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SUU KYI SPENDS ANOTHER BIRTHDAY IN JAIL

WORLD 8

BIDEN STUMBLES IN FIRST PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE WITH TRUMP

MONEY 10

MARKETS SNAP RECORD-BREAKING RALLY

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DELHI DELUGE AFTER 90 YEARS

INDEPENDENT INDIA'S CAPITAL CHALLENGE



(Left to right): Parked vehicles are damaged by the collapse of a departure terminal canopy at New Delhi's Indira Gandhi International Airport following heavy pre-monsoon rains in New Delhi; Pragati Maidan tunnel underpass waterlogged and waterlogging at the Minto Bridge underpass on Friday Photos: PTI and Ranjan Dimri/The Pioneer

RAJESH KUMAR/SAUMYA SHUKLA ■ NEW DELHI

After enduring scorching heat for several weeks, the national capital on Friday witnessed heavy rainfall, breaking an 88-year record of precipitation in a single day, causing flooding and massive traffic jams across the city.

According to the Meteorological Department, Delhi recorded 228.1 mm of rainfall between 8:30am on Thursday and 8:30am on Friday, the highest 24-hour rainfall in June since 1936.

The IMD data showed 148.5 mm of rain, much of this coming in just a three-hour window between 2:30 am 5:30 am. "The highest ever rainfall recorded in 24 hours at Safdarjung, the primary observatory of Delhi, during the month of June was 235.5 mm on June 28, 1936. The 228.1 mm of rainfall in the 24 hours ending at 8:30 am on Friday is three times more than the June rainfall average of 74.1 mm and the highest for the month since 1936. On June 24, 1936, 235.5 mm rainfall was recorded in the

month of June in Delhi. On June 24, 1933, 139.7 mm rainfall was recorded while Delhi recorded 191.6 mm rainfall on June 30, 1981," the IMD said.

"They are checking 24-hour rainfall records for every year since then to see whether this is the second-highest spell after that," officials added.

IMD data showed 228.1 mm of rainfall was recorded at Safdarjung, the city's primary weather station, 192.8 mm at Lodhi Road, Mausam Bhavan, 150.4 mm at Ridge, 106.6 mm at Palam,

and 66.3 mm at Ayanagar in the last 20 to 30 hours. The IMD, which defines very heavy rain as rainfall amounting to between 124.5 and 244.4 mm in a day, said later in the morning that the monsoon has arrived. The downpour began around 3 am.

In many residential areas, locals had to wade through knee-deep to waist-deep water to leave their homes. Water-logging in many areas of the city led to a flood-like situation forcing vehicles to crawl in massive traffic jams.

One killed in Airport collapse

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

Heavy rain accompanied by thunderstorms and lightning, hit Delhi-NCR in the small hours of Friday morning causing severe water-logging and flooding in various parts of the national Capital. Flooded roads witnessed massive gridlock and miles-long traffic snarls causing too much inconvenience to road

users. Under the impact of the downpour, a portion of the canopy at the Indira Gandhi International Airport's Terminal 1 (T1) collapsed and fell down killing a cab driver and injuring at least six others. The falling debris enshrouded several cars parked under the canopy. Following the incident, departure of all flights from Terminal 1 were temporarily

suspended and shifted to Terminal -3. Suspension of operations at T-1 comes at a time when the expanded terminal was supposed to open after a long wait. Passengers now stare at chaos in the oncoming weekend of summer holiday and peak travel season as Delhi and NCR schools reopen from July 1 onwards. A Delhi International Airport

Limited (DIAL) statement said that a technical committee had been set up to investigate the roof collapse. Union Minister of Civil Aviation Kinjarapu Rammohan Naidu took stock of the situation after the roof collapse and rushed to Safdarjung Hospital to visit those affected. "We are taking this incident very seriously", Naidu said.

NEET not so neat in Parliament

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The NEET and NET row rocked Parliament on Friday with the Congress-led Opposition alleging their voice was being muzzled and the BJP-led ruling alliance NDA declaring that the government was ready for discussion as per tradition and by maintaining decorum.



Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi speaks in the Lok Sabha during ongoing Parliament session in New Delhi on Friday PTI

While proceedings of the Lok Sabha were adjourned for the day before noon, the attempts to run Rajya Sabha ended with Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar remarks of "worst sacrilege that could be committed for this temple of democracy" following heated exchange of words with Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge who stepped in the Well of the House. Kharge claimed he was forced to take the step as he was being humiliated by the Chair and his voice along with those of other Opposition members went unheard. Both Dhankar and Speaker Om Birla and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju told Opposition members that they could discuss the matter during the course of the Motion of Thanks on the President's address but the

Opposition insisted on their demand for a discussion on matters related to the National Eligibility-cum-Entrance Test (NEET). As members from the Congress, TMC and DMK parties stormed the Well, Rijju said it was for the first time that the Opposition is seen demanding a discussion on an issue before the House takes up the Motion of Thanks on the President's address. In the Lok Sabha, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi said the NEET issue is a very important issue for the whole country and they want a dedicated discussion in the House on the matter. Hence, the adjournment motion should be accepted, he said. "Parliament should send

message to the youth that the government and Opposition are together in addressing concerns of students," Rahul said. The House also witnessed some unusual scenes as Rahul Gandhi claimed his microphone was turned off

and asked the Speaker to switch it on, to which the latter gave a prompt rejoinder. "I don't have any button to switch off the microphone. There existed a similar set-up earlier. "There is no mechanism to gag the microphone," Birla retorted. Rajya Sabha too witnessed chaotic scenes as Opposition members, demanding a discussion on the alleged irregularities in the conduct of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET), raised slogans and entered the Well of the House during the discussion on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address. Congress MP Phulo Devi Netam fainted earlier due to blood pressure and Dhankar instituted for arrangements.

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NEWS BRIEFS

Hemant Soren gets bail

Ranchi: The High Court of Jharkhand on Friday granted bail to former Chief Minister Hemant Soren in a money laundering case linked to a land scam. The court had on June 13 reserved its order on Soren's bail plea. ...The petitioner is directed to be released on bail on furnishing bail bond of ₹50,000 with two sureties of the like amount each," said the order passed by the single bench of Justice Rongon Mukhopadhyay.



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Monsoon rain causes flooding, massive traffic jams in Delhi-NCR

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

Amid monsoon marking its arrival in the national Capital in the wee hours of Friday, heavy rain wreaked havoc in Delhi causing waterlogging in many areas of the city which led to a flood-like situation forcing vehicles to crawl amid massive traffic jams.

The Delhi Traffic Police issued alerts to notify the affected carriageways, advising commuters to plan their journey accordingly. Visuals coming from various parts of the city showed several areas inundated with water, leading to long traffic jams which affected commuters, especially, office-goers.

The Delhi Police said they received several calls regarding traffic issues, waterlogging and uprooting of trees since the morning. Visuals emerged of Delhi Traffic Police standing in knee deep waters trying to help commuters navigate

their ways amid flooding on the city roads.

At the New Delhi Railway Station, people had to walk through knee-deep water, carrying children to navigate the flooded roads. Water also filled metro stations in some areas, adding to the discomfort of the commuters. According to the police, traffic is affected on Anuvrat Marg in both the carriageways from 100 Foota Red Light and Lado Sarai Red Light and vice-versa due to waterlogging. The Delhi Metro announced the temporary closure of entry and exit points at Yashbhoomi Dwarka Sector - 25 Metro station while shuttle services from Delhi Aerocity Metro station to Terminal 1 of Indira Gandhi International (IGI) Airport have been suspended. Several MPs who were in the capital due to the ongoing Parliament session shared visuals of waterlogging outside their residences in Lutyen's Delhi. Congress MP Shashi



Tharoor said his entire home was under a foot of water and the carpets and furniture inside his residence were ruined. Samajwadi Party MP Ram Gopal Yadav was lifted to his cars by his staff to carry him to his car the road outside his bungalow in the Lodhi

Estate area was inundated. Delhi Water Minister Atishi's residence was also submerged as visuals showed severe flooding outside the residence of the AAP leader. On Ring Road, waterlogging caused slow traffic in both directions from Naraina towards

Moti Bagh and vice-versa under the Dhoola Kuan Flyover. Traffic is also affected in both the carriageways on Vir Banda Bairagi Marg due to waterlogging at the Azad Market underpass. On Aurobindo Marg, traffic was stuck in both directions

from INA towards AIIMS and vice-versa due to waterlogging under the AIIMS Flyover. It was also slow on the Outer Ring Road in both directions from Shantivan towards ISBT and vice-versa due to waterlogging near Y-point Saleemgarh and Nigambodh Ghat.

Due to waterlogging below Tilak Bridge W-point, traffic was disrupted on W-Point Tilak Bridge road in both the carriageways from A-Point to W-Point and vice-versa. On Rohtak road, traffic was affected in both the carriageways from Rajdhani Park towards Mundka and vice-versa due to waterlogging. The uprooting of a tree has disrupted traffic on Mathura Road in the carriageway from Ashram towards Badarpur. Traffic was affected on Road No. 13 in both directions from Kalindi Kunj towards Crown Plaza and vice-versa due to waterlogging at the Okhla underpass. Due to a canopy outbreak at

Terminal 1 Departure, the area remained non-functional. All passengers heading towards Terminal 1 departure were advised to use the arrival section of Terminal 1. Additionally, there was waterlogging at the Mehram Nagar underpass towards Terminal 3. Traffic was affected in both the carriageways from Akshardham towards Ghaziabad and vice-versa due to waterlogging at roundabout Murga Mandi, Ghazipur Border. The uprooting of a tree opposite Jwala Heri Market disrupted traffic in the carriageway from Jwala Heri Market towards Madipur. On Minto Road, traffic was stuck in both directions from Kamla Market towards Connaught Place and vice-versa due to waterlogging at the Minto Bridge underpass. Traffic was affected on the Outer Ring road in the carriageway from Bhera Enclave Roundabout towards Peeragarhi due to waterlog-

ging near Peeragarhi Village road. It was also affected on IP Marg, BSZ Marg and Vikash Marg due to waterlogging and breakdown of vehicles at Tilak Bridge underpass (W-Point). Due to waterlogging near Park Rose Garden, Feroz Shah Kotla (IG Stadium Bus Stop), traffic got affected on MGM (Ring Road) in the carriageway from IP Flyover towards Rajghat and on Mathura Road in the carriageway from Badarpur towards Sarita Vihar due to waterlogging near Tughlakabad Metro Station. In the NCR area, the traffic was also affected at Noida-Greater Noida Expressway in the morning. Many commuters also took to social media platform X (formerly Twitter) to share updates regarding the traffic situation across the national capital. Some of them claimed that the Barapullah Elevated road was completely choked, while the traffic was also heavy near Mundka-Nagloi road.

BJP demands resignation of AAP Govt over waterlogging

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

The BJP on Friday demanded the resignation of the AAP government in Delhi over the chaos caused due to heavy rain triggering massive water logging across the city. All seven newly elected Delhi BJP MPs were on the ground assessing the situation in their parliamentary constituencies and helped the authorities to remove water.

AAP's INDIA bloc partner Congress too trained guns at the party blaming failure of its government in Delhi. Senior AAP leader and Water Minister Atishi said that Delhi received 228 mm of rainfall in the last 24 hours that was the highest after 1936.

"It means, out of total monsoon rainfall (800 mm) in Delhi, 25 per cent rain occurred in just 24 hours. Due to this, reason drain overflow happened in several areas and it took time for water to drain out," she told a press conference.

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva said that after three months of chaos faced by Delhi due to water shortage, the AAP government's failure in preparing for the monsoon season shows it has no moral right to remain in power. Sachdeva in a barb aimed at Atishi said that after inundated bungalow of the Water



minister, the people of Delhi have lost faith in the AAP government. He charged that corruption in the Delhi government and the MCD were responsible for non desilting of drains in the city and the rain proved it correct.

"The corruption in Delhi government agencies first caused people in the city to cry for drinking water and now they will suffer due to waterlogging every time it rains in this monsoon season," alleged the Delhi BJP president.

