed by God. In all respects take shelter of God only. We neither get any peace nor liberation at some stage in our eternal journey due to our refusal to surrender to God. We will do so now. What will we do then? We will follow God's instructions as detailed in verse #18.65, which is, "Develop My consciousness; become My devotee; make sacrifices for Me; and offer obeisance to Me. You will attain Me only. This I truly promise to you, because you are dear to Me." The last verse sheds light on the biggest benefit of all, in which the Lord promises, "Take My shelter only; I shall release you from all sins. Do not worry." (18.66) Why do we get repeatedly in trouble? Why are we always worried? Because our bad karmaphalas keep on manifesting. Now what will happen? They will make their appearance and God will forgive us, and we will not be troubled much. This is like being liberated while still in our material bodies. This is simply unbelievable to even think about. I won't stop trying to remain in the shelter of God as much as possible as fast as convenient.

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

# A young mother becomes a symbol of hope



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



KHUSHI PAHUJA

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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









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

PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)

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



AFI rules state that all the athletes will have to participate in the National Inter-State Championships if they have to get selected for major multi-sport events like the Olympics, Asian Games or the Commonwealth Games, unless the federation gives exemption on the request of particular athletes or their coaches. In the absence of Chopra, the likes of Avinash Sable (men's 3000m steeplechase), Kishore Jena (men's javelin throw), Ram Baboo (men's 20km race walk) and Parul Chaudhary (women's 3000m steeplechase) -- all of whom have booked Paris Games berths by breaching the qualifying standards -- will headline the championships. Other athletes who can book Paris ticket through world ranking quota like Jyothi Yarraji (women's 100m hurdles), Annu Rani (women's javelin throw), DP Manu (men's javelin throw), Tajinderpal Singh Toor (men's shot put), Jeswin Aldrin (men's long jump), Praveen Chitravel and Abdulla Aboobacker (both men's triple jump) have also entered their names. Toor, an Asian record holder till a few days back, told PTI on Tuesday that he is dealing with a slight ankle pain and his doctor told him not to throw for three-four weeks. But his name figured in Wednesday's updated entry list of the AFI. Some of rising stars like sprinter Animesh Kujur, 110m hurdler Tejas Shirse -- who

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



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

## England coach Southgate targeted after 0-0 draw with Slovenia

AP ■ COLOGNE (GERMANY)

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

way." England haven't been fun to watch at these Euros with a 1-0 win against Serbia, their only victory in Group C. That was followed by a 1-1 draw with Denmark and the scoreless draw with Slovenia. Three games, two goals and a whole lot of underwhelmed fans. The performance against Denmark was apparently so 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 ■ NEWPORT

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

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

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

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

AP ■ EAST RUTHERFORD (USA)

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

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



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

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

## Canada beat Peru 1-0 at Copa America

AP ■ KANSAS CITY (USA)

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

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



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

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