South Delhi BJP MP Ramvir Singh Bidhuri demanded that the Delhi government should be immediately dismissed, alleging the city has flooded due to its "negligence, incompetence and inefficiency".

North west MP Yogendra Chandolia visited areas in his constituency including Mundka, Bawana, and Kirari and met the family of 39-year-old Rajesh, who died from an

electric shock in Kirari. West Delhi MP Kamaljeet Sahrawat focused on reducing waterlogging and facilitating traffic on the main Dwarka road and Najafgarh road.

New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj visited the Bharti Nagar pumping station and arranged for the drainage of three feet of water from Lodhi Colony, Subrahmanyam Bharti Colony, and Sujan Singh Park while directing officials to clear waterlogging in Moti Nagar, Patel Nagar, and Paharganj.

North east MP Manoj Tiwari visited Minto Bridge, Seelampur, and Ghonda and instructed officials to set up water pumps for drainage. He expressed concern over several cars damaged due to road subsidence in Malka Ganj. Chandni Chowk MP Praveen Khandelwal inspected Netaji Subhash Place and activated pumps at underpasses in several areas.

Delhi Congress chief Devender Yadav, sharing a video of a man being rescued by the fire services personnel from a bus stuck in a water logged underpass, attacked the AAP government in a post on X questioning what could be a bigger failure of the Delhi government. "...For how long will this publicity-seeking government fool the people of Delhi?" Yadav asked.

Power disrupted in city due to downpour

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

As heavy rains wreaked havoc on Friday, a slew of problems grappled the national Capital including long power cuts due to technical faults and precautionary shutdown in the city's waterlogged areas.

Residents of Dwarka, Jangpura and Laxmi Nagar said the power supply was cut as soon as it started raining in their areas. In Lutyen's Delhi and Central Delhi reportedly power was cut for at least four hours in the morning from 6 am to 10 am while there was a power outage in the Old Parliament building.

Congress MP Shashi Tharoor shared that there was a power cut at his official residence since 6 am by the discoms out of fear of electrocution. "The power supply was cut around 3-4 am amid heavy rains and was restored hours later at 4 pm," a Jangpura resident Pranav Mishra said.

Many areas, including Nizamuddin, Jangpura, Sector 7 in Dwarka, parts of Pitampura, Rohini, Mukherjee Nagar, Timarpur, parts of Hauz Khas, Green Park, Mayapuri, Sangam Vihar, Paharganj, Sadar Bazar, Ram Nagar, Bara Hindu Rao, Karawal Nagar, Sonia Vihar, Seelampur, Laxmi Nagar, and Trilok Puri, faced power outages of varying durations.



The rain and thunderstorm also caused disruption of power supply in parts of north Delhi, including Model Town, Azadpur and Indira Vihar, among others, a spokesperson of Tata Power Delhi Distribution Limited (TPDDL) said.

A discom official said the rain caused damages to power lines, poles and other installations in different parts of the national capital causing the outages. In many areas, the electricity supply was temporarily discontinued to prevent incidents of electrocution.

"Heavy rains led to instances of power disruptions in some areas of the city, primarily due to water logging and trees and their branches falling on electricity cables. To safeguard human lives and prevent electrocution, it became necessary to switch off the electricity

supply in some waterlogged and low-lying areas as a precautionary measure," a spokesperson of BSES discoms (distribution companies) BRPL and BYPL said.

However, repair works to restore the supply were undertaken immediately. According to a BSES official, its Operations and Maintenance Teams were on high alert, and Quick Response Teams (QRTs) were pressed into service. "In most cases, power supply was restored quickly," he said.

"However, it took a little longer than usual to restore electricity in some areas as we had to wait for the water to recede. For us, the safety of citizens is paramount," he added as heavy rains lashed Delhi early Friday, waterlogging roads across the city and causing a portion of the roof of the Delhi airport's Terminal 1 to collapse.

LG, Govt take stock of waterlogging situation

STAFF REPORTER ■ NEW DELHI

A pandemonium broke out in Delhi, heavy rain in the city, highest in a single day of June in 88 years, prompted the Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar and AAP government on Friday to take stock of the situation.

Saxena took stock of the situation in Delhi and directed officials to set up an emergency control room and deploy static pumps to address waterlogging reports. Chairing an emergency meeting, the LG said that all senior officers on leave should be asked to report back to duty immediately and no leave should be sanctioned for the next two months.

Senior officers of civic agencies like Delhi Jal Board, Public Works Department, Municipal Corporation of Delhi, Delhi Development Authority, Irrigation and Flood Control department and the Delhi Police attended the meeting. Saxena noted that the desilting of drains had not been completed and the Flood Control Order was yet to be issued and asked the officials to undertake the desilting work on an emergent basis over the next week. An emergency control room will be established, to be manned 24x7 by senior officials from all of the concerned departments. "Wide publicity of control room number be given for

common citizens to make telephonic calls to report incidents of waterlogging," it said.

He also directed various agencies to deploy static pumps and field staff to drain water from roads. The Irrigation and Flood Control department was directed to remain in touch with their counterparts in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh to assess rainfall levels and discharges from the Hathnikund barrage. The LG directed the revenue department to activate the disaster response cell under the Delhi Disaster Management Authority (DDMA) in case of excess rainfall and seek assistance of the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) for any emergency measures during the monsoon.

Meanwhile, Delhi Ministers including Saurabh Bharadwaj, Atishi, Gopal Rai and Imran Hussain held an emergency meeting in the afternoon and announced that the Delhi government will set up a 24-hour control room to monitor the waterlogging situation. Bharadwaj said a round-the-clock control room is being set up at the PWD headquarters where senior officials will be present to monitor the waterlogging situation. "Delhi government has started WhatsApp chatbot number 8130188222 and helpline number 1800110093 to register waterlogging complaints," he added.

Surge in summer fires due to flawed urbanisation practices

ASAD ■ NEW DELHI

Though the arrival of the rain in Delhi has brought much-needed relief from the blistering heat, the painful memories of the cruelest summer in decades has left an ineradicable mark on the city residents many of whom lost their loved ones in a spate of devastating fires during a prolonged heatwave.

The bitter memories of the loss of lives and property in the summer fires serve as a somber reminder of the heavy toll that extreme weather can exact from a city unprepared for such calamities.

Each summer, as temperatures in Delhi soar to record highs, the city's residents find themselves unprepared not only for the stifling heat but also for a more deadly phenomenon—accidental fires aided and abetted by extreme summer heat.

Just a week before one of the severest heatwaves in living memory subsided, four members of a family perished in a

fire started by a spark from a short circuit in their house in the Prem Nagar area of Delhi. As many as three separate fire incidents took place across the city on that day. In two of these cases, there were no casualties, however.

These blazes act as stark indicators of the growing urban challenges afflicting this expansive metropolis.

Urban policy strategist and architect Ekta Singh said, "A large number of settlements in Delhi, particularly the old ones, are unplanned. As the city grows in an unregulated manner with all the available spaces being filled in haphazard ways in utter disregard of building norms and safety standards, untoward incidents, even disasters, remain lurking just around the corner."

Data from the Delhi Fire Services (DFS) paints a grim picture of the situation. In May alone, they received 5,218 emergency calls, marking a staggering 75 per cent increase over the 2,935 calls received

during the same month last year.

In June, with temperatures continuing to rise, the DFS had responded to 1,681 calls by the 11th, and is on track to exceed the 2,571 calls recorded in June of the previous year. This surge in fire incidents starkly highlights the severe implications of the rising temperatures.

In May, a fire at a paediatrics hospital in the city claimed the lives of six newborns. "In the hospital, there were 12 newborns admitted. They were all rescued and shifted to the East Delhi Advance NICU Hospital, Vivek Vihar, for treatment. Shockingly, six of the babies were declared brought dead, one had died earlier. The bodies of all the seven children were sent to GTB Hospital for postmortem examination," DCP Shahdara said.

In a majority of cases, short circuit is the culprit responsible for accidental fires. "Almost 70 per cent of the fires during summer are invariably caused by some fault in the electricity



circuiting, wrong wiring, overheating, multi-plugging and other related problems," said Delhi Fire Service chief Atul Garg. He underscored the severe strain on the department and said, "In summer, we handle an average of 150-170 fire-related calls daily, a figure that decreases to 60-70 in the winter. On May 29, we were overwhelmed by the sheer volume of the distress calls, stretching our capabilities to the limit." Garg also underlined the

unbreakable dedication of the team, stating, "Our personnel are operating continuously, foregoing rest and sleep, to manage these crises."

The surge in calls on May 29 "primarily originated from industrial zones in west Delhi, largely triggered by short-circuits within the congested confines of local buildings and shops".

Consumers, in an effort to combat the sweltering heat, frequently push the boundaries

of their sanctioned electricity load. Numerous other recent fires in Delhi have been traced to electrical short-circuits. The city's peak power demand has broken previous records, hitting the 8,000 MW mark on May 29. This record was soon surpassed, with a staggering new peak of 8,647 MW on June 18, underscoring the intense strain on Delhi's electrical infrastructure.

Recent data from the DFS revealed a grim reality — the number of fatalities from fire-related incidents in the national Capital has more than doubled compared to last year's figures. By June 25, 2024, fire-related accidents claimed 83 lives, an alarming increase over the 39 deaths recorded during the same period in 2023.

The solution to Delhi's frequent fires mainly caused by electrical malfunctions lies in a comprehensive overhaul of the city's ageing electrical infrastructure. Key to this transformation is the elimination of

substandard materials, specifically the avoidance of cheap Chinese wires notorious for their inability to bear load increases. Use of high-quality, ISI-certified wires in buildings is also a key component of the solution.

Realtor Zubaid-ur-Rahman Khan emphasised the importance of regular maintenance. "To further guard against the risk of short circuits, it's important that people routinely inspect their electrical appliances." This proactive approach not only enhances safety but also underscores the need for rigorous standards and vigilant oversight in building practices across Delhi.

Prevention of recurring fires is not only the responsibility of Government agencies but also of every citizen, businesses, and other stakeholders with genuine concern for the city and its residents.

Deplorably, a significant number of buildings ravaged by fires were found to have failed to meet basic fire safety stan-

dards, most strikingly, non-issuance of a 'Fire No Objection Certificate' (NOC) by the proper authorities. Numerous commercial establishments also operate without this critical clearance from the fire department, flouting safety regulations with impunity.

However, not every building is mandated to have a NOC. Many of the fire-damaged properties are under the nine-metre-height limit that exempts them from needing a fire safety certificate from the DFS. This loophole often encourages property owners to neglect vital fire safety precautions, leading to preventable loss of life and extensive damage to property.

By adopting a holistic approach that includes strong fire safety protocols, strict enforcement of building regulations, and extensive public education on fire prevention, Delhi may be able to protect the lives of its residents, and significantly enhance the quality of urban living.

Maoist activities declining in C'garh: CM

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Friday said that Maoist activities in Chhattisgarh are declining due to the effective operations conducted by central security forces and the state police.

He said this while chairing a Unified Command meeting in Raipur.

Sai said his government has intensified anti-Maoist operations and accelerated development efforts. This, he said, had increased public trust in the government.

The Chief Minister asked officials to prioritise development projects in Maoist-affected areas, focusing on completing high-quality road construction, bridges and other projects within the



stipulated time frame. He also told officials to provide security to expedite ongoing construction work in these areas. The meeting focused on

enhancing the police intelligence network in Naxalite regions and conducting anti-Naxalite campaigns with the support of villagers.

They also discussed the issues faced by security forces in the Naxalite hubs.

The Chief Minister called for ensuring the availability of essential facilities and resources at security camps.

He also called for better coordination with neighbouring states Maharashtra, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Sai emphasised that villagers should not face any inconvenience during anti-Maoist operations.

Deputy Chief Minister and Home Minister Vijay Sharma, Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain and Director General of Police Ashok Juneja attended the meet.

Promoting Bastar produce for employment emphasised

STAFF REPORTER ■ JAGDALPUR

Chhattisgarh Cooperative Department Secretary Dr. CR Prasanna on Friday emphasised the need to promote Bastar products in other markets to generate employment and boost economic development.

A meeting was held in Jagdalpur to assess action plans with groups and committees affiliated with various departments.

An official communiqué said that products like cashew, coffee, chilli, sisal and silk was in high demand in other states. The meeting called for providing subsidies to villagers through the



cooperative department to boost production. Dr. Prasanna said the main products can be promoted through

processing plant initiatives. Then, the products can be pitched to businessmen and manufacturers. He gave directions to

increase the production of cashew and sisal through MGNREGA. He advocated more silk production as well.

Seven Maoists held



STAFF REPORTER ■ BIJAPUR

Seven Maoists, two carrying a cumulative reward of Rs 2 lakhs on their heads, were arrested in Bijapur district of Chhattisgarh, police said on Friday.

Ramdhari Veko, Somlu Ursa, Sukhram Kowasi, Sai Veko, Lalsingh Kowasi, Ranu Lekam and

Sanna Ursa were caught on Thursday, Bijapur Superintendent of Police Jitendra Kumar Yadav said.

Ramdhari Veko and Somlu Ursa carried a bounty of Rs 1 lakh on their heads. The others were lower rung cadres.

The seven were involved in planting IEDs to target security forces.

Man held for cheating two of Rs 18L

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Chhattisgarh Police on Friday arrested a man for cheating two siblings of Rs 18 lakhs on the pretext of providing them jobs in the electricity department.

Raipur's Avinash Singh Thakur, 41, has been taken into custody, Raipur Additional Superintendent of Police (Urban) Lakhman Patle said. Thakur told the police that he took the money from Avinash Dharde and Anurag Dharde by promising them jobs as junior engineers in the Power Distribution Co Ltd's Gudhiyari office. A court sent him to prison.

1,339 benefit from bike ambulance service



STAFF REPORTER ■ BILASPUR

As many as 1,339 people in Chhattisgarh's interior Bilaspur have benefited from a bike ambulance service called 'Sangwari Express', an official statement said on Friday.

Sangwari Express is a mini ambulance built into a bike that can easily traverse difficult regions. Due to geographical conditions, it is not possible for standard ambulances to reach patients in some villages of Kota

block. The service has proven to be a boon for transporting pregnant women from forest areas for institutional delivery and back. Among the beneficiaries are Ishwari Gond and Mahesh Dhanwad. Gond was able to safely deliver her child at the Ama Gohan Government Hospital after being transported there in the middle of the night. Dhanwad got immediate treatment after being bitten by a snake. He is in good health now.

Axis Bank honours MSMEs in C'garh



STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

Axis Bank felicitated over 50 micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) across Chhattisgarh on the International MSME Day on Friday.

Senior representatives of the bank presented certificates of appreciation to MSME representatives and acknowledged their significant contribution in their sectors and for the economic growth of the state.

MSMEs generate the highest amount of employment. On this occasion, the bank

"We are committed to promoting and supporting MSMEs as they play a key role in the economic development of the country"

unveiled a slew of offers providing significant financial benefits. It also extended pre-qualified offers and unsecured EMI-based loans at discounted rates.

The bank's head of Branch Banking, Arnika Dixit, said: "We are committed to promoting and supporting MSMEs as they play a key role in the economic development of the country."



Chhattisgarh Congress chief Deepak Baij and others on Friday welcomed Congress veteran and former Karnataka Chief Minister M. Veerappa Moily at the Raipur airport. Moily is visiting Chhattisgarh for four days to meet party leaders in the state.

MoU between RMC, IOC for EV charging stations

STAFF REPORTER ■ RAIPUR

The Raipur Municipal Corp (RMC) and the Indian Oil Corp (IOC) on Friday signed a MoU to set up four-wheeler electric vehicle charging stations in Raipur city.

The MoU was signed by Municipal Commissioner Abinash Mishra and IOC Divisional Institutional Business head Sanjay Kachwaha.

Raipur Collector Gaurav Kumar Singh and others were present.

The RMC will provide the space for the charging stations. The IOC will bear the entire cost of installation.

Furthermore, 10 percent of the revenue



generated from the charging stations will be shared with the RMC.

The locations for the charging stations include Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose Stadium complex, Gandhi Udyan, Old Smart City Ltd Office complex,

Outdoor Stadium complex, Anupam Garden (Mahavir Park), in front of the Central Library and Jawahar Bazaar Parking.

In the first phase, five charging stations will be installed in Raipur.

Air pollution exposure during childhood may affect lung health later

AGENCIES ■

Early-life exposure to air pollution may have a direct effect on lung health later in life, reveals a study on Friday that underlines the need to reduce pollution.

Scientists at the University of Southern California (USC) found that the link between childhood air pollution exposure and adult bronchitis symptoms such as bronchitis, chronic cough, or congestion or phlegm production not associated with a cold -- persisted even when the researchers adjusted for asthma or bronchitis symptoms early in life.

The study, published in the American Journal of Respiratory and Clinical Care Medicine, included 1,308 Children's Health Study participants with an average age of 32 at their adult assessment. The results showed that one-



quarter of participants had experienced bronchitis symptoms within the previous 12 months.

The findings "suggest that childhood air pollution exposure has more subtle effects on our respiratory system that still impact

us in adulthood," said Erika Garcia, Assistant Professor of population and public health sciences at the Keck School of Medicine.

The presence of bronchitis symptoms was associated with exposure between birth and age 17

to two types of pollutants.

One group consists of tiny particles in the air, such as dust, pollen, ash from wildfires, industrial emissions, and products from vehicle exhaust.

The other is nitrogen dioxide -- a byproduct of combustion in automobiles, planes, boats, and power plants that is known to hurt lung function. The study focused on exposure in children as they are particularly vulnerable to the effects of air pollution. Their respiratory and immune systems are still developing, and compared to adults, they breathe in more air relative to their body mass.

The team also found that the effect of nitrogen dioxide and particulate matter exposure during childhood on bronchitis symptoms among adults was stronger for those who had been diagnosed with asthma as kids.

Two Maoists with Rs 4L bounty surrender



STAFF REPORTER ■ SUKMA

A male and a female Maoists, carrying a bounty of Rs 2 lakhs each on their heads, on Friday surrendered to security forces in Sukma district of Chhattisgarh.

Sukki Podiyam alias Roshani and Nanda Podiyam alias Nandu turned themselves in, Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan said.

Roshani was a People's Liberation Guerrilla Army member. Nandu was a Platoon Number 3 party member of the outlawed Maoist outfit.

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDING ENGINEER P.W.D. (B&R) AMBIKPUR CIRCLE AMBIKPUR

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03. S.No. 'C' Class And Above Contractor.
04. Bid Submission Due Date 18.07.2024

S. No.	N.I.T. No.	Name of work	P.A.C. in lacks
1	2	3	4
1	08	Construction of SH 04 Road to Kharhaguda Uraon Basti Approach Road Length 1.20 Km.	145.14

Superintending Engineer P.W.D. Ambikapur Circle Ambikapur
G-242500661/5

कार्यालय कार्यपालन अभियंता, ग्रामीण यांत्रिकी सेवा, संभाग कांकेर

Phone No. :- 07868-241213, Email Id: ee-res.kanker@gov.in
// मैनूअल पद्धति जौनल निविदा सूचना //

क्रमांक / 07 /व.ले.नि./ग्रा.यां.से./2024-25 कांकेर, दिनांक 27/06/2024

छ.ग. राज्य ऊर्जा विभाग द्वारा प्रदत्त "बी" एवं उच्च श्रेणी के लाईसेंसधारी, एकीकृत पंजीयन प्रणाली अंतर्गत सक्षम श्रेणी में पंजीकृत टेकेदारों से निम्नलिखित जनपद पंचायत अंतर्गत स्वीकृत निर्माण कार्यों में विद्युतीकरण कार्य हेतु मैनूअल जौनल निविदा आमंत्रित की जाती है जौनल निविदा दिनांक 08.07.2024 शाम 5.00 बजे तक पंजीकृत डाक स्पीड पोस्ट से (आमंत्रण क्रम द्वितीय बार) आमंत्रित की जाती है तथा निविदा दिनांक 09.07.2024 को 11.30 बजे पूर्वान्ह में खोली जावेगी :-

क्र.	कार्य का विवरण	अनुमानित लागत (लाख में)
1	2	3
1	जनपद पंचायत अंतर्गत विभिन्न मड़ों में स्वीकृत भवन निर्माण कार्यों में आंतरिक विद्युतीकरण कार्य, जनपद पंचायत कांकेर, चारामा, नरहरपुर, भानुप्रतापपुर, दुर्गुकोदल, अंतागढ़, कोयलीवेड़ा, जिला-उत्तर बस्तर कांकेर (छ.ग.)	प्रत्येक जनपद पंचायत में रु. 10.00 लाख

2. निविदा की सामान्य शर्तें, विस्तृत निविदा विज्ञप्ति (परिशिष्ट-2.10) एवं निविदा दस्तावेज (परिशिष्ट- 2.13) यथा संशोधित व अन्य जानकारी विभागीय वेबसाइट <http://res.cg.gov.in> में अथवा कार्यालयीन अवधि में कार्यालय में उपस्थित होकर देखी जा सकती है।

कार्यपालन अभियंता ग्रामीण यांत्रिकी सेवा संभाग - कांकेर
G-242500652/3

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NIA raids in Guj, Maha in hunt for suspected spies

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The National Investigation Agency (NIA) Friday conducted searches in Gujarat and Maharashtra on the premises of those suspected to have received money from Pakistan to spy on Indian defence establishments.

The searches were conducted in a case registered by the NIA in June last year. The agency filed a charge sheet in July 2023 against two accused including an absconding Pakistani national. This was followed by two more charge sheets against three others, including a Pakistani national, a statement issued by the NIA said.

NIA investigations have revealed that Pakistani nationals had collaborated with the arrested accused in the espionage racket, in which sensitive/vital information pertaining to the Indian Navy was being leaked as part of a con-



spiracy to unleash terrorist violence in India, it said. "Cracking down on suspects involved in the 2021 Visakhapatnam Pakistani ISI espionage case relating to leakage of classified defence information, the NIA on Friday conducted extensive searches at three locations in Gujarat and Maharashtra," the statement said.

The residences of the suspects, believed to have received money from Pakistan to spy on

Indian defence establishments, were thoroughly searched by the NIA teams at three locations. Several incriminating materials, including mobile phones and documents, were seized during the searches. The NIA is examining the seized materials to identify more linkages in the case, originally filed by the Counter Intelligence Cell, Andhra Pradesh, on January 12, 2021, under various sections of Indian Penal Code, Unlawful

Activities (Prevention) Act and the Official Secrets Act, 1923. NIA also conducted a series of searches in the Naxal-infested regions of Chhattisgarh in connection with a CPI (Maoist) arrest and arms recovery case. "Half a dozen places in the troubled region were extensively searched, and several mobile phones, a printer, and cash amounting to Rs 39,100 were seized along with incriminating documents," a statement issued by the NIA said.

The six premises subjected to searches are located in the remote villages of Mujalgondi, Kalmuchche, Amabeda and Jiwalamari in Kanker district, it said.

The NIA is continuing with its investigation in the case, registered initially by the local police on February 5 this year and taken over by NIA on February 22. Early investigations led to the arrest of two persons in the case, the probe agency said.

Parents, not digital devices help children manage emotions: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Are you one of those parents who hand over digital devices to your kids to escape tantrums? Beware! While it might offer a quick fix, relying too much on screens can hinder your child's development of essential emotional regulation skills.

This could set the stage for issues like poor impulse control or frequent outbursts, turning everyday frustrations into major challenges when they grow up, a study published in Frontiers in Child and Adolescent Psychiatry has said.

In other words, excessive use of digital devices to distract children can prevent them from learning how to manage emotions independently.

The researchers from Hungary and Canada tracked 300 parents of children aged two to five over a year.

They found that children who were frequently pacified with digital devices struggled more with managing anger and frustration. Parents often turned to digital



distractions when their children displayed poor behavior control, but this approach only exacerbated the issue.

The study emphasised that the early years are crucial for developing self-control, where children learn to recognize emotions and respond deliberately rather than impulsively.

Veronika Konok, a researcher at Eötvös Loránd University in Hungary and the study's lead author, stated, "Tantrums cannot be cured by digital devices. Children must learn to manage

their negative emotions with the help of their parents, not a digital device."

The study suggested that over-reliance on screens can cripple children's ability to handle emotions effectively later in life. The researchers recommended that parents should guide their children through frustrating moments, helping them recognize and handle their emotions rather than avoiding the situation.

They also stressed on the importance of parents receiving support from health professionals through training and counseling to better navigate their child's emotional development.

Dr Shweta Sharma, a clinical psychologist and counselling psychologist, who is not related with the study, agreed with the observations, warning that, "over-reliance on digital devices for emotional regulation could potentially impair children's ability to recognize and manage emotions effectively later in life.

"This may manifest in difficulties with anger management, emotional control, and overall emotional well-being," said Dr Sharma, who also happens to be general secretary of Indian Association of Clinical Psychologists (IACP).

Dr. Rabya Umman, an RCI-registered clinical psychologist opined that instead of relying on gadgets, parents should be proactive and supportive, and help their children build strong emotional regulation skills, contributing to better mental health and well-being in the long run.

Modi pays tributes to Narasimha Rao



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday paid tributes to former prime minister P V Narasimha Rao, widely hailed for introducing various economic reforms, on his birth anniversary. Paying homage to Rao, Modi said in a social media post,

"He is remembered for his leadership and wisdom. It is our Government's honour that we conferred the Bharat Ratna on him earlier this year, recognising his rich contribution to



our nation."

Born in 1921, Rao was a veteran Congress leader who became prime minister in 1991 after the assassination of former prime minister and party leader Rajiv Gandhi during the Lok Sabha election campaign.

The dismantling of what was known as the "license-permit raj" built around the state's rigid control of the economy and encouragement of private enterprise through numerous reforms are considered Rao's enduring legacy as prime minister.

President urged to stall three new criminal laws

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

CPI (ML) Liberation MPs on Friday sought President Droupadi Murmu's "urgent intervention" to postpone the implementation of the new criminal laws that are set to come into force from July 1, saying they need a thorough review and wider consensus.

In a letter, the two MPs -- Sudama Prasad and Raja Ram Singh -- said several compelling concerns are being raised from various sections of society and the legal fraternity regarding the three new criminal codes - Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam.

The MPs said there are several draconian provisions in the laws that have criminalised the basic civil liberties that citizens enjoy, in particular, the freedom of speech, right to assembly, right to associate, the right to demonstrate and other civil rights, the MPs said.

"This is particularly evident in the introduction of a broadened definition of a 'terrorist act' from the draconian UAPA,



the retention of the notorious sedition law (section 124A of IPC) under a new nomenclature and the criminalising of hunger strikes - all of which are likely tools in the criminalisation of legitimate dissent and lawful nonviolent democratic protests," they said.

They said there are enhanced arbitrary powers to the police that will have an impact on civil liberties and human rights in the country.

"Statutory sanction has been

facilitates the profiling and targeting of individuals by the police prior to any formal conviction," they said.

The MPs said handcuffing has been made statutory, while the police have been given discretion in the registration of FIRs.

"Most shockingly, the duration of police custody has been enhanced from the present limit of 15 days, to 60 or 90 days (depending on the offence), exposing accused persons to intimidation, torture and danger," they said.

The CPI (ML) Liberation leaders said it appears that "half measures have been taken at tackling mob lynching since the relevant provisions in the BNS, while criminalises such actions without specifically calling it as such, has omitted religion as one of the explicit grounds.

They also expressed concerns over provisions sanctioning punishments like solitary confinement which they called inhuman.

"Given the massive backlog of criminal cases (3.4 crore cases), bringing these three laws in force at this time, will create two parallel legal regimes, leading to further backlog and

placing further strain on the already overburdened judicial system," they said.

The MPs said while there is no denying that India's criminal justice infrastructure is in dire need of reform, the three criminal laws are not the answer.

"These were passed with undue haste, without any discussion or parliamentary scrutiny given that 146 Opposition MPs were under suspension at the time these laws were passed.

As such, it is necessary that the Union government take the decision to suspend the implementation of these three criminal laws and re-introduce them in Parliament for proper scrutiny and deliberations," they said.

The MPs urged the President to make an "urgent intervention".

"We share their concerns that the new laws will erode liberties and legal safeguards of citizens by arming the state with more sweeping and draconian powers.

The new laws need a thorough review and wider and more informed consensus. Please advise the government against rushing with their implementation," they said.

Nitish in Delhi for party national executive meet

Bihar Chief Minister and JD(U) supreme Nitish Kumar on Friday reached Delhi, a day before the party's National Executive meeting scheduled to be held in the national capital. Kumar will chair the National Executive meeting on June 29.

According to party insiders Kumar, who is the party's national president, will also meet JD(U)'s Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha MPs at his official residence in the national capital on Friday evening. The national executive meeting will be attended by party's all MPs, including union Ministers and JD (U) leaders --Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lallan Singh and Ramnath Thakur and senior leaders from Bihar and other states.



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Police stations across India to create awareness on new criminal laws

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

All 17,500 police stations in the country will hold a special event on July 1 involving women, youth, students, senior citizens and eminent personalities to apprise them the key features of the new criminal laws, which will come into force on that day, official sources said.

The new laws -- Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam 2023 -- will come into effect from July 1. These laws are set to replace the British-era Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure and the Indian Evidence Act respectively.

Sources said coinciding with commencement of these three criminal laws, an event will be held on July 1 by the Officer-in-Charge of each police station in all states and Union Territories highlighting the key features of the new criminal laws. The programme at the police station or a suitable place will involve women, youth, students, senior citizens, retired police officers, eminent personalities and members of self-help groups, anganwadi centres and local peace committee and also educational institutions like schools, colleges etc, they said.

According to a data of the Police Organisations compiled by Bureau of Police Research & Development (BPR&D), there are over 17,500 police stations in the country.

All higher education institutions under the University Grants Commission (UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) as well as in the states and UTs will



organise day long activities on July 1 that will focus on group discussions, workshops, seminars on various provisions of new criminal laws, highlighting the major transformation intended to achieve the ends of justice with wide participation of students, faculties and other staff. Zero FIR, registration of police complaints online, summons through electronic modes and mandatory videography of crime scenes of all heinous crimes are the key highlights of the three new criminal laws. The Union Home Ministry is gearing up to roll out the three new criminal laws from next week with 40 lakh grassroots functionaries trained to ensure people are aware about the legislations and the impact they will have on everyone, particularly women and children, official sources said Wednesday.

Over 5.65 lakh police, prison, forensic, judicial and prosecution officials have also been trained about the new laws. The BPR&D also conducted 250 training courses, organised webinars and seminars in which 40,317 officers and personnel have been trained.

Under the new laws, victims

will receive a free copy of the FIR, ensuring their participation in the legal process. An interesting addition of the law is that in the event of an arrest, the individual has the right to inform a person of his choice about his or her situation. This will ensure immediate support and assistance to the arrested individual.

Besides, arrest details will now be prominently displayed with in police stations and district headquarters, allowing families and friends of the arrested person easy access to important information. To strengthen the case and investigations, it has become mandatory for forensic experts to visit crime scenes for serious offences and collect evidence. Additionally, the process of evidence collection at the crime scene will be mandatorily videographed to prevent tampering of evidence. This dual approach significantly enhances the quality and reliability investigations and contributes to a fair administration of justice, sources said. The new laws prioritised the investigations for offences against women and children, ensuring timely completion within two months of record-

ing information. Under the new law, victims are entitled to regular updates on the progress of their case within 90 days. This provision keeps victims informed and involved in the legal process, enhancing transparency and trust.

The new laws guarantee free first-aid or medical treatment to victims of crimes against women and children at all hospitals. This provision ensures immediate access to essential medical care, prioritising the well-being and recovery of victims during challenging times.

Summons can now be served electronically, expediting legal processes, reducing paperwork, and ensuring efficient communication between all parties involved. For certain offences against woman, statements of the victim are to be recorded, as far as practicable, by a woman magistrate and in her absence, by a male magistrate in the presence of a woman to ensure sensitivity and fairness, creating a supportive environment for victims.

Both the accused and the victim are entitled to receive copies of the FIR, police report, chargesheet, statements, confessions, and other documents within 14 days.

Courts grant a maximum of two adjournments to avoid unnecessary delays in case hearings, ensuring timely justice delivery.

The new laws mandates all state government to implement witness protection scheme to ensure the safety and cooperation of witnesses, enhancing the credibility and effectiveness of legal proceedings. The definition of "gender" now includes transgender individuals, promoting inclusivity and equality.

Review work of staffers to retire non-performers, Centre tells Ministries

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trked over non-adherence to Lits directives, the Centre has asked all ministries to timely review the working of the employees so that the non-performers are prematurely retired from service.

In an order, the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) asked ministries concerned to direct the public sector undertakings (PSUs), banks, autonomous institutions and statutory bodies under their administrative control to undertake the exercise of periodic review of employees.

It said instructions have been issued from time to time for undertaking periodic review of the government servants' performance with a view to ascertaining whether they "should be retained in service or retired from service prematurely, in public interest".

The administrative ministries and departments have repeatedly been requested to adhere to guidelines issued in this regard and furnish a report to this effect to the DoPT, said the order issued to the secretaries of all central government departments.

However, it has come to notice that various ministries and departments are not adhering to the said guidelines resulting in delay in identifying the government employees due for review under relevant provisions of Fundamental Rules (FR)-56 (J)/(I) and Rule 48 of Central Civil Services or CCS (Pension) Rules (now, revised as Rule 42 of CCS (Pension) Rules, 2021), it said.

These rules lay down the policy of periodic review and premature retirement of government servants and to ensure efficiency, economy and speed in the disposal of the government functions.

"In view of the above, the ministries/departments are requested to take immediate action to identify the employees due for review under relevant provisions of Fundamental/Pension Rules and ensure that their cases are expeditiously submitted for consideration before the duly constituted review committee as per extant instructions," read the order dated June 27.

Further, all the ministries, departments and organisations have been asked "to strictly adhere" to the timeline mentioned in DoPT's order issued in this regard in 2020 "for undertaking the exercise of review of performance of the government servants and for

the employees of PSUs/banks/autonomous institutions/statutory organisations under their administrative control to ensure that the employees with doubtful integrity or found to be ineffective are not allowed to continue in government", according to the order.

The DoPT had issued comprehensive and consolidated guidelines through its 2020 order detailing the procedures to be followed in identifying the cases of premature retirement.

All ministries and departments have been asked to furnish a report to the DoPT in a particular format by the 15th day of each month starting from July, 2024, it added.

The DoPT said that the objective of the CCS rules is to strengthen the administrative machinery by developing responsible and efficient administration at all levels and to achieve efficiency, economy and speed in the disposal of government functions.



India denounces US report on religious freedom

India on Friday categorically rejected criticism against it in an annual US State Department report on international religious freedom, describing it as deeply biased and visibly driven by vote-bank considerations.

External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said the report selectively picked incidents to advance a preconceived narrative against India.

In his remarks at the release of the report, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said there has been a "concerning increase" in anti-conversion laws, hate speech and

demolitions of homes and places of worship of members of minority faith communities in India. "As in the past, the report is deeply biased, lacks an understanding of India's social fabric and is visibly driven by votebank considerations and a prescriptive outlook," Jaiswal said.

"We therefore reject it. The exercise itself is a mix of imputations, misrepresentations, selective usage of facts, reliance on biased sources and a one-sided projection of issues," he said.

The MEA spokesperson said, "It has selectively picked incidents to advance a preconceived narrative as well. In some cases, the very validity of laws and regulations are questioned by the report." Jaiswal said the report also appears to challenge the integrity of certain judgments given by Indian courts.



Chhattisgarh Govt striving to expand road, rail, telecom links in Naxal-hit areas: CM

PTI ■ CHHATTISGARH

Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Vishnu Deo Sai on Friday said his government is committed to expediting the expansion of rail, road and telecom connectivity and other developmental work in the Maoist-hit areas of the state. He was talking to reporters after chairing a meeting of the unified command here to review the security situation and development-related initiatives in left-wing extremism (LWE)-hit pockets in Chhattisgarh. "The meeting of unified command is generally convened once a year. Our home minister, chief secretary, director-general of police (DGP) and senior officials were present. We held an elaborate discussion on Naxalism and reviewed the status of developmental works of different departments in the affected areas," Sai said. After the BJP returned to power in Chhattisgarh six months ago, Sai said, his



government has been fighting strongly against the Naxal menace. Security forces have also achieved significant success in anti-Naxal operations during this period, he said. Asked about the anti-Naxal strategy discussed in the meeting, the CM said, "It is fortunate that there is a

'double engine' government (BJP in state and Centre) and Union Home Minister Amit Shah ji has already chaired a meeting here in January (on anti-Naxal front) and given necessary instructions." The CM said they want to take development to everyone. "Even villagers want to be

associated with the mainstream of growth," he said. New security camps have been set up in many places and the government is trying to ensure that basic amenities and benefits of welfare projects reach Naxal-affected villages through its 'Niyad Nellanar' scheme, he said. "The effort is to expedite works related to road, rail and telecom connectivity in those areas and ensure that there is no shortage of resources for any work there," he added. Deputy CM Vijay Sharma, who also holds the home portfolio, Chief Secretary Amitabh Jain, DGP Ashok Juneja, Additional Chief Secretary (Home) Manoj Kumar Pingua and senior officials of state police and central armed forces, including CRPF, BSF and ITBP, and Indian Air Force attended the meeting, officials said. More than 130 Naxalites have been killed so far this year in separate encounters with security forces in Chhattisgarh.

BJP holds State wide protest in Karnataka over Valmiki scam

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Karnataka BJP on Thursday held a state-wide protest against the Congress government over alleged illegal money transfer scam involving a state-run corporation, and demanded Minister Siddaramaiah's resignation. BJP workers and leaders held demonstrations in front of the Deputy Commissioner's office in almost all districts in the state, party sources said. The party's state President B Y Vijayendra took part in the demonstration held in the district headquarters town of Chitradurga. As Vijayendra and other leaders tried to march towards the Deputy Commissioner's office there, police detained them and whisked them away in a bus. There are reports of similar protests from various parts of the state including Belagavi, Mandya and Mangaluru. Vijayendra alleged that the government is trying to cover up the scam in the Karnataka Maharshi Valmiki Scheduled Tribes Development



Corporation. "There are death threats to officials and those who want to expose the government's scams. Congress government has done a daylight robbery of funds that were kept for the Valmiki and other ST communities, and thereby it has done injustice to those communities," he said. Speaking to reporters as he was being whisked away in the bus, he said, "(Medical Education) Minister Sharan Prakash Patil, Valmiki Corporation's Chairman Basanagouda Daddal will have to resign. Not only that, the Chief Minister holds the Finance portfolio, without coming to his notice such a

big scam would not have happened. Allegations have surfaced that the money was utilised for the election, so the Chief Minister has to resign." The illegal money transfer issue, involving the Corporation, came to light, after its accounts superintendent, Chandrashekhar P, died by suicide on May 26, leaving behind a death note. The note claimed unauthorised transfer of Rs 187 crore belonging to the Corporation from its bank account, and from that, Rs 88.62 crore was illegally moved to various accounts allegedly belonging to "well-known" IT companies and a

Hyderabad-based cooperative bank among others. Chandrashekhar has named the Corporation's now-suspended Managing Director J G Padmanabh, accounts officer Parashuram G Durugannavar, and Union Bank of India Chief Manager Suchismita Rawal in the note, while also stating that the "Minister" had issued oral orders for transferring the funds. Following allegations against him in connection with the scam, Scheduled Tribes Welfare Minister B Nagendra tendered his resignation on June 6. Leader of Opposition R Ashoka said the BJP will press for Siddaramaiah's resignation during the upcoming Assembly session. "Nagendra's share in this scam was only 20 per cent, 80 per cent loot was by Siddaramaiah and gang.....We will not stop our fight for any reason, it will continue. One wicket has fallen (Minister resign), three or more will follow. People know this is a corrupt government," he said in the district headquarters town of Kolar.

Maharashtra budget: Political hypnotism, says LoP Danve

PTI ■ CHHATRAPATI SAMBHAJINAGAR

Leader of Opposition in the Maharashtra Legislative Council Ambadas Danve on Friday dubbed the Maharashtra budget presented by Deputy Chief Minister Ajit Pawar as "political hypnotism" and claimed regions like Marathwada and Vidarbha did not get anything. "The state has announced so many schemes but there is a doubt about its implementation. This is more of 'political hypnotism'. After today's budget speech, it is clear that the government doesn't consider regions of Marathwada, Vidarbha as part of Maharashtra. The government will impose heavy taxes on the people through the committee formed for systematic implementation of schemes," Danve, a top Shiv Sena (UBT) leader, said in a post on X.



Mahesh Tapase, chief spokesperson of the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party, accused the government of financial mismanagement and highlighted that debt burden of the state has crossed Rs 7 lakh crore. He questioned the feasibility of budgetary provisions given the debt burden and said the government had no strategy to attract business investment and reduce unemployment.

The populist but hollow promises would not sway the people ahead of the elections, Tapase added. Danve's colleague and Osmanabad MLA Kailas Patil said the budget was just a damage control exercise after the reverses the ruling alliance faced in the Lok Sabha polls. He said demands of complete farm loan waiver had been ignored, while the promise of free electricity is ineffective since farmers are not getting supply in the first place. Industrialist Ramchandra Bhogale criticised the budget for "freebies", adding that "giving everything free can help the parties in power to win elections, but this will sink the state". Maharashtra State Bank Employees Federation general secretary Devidas Tuljapur said the need of the hour was relief for farmers, especially by way of loan waiver, but this issue was ignored in the budget.

SPOs decorated as constables in J&K

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

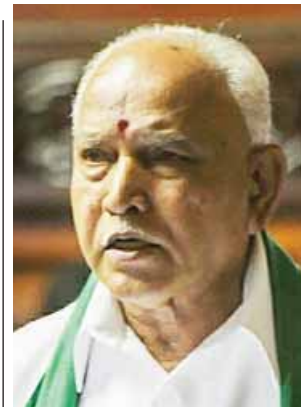
Director General of Jammu and Kashmir Police RR Swain Friday rewarded nine special police officers (SPOs) by converting them to Constables in recognition of their exemplary bravery during an encounter in the Saida Sohal village of Hiranagar tehsil in Kathua district on June 11. Two foreign terrorists were neutralized during an overnight operation in the area. All nine SPOs were part of the special operations group (SOG) team that was rushed to the spot to neutralize the terrorists in the area. DGP said the police leadership in Jammu and Kashmir has decided to acknowledge the bravery of special police officers as they remain the most important component in our fight against terrorism in the region. DGP said we changed the procedure and fast-tracked their files to acknowledge their bravery.



DGP said by rewarding these nine SPOs a clear message has been sent to around 20,000 SPOs that if they will showcase bravery and even make an effort to do their best during anti-terrorist operations we will convert them to the rank of constable within 24 hours. "The courage and professionalism exhibited by these police personnel during the encounter was exemplary even when they were temporary members of J&K police. These promotions are a testament to their valor and dedication.

As these police personnel become permanent members of J&K Police, this will encourage the Kathua Police, especially SOG Kathua & SPOs, and boost their morale during such operations and encountering ANEs and other hardcore criminals. Meanwhile, addressing the gathering at District Police Lines, Kathua DGP also assured that the Village defense groups will be strengthened in Kathua and other places. SPOs will be promoted to win the war against terrorism. DGP said, "The Jammu and

Kashmir Police is like a sword against the terror ecosystem. If this sword, which belongs to the people, is not properly maintained, victory in this war against terrorism cannot be achieved". Pointing to a series of recent terror attacks in the Union Territory, the DGP said terrorists can neither defeat the force nor diminish its resolve. He also said the police are well-equipped with advanced weaponry, including arms from Israel and Germany. "We have no weaknesses as far as arms are concerned," the DGP said.



HC extends interim order restraining CID from arresting Yediyurappa

PTI ■ BENGALURU

The Karnataka High Court on Friday extended its interim order restraining the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) from arresting former Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, in connection with a case registered against the BJP leader under POCOS Act. The bench of Justice Krishna S Dixit continued its earlier order, as it permitted the prosecution to file its objection to the petition filed by Yediyurappa seeking quashing of the case. The CID on Thursday filed a chargesheet at the Fast Track Court 1 for POCOS Act cases here against Yediyurappa and three of his aides in connection with the case based on a complaint by the mother of a 17-year-old girl who alleged that he sexually assaulted her daughter during a meeting on February two this year, at his residence in Dollars Colony here. A Bengaluru court on June 13 issued a non-bailable arrest warrant against Yediyurappa in the case registered against him on March 14 this year. The High Court on June 14 restrained the CID from arresting Yediyurappa, while directing him to appear before it for probe. Yediyurappa was questioned for over three hours by the CID on June 17.

Vacancies in teaching positions major problem in NEP implementation, says UGC chairman

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Vacancies in teaching positions in state universities have emerged as a major hurdle in the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, University Grants Commission (UGC) chairman Mamidala Jagadesh Kumar said here on Friday. The UGC chairman was here to attend a day-long conference of vice-chancellors of Northeastern and Eastern regions on 'Implementation of NEP 2020', hosted by Guwahati-based Pragjyotishpur University. Addressing a press conference, Kumar said, "Across the country, a major problem in state universities is vacancies in teaching positions. In some state universities, 50 to 80 per cent



of teaching positions are vacant," urging universities to expedite the filling of these positions. He said implementation of NEP is a "journey", which cannot happen overnight, and state governments have been enthusiastically participating in implementing it. Kumar stressed that it is also essential for the universities to formulate an institutional development plan and their own roadmap for the future. With approximately 130 vice-

chancellors and other academics participating, discussions at the conference focused on transforming higher education institutions to empower students in contributing to national development. Key topics include providing holistic education, integrating skill development with degree programs, and utilising digital technology to reach students from rural and economically weaker backgrounds. "We will be discussing how the NEP is being implemented and challenges colleges and universities are facing, so that we can collectively find solutions," he said. Kumar requested the universities to open more off-campus centres to make education accessible and equitable, while stating that UGC was also laying thrust

on training teachers in the higher education sector. Highlighting the need to expose students to different parts of the country, he said the Northeastern region is home to many indigenous knowledge systems, whether it be a festival celebrated based on astronomical calculation, bamboo engineering or shifting cultivation. "These are parts of Indian knowledge system and there is a need to expose students to this from different parts of the country," he said. Kumar added that UGC is also working on promoting education in own language, especially with the country having numerous native languages. On implementation of NEP in this region, Kumar said the UGC is in regular touch with state higher education councils and VCs.

IMD issues high alert for coastal Karnataka

PTI ■ BENGALURU

Owing to heavy rains in the coastal regions of Karnataka, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) has issued warning for fishermen till June 29. Stating that squally weather with wind speed of 35 kmph to 45 kmph, gusting to 55 kmph, is likely to prevail till June 29, the IMD reiterated its warning to fishermen, asking them not to enter the sea. It has also issued high wave alerts for the coast of Dakshina Kannada (Mulki to Mangalore) Udupi (Baindur to Kapu) and Uttara Kannada (Majali to Bhatkal). With high waves in the range of 2.9 m to 3.7m till June 29, the Met centre advised caution while doing marine operations and nearshore recreations. Stating that



waterlogging and flooding of low-lying areas as well as mudslides and rock falls are possible, it has warned people to avoid areas prone to flash floods and be prepared for power outages and traffic disruptions. According to its report, Bengaluru is likely to receive very light rain, with temperatures varying from 26.4 degrees Celsius to 21.3 degrees Celsius tomorrow. In Karnataka, Agumbe has received the highest rainfall at 81.5 mm on June 27 and Bengaluru city the lowest at 0.1mm. Meanwhile, Bengaluru's water expert and one of the

founders of Biome Trust, S Vishwanath, who tracks the reservoir inflow on 'X' has pointed out that there has been a good inflow in Kaveri basin. "Kabini roars in," he posted on the social media on June 27 from his handle @zenrainman. He had also observed earlier that Kabini will be the first reservoir to fill up as it's a small reservoir with a large rainy catchment area. As per Karnataka State Natural Disaster Monitoring Centre, as on June 28, water inflow to Kabini stands at 20,113 cusecs. Another 'X' user, who too tracks weather in the state through his handle Namma Karnataka Weather (@namma.vjy) has pointed out that the water level has started receding in Bhagamandala Triveni Sangama.

Himanta pulls up Nalbari DC for elaborate lunch during Cabinet meet

PTI ■ GUWAHATI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Friday pulled up Nalbari district commissioner for serving lunch with "too many items" during the state Cabinet meeting there the previous day. Sarma said instructions were issued for arranging simple vegetarian meal, which was allegedly not followed by DC Varnali Deka. "In spite of repeated instructions from this office to arrange simple vegetarian meal during the Cabinet meeting held on 27/06/24 at



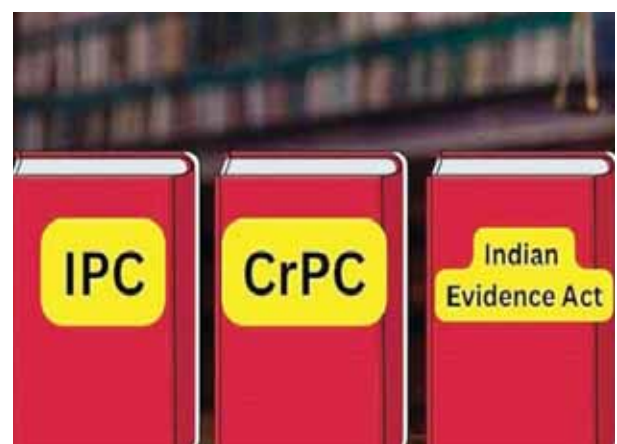
Nalbari, you have not followed the instructions accordingly," Sarma wrote to Deka. "Rather, elaborate arrangements were made with too many items," he added. Expressing "extreme displeasure," the CM added that such instructions should

be carried out scrupulously in future. According to local media reports, the menu included several vegetarian dishes and different varieties of fish and meat cooked with local ingredients. Elaborate arrangements during Cabinet meetings held outside Dispur had drawn the attention of the public previously, leading the CM to instruct for basic food and other provisions. Sarma-led Cabinet has been holding meetings outside the capital on different occasions in a bid to take the government closer to people.

Arunachal to use English, Hindi versions of new criminal laws: Official

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

Arunachal Pradesh will use the English and Hindi versions of the three new criminal laws since the state's people speak in "innumerable" dialects, an official said on Friday. Officials and other people concerned are being trained on the new laws in English and Hindi, he said. English is the official language of the northeastern state. From July 1, three new criminal laws, Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita 2023,



Bharatiya Nagrik Suraksha Sanhita 2023 and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhinyam 2023, will come into effect across the country. These laws will replace the Indian Penal Code 1860, Indian Evidence Act 1872 and the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973. "We will use the English and Hindi versions (of the three laws). They are not being translated into any local language. We have 26 major and over 100 sub-tribes," the official said. He said all investigating officers in the northeastern state are being imparted

training on the laws in all 27 districts in English and Hindi for the last two months. According to the website of the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region, 30-50 distinct languages/dialects are in use in Arunachal Pradesh. Besides, there are "innumerable dialects and sub-dialects". Some of these languages are Nyishi, Dafla, Miji, Adi, Gallong, Wancho, Tagin, Hill Miri, Mohpa, Nocte, Aka, Tangsa and Khanti. A majority of them belong to the Tibeto-Burman language family.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Presidential address

President's address, while highlighting various Govt achievements, fell short of raising some serious concerns

As the inaugural session of the 18th Lok Sabha progresses, it is evident that this Lok Sabha would be way livelier and more eventful than the previous one. Thanks to a more evenly distributed treasury and opposition benches. This was evident from the day one and in the address by President Droupadi Murmu to both houses of Parliament. Her address and drawn significant attention and controversy. In the customary joint address, President Murmu made a mention of the various achievements of the government, including its pervasive welfare schemes and the resilience of the Indian economy. The address, while highlighting various achievements of the Government was silent on various issues of national importance. For this the Opposition was vocal in criticising for its content and omissions, especially the exclusion of the ongoing violence in Manipur. The Opposition response was not ill founded but rooted in deeper political and social tensions prevailing in the State. The address, intended to set the tone for the parliamentary session, included references to several critical issues and achievements. Notably, it highlighted irregularities in examinations and touched upon the historical context of the Emergency imposed in 1975. The reference to the Emergency was frowned upon by the Congress which dubbed it as an effort to deflect attention from the current political scenario. However, the glaring omission of the escalating violence in Manipur stood out starkly. President Murmu addressed the troubling trend of examination paper leaks, acknowledging the impact on the credibility of academic processes. She emphasised the government's commitment to transparency and reform in examination systems, underscoring the need for stringent measures to ensure fairness and integrity. The mention of the Emergency, referred to as the 'biggest and darkest chapter of direct attack on the Constitution,' was a strategic move that dug up the historical blunder. This reference, while aimed at highlighting the Government's commitment to democracy, struck a nerve with the Congress, reminding them of a period they would prefer to distance themselves from. The most contentious aspect of President Murmu's speech was the omission of any direct mention of the violence in Manipur. The President's speech did acknowledge the government's broader efforts in the Northeast, citing increased allocations for development and initiatives under the Act East Policy, but this was seen as insufficient by many. The exclusion of the Manipur violence from the President's speech was perceived by the Opposition as an attempt to downplay the crisis and avoid accountability. The speech did not adequately address the concerns of the day and call for action from the Opposition regarding various pressing issues. Engaging with these concerns and outlining a collaborative approach to resolve the crisis could have fostered a more constructive political dialogue and demonstrated Govt's willingness to work across party lines.



President Droupadi Murmu made a mention of the various achievements of the government, including its pervasive welfare schemes and the resilience of the Indian economy. The address, while highlighting various achievements of the Government was silent on various issues of national importance. For this the Opposition was vocal in criticising for its content and omissions, especially the exclusion of the ongoing violence in Manipur. The Opposition response was not ill founded but rooted in deeper political and social tensions prevailing in the State. The address, intended to set the tone for the parliamentary session, included references to several critical issues and achievements. Notably, it highlighted irregularities in examinations and touched upon the historical context of the Emergency imposed in 1975. The reference to the Emergency was frowned upon by the Congress which dubbed it as an effort to deflect attention from the current political scenario. However, the glaring omission of the escalating violence in Manipur stood out starkly. President Murmu addressed the troubling trend of examination paper leaks, acknowledging the impact on the credibility of academic processes. She emphasised the government's commitment to transparency and reform in examination systems, underscoring the need for stringent measures to ensure fairness and integrity. The mention of the Emergency, referred to as the 'biggest and darkest chapter of direct attack on the Constitution,' was a strategic move that dug up the historical blunder. This reference, while aimed at highlighting the Government's commitment to democracy, struck a nerve with the Congress, reminding them of a period they would prefer to distance themselves from. The most contentious aspect of President Murmu's speech was the omission of any direct mention of the violence in Manipur. The President's speech did acknowledge the government's broader efforts in the Northeast, citing increased allocations for development and initiatives under the Act East Policy, but this was seen as insufficient by many. The exclusion of the Manipur violence from the President's speech was perceived by the Opposition as an attempt to downplay the crisis and avoid accountability. The speech did not adequately address the concerns of the day and call for action from the Opposition regarding various pressing issues. Engaging with these concerns and outlining a collaborative approach to resolve the crisis could have fostered a more constructive political dialogue and demonstrated Govt's willingness to work across party lines.

PICTALK



Sadhus shout slogans as the first batch of pilgrims leaves for the Amarnath Yatra, in Jammu

Suu Kyi spends another birthday in jail



HIRANMAY KARLEKAR

Despite the Junta's desperate measures, including heightened repression and forced conscription, the resistance continues to gain ground

On June 19, 2024, Aung San Suu Kyi spent yet another birthday in prison, as she completed 79 and stepped into her 80th year. No one knows where she is. Even her son, Kim Aris, has not heard from her since receiving a thank-you note from her in January this year for a package he had sent her. Yet not a squeak was heard from leaders of Western democracies who were, not so long ago, condemning her incarceration and Myanmar's ruling junta which had usurped power through a coup on February 1, 2021, and unleashed savage repression as protests surged throughout the country. Clearly, Myanmar is no longer visible on the radar of the democratic world's concerns. There are doubtless possible explanations. Member countries of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) are engrossed with the war in Ukraine and the possibility of the latter turning into a wider European War, if not World War III. Liberal elements in several European countries are alarmed by the gains made by right-wing forces in the recent elections to the European Parliament. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak of the United Kingdom and President Emmanuel Macron of France are facing elections. Growing popular anger over Israel's continuing offensive in Gaza, which has caused around 40,000 deaths, a large part of whom are women and children, is worrying governments that continue to support the Netanyahu regime. President Joe Biden's worries range from Israel's war, the conflict in Ukraine, immigration, and fending off the challenge posed by Donald Trump in the November presidential elections in the US. Whatever the reasons, the fact is that Myanmar is no longer the global concern it was. Such things have happened before. Public and governmental spans of attention are proverbially ephemeral. It is this transience that mostly sustains autocracies. There is a perceptible process. The initial response to a coup is condemnation by democracies and,



often, the imposition of sanctions. Not all countries, however, react this way. Given the dynamics of global power play, some countries, mainly autocracies themselves, do not join the chorus of outrage. Rather, they rally behind the usurper. Mostly thanks to them, the sanctions do not work. The junta that had staged the coup carries on. New developments on the global scene consume the attention of countries condemning the coup. The junta is replaced by another entity as the principal target of outrage. Slowly, opposition towards it declines and there is a gradual trudge towards normalization of ties, particularly if the uniformed dictators relax their tyranny a little while retaining their grip on power. Is this what is going to happen in Myanmar? One does not know. It will, however, be of no credit to the world's democracies if this does not happen and the people of Myanmar are able to overthrow the junta forcibly, which, by the look of things, is by no means a remote possibility. The Sit-Tat (which, and not Tatmadaw, is the real name of the junta's army), has been suffering reverse after reverse ever since the opposition Three Brotherhood Alliance (henceforth the Alliance) launched its current offensive, codenamed



THE JUNTA'S GROWING DESPERATION IS REFLECTED IN THE STERN MEASURES IT HAS BEEN TAKING AGAINST THOSE IT REGARDS AS SURRENDERING OR DESERTING, THE KILLING OF ALL SUSPECTED OPPONENTS AND HEIGHTENED EFFORTS AT CONSCRIPTION GIVEN THE REFUSAL OF PEOPLE TO SERVE IN ITS FORCES

Operation 1027, on October 27, 2023. Comprising the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army (MNDA) operating in the Kokang Special Region of Northern Shan State, the Ta'ang National Liberation Army (TNLA), also active in Shan State, and the Arakan Army, based in the Rakhine State in the country's western part, it has been acting in close cooperation with the National Unity Government's military arm, the People's Democratic Force (PDF), and other ethnic armies like the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA), the Karen Liberation Army (KNA), the Karenni Nationalities Defence Force (KNDF), and one of the country's most powerful armed ethnic organisations, the Kachin Independence Army (KIA). According to an analysis in the website *The Irrawaddy*, dated June 22, 2024, the junta has lost, since its coup on February, 2024, to the resistance forces one Military Regional Command, three Military Operational Commands, seven headquarters of the Border Guard Police Battalions, and 63 of the 545 military battalions besides more than 2,500 frontline bases including tactical and frontline bases of military divisions. Among the latest gains by the resistance forces, Mohinga Matters lists the Chin Brotherhood Force's capture of the junta's battalion station 304 in Chin State's Matupi township on June 17, 2024, and the KNLA's capture of Sukali military station, south of Myawaddy city, on June 18. The Junta's growing desperation is reflected in the stern measures it has been taking against those it regards as surrendering or deserting, the killing of all suspected opponents and heightened efforts at conscription given the refusal of people to serve in its forces. Indeed, those sentenced to death include Brigadier-General Zao Myo Win for surrendering to the MNDA. The junta has also killed a highly respected Buddhist monk, Bhaddanta Manindabhivamsa, who has been strongly critical of it by shooting at his car on June 19, Aung San Suu Kyi's birthday. Given its faltering conscription scheme, the junta has reportedly been planning to conscript women in some parts. Needless to say, all this only serves to swell the tide of anger against it sweeping the country. Time is running out for Myanmar's uniformed tyrants. (The author is Consulting Editor, The Pioneer. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

THE PLIGHT OF GIG WORKERS

Madam — The alarming unemployment rate and the availability of cheap labor in India enable multinational companies to dictate terms and exploit poor gig workers with low wages. Over the years, there has been significant outcry in the U.S. and Europe about companies like Amazon, which have been fined and investigated for poor working conditions for non-permanent employees. These commercially driven giants often prioritize profit over worker welfare. The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) has taken cognizance of the dire working conditions in Amazon warehouses, where workers are forced to endure inhumane conditions without breaks, often in extreme heat. Despite regulations like the Contract Labour (Regulation and Abolition) Act, which aims to ensure the safety, health, and social security of contract laborers, the situation remains dire. To meet unrealistic and dangerous targets, unemployed youths are compelled to work under miserable and unhealthy conditions. Consumer indifference further exacerbates the situation, allowing such exploitation to continue unchecked. Regulatory agencies and consumer awareness can make a significant difference. It's crucial to recognize that the gig economy relies on underpaid employees, whose rights and well-being should be central to national development. Vijay Singh Adhikari | Nainital

PRESERVING DEMOCRACY IN INDIA

Madam — This refers to the article, "The Dark Days of India's Emergency" (27-6-24). When India achieved independence, many doubted its ability to sustain a democratic republic for long. However, the Indian people have consistently demonstrated their wisdom, commitment to democracy, and their ability to resurrect it whenever it has been threatened. Indira Gandhi's declaration of the Emergency, despite being an act that stifled democracy, required considerable boldness. The hardships endured during that peri-

Integrity of India's education system



Scams and the Integrity of India's Education System The National Testing Agency (NTA) is under immense pressure following irregularities in this year's NEET-UG (medical), NET (teaching), and JEE (engineering) exams. The plight of the affected candidates, who prepared for months and traveled long distances to their exam centers, is heartbreaking. They now face the

daunting task of preparing for re-examinations, which could have a detrimental effect on their morale and undermine their faith in the system. These candidates come from diverse backgrounds, including corporate employees, housewives, and educators, making it difficult to balance their jobs and studies, let alone prepare for re-exams. There are significant flaws in the examination system, necessitating stringent legal actions and severe punishments for those responsible for these scams. Re-examinations only delay the admission process without addressing the root causes of the problem. Political parties should focus on addressing the underlying issues rather than exploiting the situation for political gain. They need to cooperate and propose constructive solutions to tackle this urgent matter. The states must collaborate with the central govt to restore the integrity of the education system. Dimple Wadhawan | Kanpur

THE SPEAKER'S ELECTION

Madam — The election of Om Birla as Speaker was a foregone conclusion, serving merely as a formality to placate opposition parties. The tradition of allotting the Speaker's post to the ruling party and the Deputy Speaker's post to the opposition has been abandoned. Although AICC President asserted the INDIA bloc would not withdraw its candidate, Jairam Ramesh admitted they did not seek a division. Consequently, the opposition has forfeited its right to demand the Deputy Speakership. The trust deficit between the treasury benches and the opposition necessitated the election. Ideally, an agreement could have been reached where the opposition conceded the Speaker's post to the ruling party in exchange for the Deputy Speakership. This trust, if honoured, would have exposed any ruling party's deception. KV Seetharamaiah | Bengaluru

Directive on doctor's fees sparks controversy in Bihar



GYAN BHADRA

The debate over how much doctors should charge for consultations has heated up in Bihar after Pappu Yadav capped fees in his constituency

Pappu Yadav, an independent Member of Parliament from Purnia in Bihar, has sparked a heated debate by instructing doctors in his constituency to cap their consultation fees at 500 rupees. This directive has not only caused an uproar in medical and political circles but has also highlighted a long-ignored issue: the regulation of doctors' fees for patient consultations. Amid the political backlash and ongoing arguments, several critical questions arise: Who sets the consultation fees for doctors? Is there any mechanism to control the exorbitant fees that doctors often charge? What roles do the Indian Medical Association (IMA) and the Medical Council of India (MCI) play in regulating these fees? Unfortunately, the answers appear bleak for patients. The IMA has distanced itself from the responsibility of setting doctor's fees, citing the "Clinical Establishments Act" as a reason for their inaction. In reality, doctors charge consultation fees ranging from 500 to 2,000 rupees per visit, with no standardization or over-



sight. Adding to the problem is the unethical practice of government doctors running private clinics, sometimes even during official hospital hours. In Bihar, it is common knowledge that government doctors often skip their hospital duties to treat patients privately. Many of these patients had initially visited them at government hospitals. Despite this rampant issue, the IMA has not implemented any regulations to curb this behavior, instead deferring the matter to state governments, stating they will follow any rules set by the states regarding private practice. In Bihar, however, such rules are frequently disregarded. Historically, whenever a state government has attempted to ban private practice for government doctors, the medical community has reacted with strong opposition, organizing protests and strikes, which have left many patients without care. This ongoing struggle highlights the urgent need for regulatory reform in the medical sector to ensure fair and ethical treatment for all patients. The controversy ignited by Pappu Yadav's directive to cap consultation fees at 500 rupees underscores the urgent need for regulatory reform in India's medical sector. The outcry from both political and medical circles highlights the long-standing issue of unchecked and exorbitant consultation fees, which often range from 500 to 2,000

rupees, with no standardization or oversight. The Indian Medical Association (IMA) and the Medical Council of India (MCI) have largely abdicated responsibility, citing the "Clinical Establishments Act" as a reason for their inaction. Meanwhile, unethical practices persist, such as government doctors running private clinics during official hours, exacerbating the problem. In Bihar, the issue is particularly severe, with government doctors often neglecting their duties in public hospitals to treat patients privately. Attempts by state governments to regulate this practice have faced fierce opposition from the medical community, leading to protests and strikes that disrupt patient care. This situation reveals a critical need for comprehensive reforms to ensure fair and ethical medical practices. By addressing these challenges, regulatory bodies can create a more equitable healthcare system that prioritizes patient welfare over profit, ultimately fostering a more just and efficient medical landscape. (The author is a columnist, views are personal)



FIRST COLUMN

DISCOVERING WISDOM THROUGH A ZEN TALE

The truth is that the world around us is often a reflection of our inner world



RAVI VALLURI

There was a man who stumbled upon a Zen story which in several ways typified his state of mind, thought process, attitudes and his reactions and responses to various adverse situations in life.

Zen Story

Aeon's ago two men visit a Zen Master. The first man says, "I am thinking of moving into this town. What is it like to inhabit this place?"

The Zen Master pondered for a while and then questioned the man, "What was your old town like?"

The first man responds, "It was dreadful living in the town. Everyone was hateful. I loathed staying in the town. This therefore is the reason why I am looking for a fresh place to dwell."

The Zen Master replied instantly, "This town is very much the same. I do not think you should move here. You will discover the place to be resentful and you would end up hating and disliking everyone." This left the first man flummoxed and speechless.

The first man left in a disarray and the second one entered the room of the bearded Zen Master. The room was dimly lit but the virtuous one was incandescent with radiance, sitting silently.

The second man posed the same question, "Master I am thinking of moving to this town. What is it like?" The Zen Master was once again thoughtful and asked the second man, "What was your old town like?"

This man blessed with a cheery disposition exclaimed, "Oh, Master! It was wonderful. Everyone was brimming with confidence and zest; people were friendly and I was jollity personified. Right now, I am interested in a change of place though I am comfortable in the old place of dwelling."

The Zen Master nodded his head and with a twinkle in his eye replied, "This town is very much similar to your old one and I am positive that



you would feel at home in the new township. Welcome aboard."

Life is full of vicissitudes. There are high points and low ones. The first man faced constant misadventure in his old township. He squabbled with his wife, snarled at his children and was at odds with his superiors, juniors, and peers. He was not at peace with himself, with his energy/prana/chi levels at a low ebb.

While the second person, accepted all situations and people as they were. This resonates with one of sutras of the Art of Living, "Accept people and situations as they are." Such people do not find fault with any situation and are at peace with themselves. This becomes the state of their mind.

This Zen story pivots on the idea of karma. Whatever happens to anyone is the result of their own actions. We may travel around the world in the hope of escaping a life we condemned. What we will find instead is that we continue to carry our baggage with us wherever we go. Verily it applies to a positive mindset too, in that happiness is a matter of one's choice.

Upon reading the Zen story the man whose life was like that of the first individual decided to make a metamorphosis in his life and opted to be positive like the second man. He made a 360 degree turn in his thought process and broke the glass ceiling of negativity and accepted all challenges in life. "Invoke the valour in you. Just say, 'Okay, whatever comes, I am going to take it as a challenge.' When you invoke this energy, fear vanishes," says the spiritual master Gurudev Sri Sri Ravi Shankar.

(The writer is the CEO of Chhattisgarh East Railway Ltd. and Chhattisgarh East West Railway Ltd. He is a faculty of the Art of Living; Views are personal)

Challenges ahead for RaGa as Leader of the Opposition



KS TOMAR

Rahul Gandhi's new avatar enhances his ability to foster the Opposition unity and effectively counter the BJP's influence within Parliament

Rahul Gandhi's decision to accept the Congress Working Committee's (CWC) offer to become the new Leader of the Opposition in Parliament may serve a dual purpose. Firstly, it will provide him with a statutory position under the law, positioning him as a direct rival to Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the 2029 elections, compelling Modi to take him seriously, unlike in the past. Secondly, despite being the strongest critic of the Prime Minister both inside and outside Parliament, Gandhi's voice has often been drowned out by the BJP's "shouting brigade" over the past decade. However, this scenario is poised to change as the BJP enters the Lok Sabha with a reduced strength of 240 MPs, down from 303 in the previous Lok Sabha. In contrast, the Congress has almost doubled its strength, increasing from 52 to 102 MPs, including three independents.

This bolstered presence will enable the Congress to counter the BJP's tactics more effectively. A tit-for-tat dynamic may emerge in Parliament: if the BJP's "shouting brigade" attempts to silence Rahul Gandhi, Congress MPs may respond by disrupting the Prime Minister's speeches. The overall parliamentary balance of power has shifted as well. The combined strength of the NDA (BJP and its allies) will be reduced to 294, down from 336 in the previous term. Meanwhile, the Congress-led UPA has increased its seats from 90 to 234, including several new additions, posing a significant challenge for the ruling party.

Challenges as Leader of the Opposition As the Leader of the Opposition (LoP) in Parliament, Rahul Gandhi will face numerous challenges requiring a dedicated and full-time commitment. The role cannot be managed on an ad hoc basis as it demands continuous effort and strategic planning. Key responsibilities and strategies include:

Regular Interaction with Allies: Gandhi must engage regularly with leaders of allied parties to formulate strategies aimed at cornering the weakened BJP-led alliance in Parliament. Building and maintaining strong relationships with diverse political groups will be essential.

Aggressive yet Mature Approach: It will be crucial for Gandhi to demonstrate aggression balanced with maturity, particularly when highlighting issues of public importance. His ability to address these issues effectively in Parliament will be key to his success.

Unifying a Fragmented Opposition: One of the most significant challenges will be unifying a fragmented opposition. The diverse political ideologies and regional interests create a complex landscape, making consensus-building a critical yet difficult task.

Countering the Ruling Party's Narrative: Despite the BJP's reduced majority, countering its dominant narrative remains a formidable challenge. The ruling party's stronghold on media and public perception necessitates a strategic and compelling opposition narrative.

Scrutiny of Leadership Style: Gandhi's leadership style and communication skills will be under constant scrutiny. Establishing his credibility and demon-



RAHUL GANDHI MAY ALSO GAIN AN IMPORTANT POSITION AS THE CHAIRMAN OF THE PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE, WHICH PRIMARILY EXAMINES REPORTS FROM THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL

strating robust leadership in parliamentary debates and public forums are crucial for gaining public trust and support.

Responsibilities as LoP

Holding the Government Accountable: Gandhi will lead the opposition's efforts in holding the government accountable. This involves articulating the opposition's stance on various issues, participating in debates, and ensuring effective representation.

Rallying Opposition Parties: He will need to rally opposition parties, build consensus, and coordinate their efforts. This can be challenging given the diverse ideologies and interests of different parties.

Effective Communication: Gandhi must communicate effectively within and outside Parliament. His speeches, statements, and interactions with the media will shape public perception and influence political discourse.

Strategic Decision-Making: Making strategic decisions regarding when to cooperate with the ruling party and when to oppose them requires astute political judgment. Balancing these choices will be crucial.

Mastery of Parliamentary Procedures: Understanding parliamentary rules, procedures, and tactics is crucial. Gandhi will need to master these to effectively challenge the government.

Raising Critical Issues: People expect the LoP to raise critical issues, propose alternatives, and offer constructive solutions.

Meeting these expectations will be key to Gandhi's effectiveness as LoP.

Rahul Gandhi may also gain an important position as the chairman of the Public Accounts Committee, which primarily examines reports from the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG). The PAC has a majority of government nominees and typically decides issues by vote. Additionally, as LoP, Gandhi would be part of various collegiums alongside the Prime Minister and Chief Justice of India (or government nominees), responsible for selecting the heads of key investigative and transparency agencies including the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Lokpal, Central Vigilance Commission (CVC), Chief Election Commissioner/Election Commissioners, and Chief Information Commissioner (CIC).

Historical Parallels: Indira Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi An amended version of Karl Marx's quote suggests that history repeats itself first as tragedy and not necessarily as farce; hence its recurrence has ended up enhancing Rahul Gandhi's prestige as LoP. Political observers note two stark similarities between the late Mrs. Indira Gandhi's comeback in 1980 and Rahul Gandhi's recent resurgence. Indira Gandhi earned the title "Bechari" in the eyes of the people due to the excesses and humiliation inflicted on her by the Janata Party after losing power, a fallout of the

Emergency's dark era. In the late 1960s, she was derisively called "Goongi Gudiya" (Dumb Doll) by her detractors, which ultimately helped her emerge strong and bounce back to power in 1980. Similarly, Rahul Gandhi's rejuvenation as a credible LoP in 2024 comes after being dubbed "Pappu" by the BJP.

At this juncture, experts suggest that the common people witnessed a privileged member of the Gandhi family walking in scorching heat and biting cold, highlighting their problems. This might have changed their opinion about him, leading them to perceive him as a "Bechara Shehzada" (Poor Prince), earning their sympathy and contributing to the BJP's undoing in the 2024 polls.

The NDA government's focus on Hindutva, anti-Muslim rhetoric, and tall promises failed to address people's real issues. Prime Minister Modi can be credited for popularizing the term "Shehzada" (Scion) for Rahul Gandhi, but this campaign ultimately transformed his image from "Pappu" to a credible national leader. Overall, Rahul Gandhi's leadership as LoP will significantly impact India's political landscape. To effectively represent the opposition in Parliament, he will need to rise to these challenges, demonstrating strong leadership and a commitment to addressing the concerns of the Indian people.

(The writer is a senior journalist and a policy analyst; views expressed are personal)

Union budget needs to adopt all-inclusive approach to health

India needs to spend more on infrastructure development, innovation, and accessibility for universal health coverage by 2030

As India anticipates the unveiling of the first comprehensive Union Budget under the Modi 3.0 government, the healthcare sector finds itself at a crucial crossroads. The interim budget has set a preliminary roadmap, yet achieving a transformative overhaul of the healthcare ecosystem requires a robust and unified effort. It is imperative to prioritize increased funding for healthcare infrastructure, innovation, and accessibility to create a new ecosystem that can support India's ambitious healthcare objectives. One of the primary expectations from the forthcoming budget is the reclassification of hospitals as infrastructure investments. This reclassification has the potential to attract substantial



SUGANDH AHLUWALIA

private sector investments, which are vital for the development of state-of-the-art healthcare facilities across the country.

Additionally, extending interest rate subventions for medical equipment could alleviate the financial strain on hospitals, facilitating the modernization of technology and improvement in service delivery. A significant step forward for India's healthcare system

would be the formulation of a roadmap to boost public healthcare expenditure to 3% of the GDP. According to the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) and Reserve Bank of India estimates, healthcare expenditure needs to grow at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 18.9%. The current goal is to achieve 2.5% public expenditure on healthcare by 2025-26 and 3% by 2030-31.

While these targets are ambitious, they require meticulous planning and strategic execution to be realized. The economic burden of healthcare costs is a major concern for the lower and middle-income groups in India. High out-of-pocket expenditures, coupled with escalating healthcare costs and insurance barriers, neces-

sitate immediate government intervention. Incorporating advanced treatment methods into the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) and encouraging private health insurance companies to adopt similar practices can significantly enhance healthcare accessibility for these groups. The government must also place a strong emphasis on rural healthcare in its budget allocations.

Direct investments in healthcare infrastructure and medical personnel, along with targeted incentives to attract doctors and hospitals to underserved areas, are critical. This approach will expand healthcare coverage and spur innovation in insurance products, making comprehensive health-

care accessible to all, especially in rural regions where the need is most pressing. Physical infrastructure along with the human resources is essential for delivering quality healthcare.

Rational regulations and policies are critical to supporting India's aspiration to achieve UHC by 2030. Such regulations should enable seamless collaboration among all stakeholders, ensuring that quality healthcare services are accessible to all citizens, regardless of socio-economic status.

This approach will help address health disparities and improve overall health outcomes in the country. The private sector has a pivotal role in delivering quality healthcare services. Bridging the critical gaps in service delivery is

essential for achieving UHC, particularly in addressing the dual burden of non-communicable and communicable diseases. Health insurance is a vital component in the journey toward "Health for All." With low insurance coverage, many individuals face substantial out-of-pocket expenses when seeking healthcare services.

Implementing mandatory health insurance and gradually expanding coverage to include self-employed professionals and other currently excluded groups can pave the way for a more equitable healthcare system. This strategy would ensure that all citizens have access to essential health services without financial hardship. Access to quality healthcare is fundamental for everyone, and UHC

is key in this regard. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), UHC means access to essential health services, including affordable medicines and vaccines, without financial difficulty. Strengthening health systems and essential infrastructure is vital for achieving UHC.

The private sector's investments in healthcare infrastructure and training health workers are significant contributions toward this goal. Achieving the goal of Healthcare for All by 2030 in India presents numerous opportunities but also requires overcoming significant barriers. A multi-faceted approach is essential for increasing access to and delivery of quality healthcare. Developing a

sustainable healthcare business model that integrates primary, secondary, and tertiary care systems is crucial. Such a model should emphasize affordability and high quality, enhancing the reputation of Indian healthcare. Substantial support for the hospital sector is also necessary, including a combination of investments and tax reliefs, to build infrastructure assets and provide top-tier healthcare services across the country. Bridging the rural-urban divide in critical care facilities is imperative to reaching the goal of Healthcare for All by 2030.

(The author is Chief Strategy Officer at Indian Spinal Injuries Centre, New Delhi. The views expressed are personal)

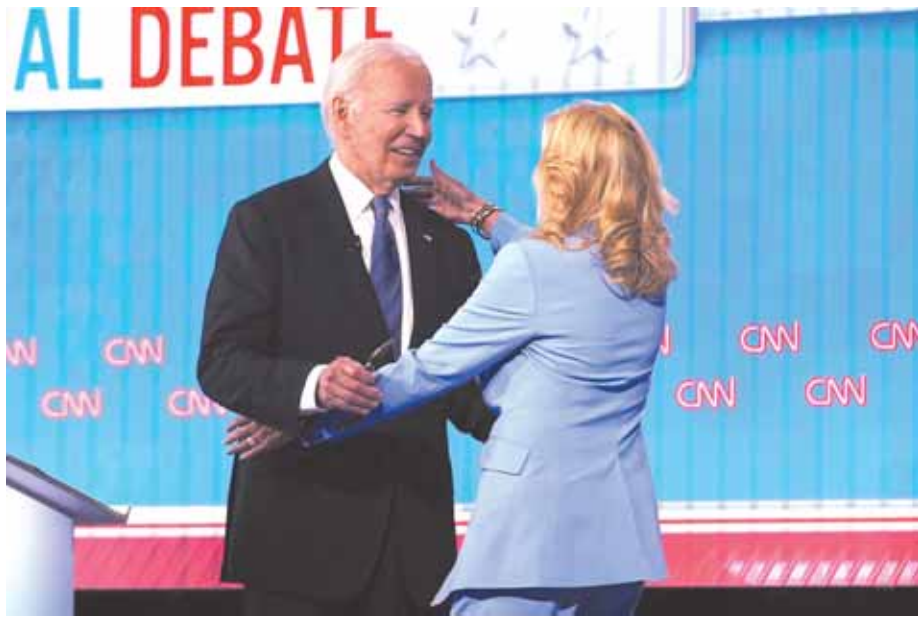
Biden stumbles in first presidential debate with Trump

AP ■ ATLANTA

Joe Biden, seeking a second term in the White House, stumbled in his first televised presidential debate with his predecessor Donald Trump, setting off alarm bells among top Democrats about whether the incumbent president can stay atop in the gruelling months ahead of the elections. During their roughly 90-minute debate defined by personal attacks on Thursday night, Trump, the presumptive Republican Party candidate in the November 5 presidential election, clashed right from the start with 81-year-old Biden, arguing pointedly about the American economy, foreign relations and migration.

"We're like a Third World nation and it's a shame," Trump, 78, said. "We're no longer respected," he said, blaming a halting and raspy-voiced Biden. "They think we're stupid."

Trump, appearing very confident during the high-stakes debate at the CNN headquarters



First lady Jill Biden, right, hugs President Joe Biden at the conclusion of a presidential debate with Republican presidential candidate former President Donald Trump hosted by CNN, Thursday.

in Atlanta, also repeated falsehoods - from abortion to taxes and the deficit - and at first

avoided answering if he would accept the 2024 election result. Trump also linked the country's

problems to the influx of migrants crossing the porous southwestern US border with

Mexico, saying they were hurting the American economy.

"We had the safest border in the world," Trump said about his 2017-2021 term in the White House. Now, he claimed, "It's the most dangerous place in the world."

Responding to Trump's statement, Biden said, "He is exaggerating, he's lying," underlining that 40 per cent fewer migrants are now crossing the border since he recently imposed tighter entry restrictions.

The two leaders called each other a liar and the worst president in the history of the US.

Biden called Trump a sucker and loser. "I was recently in France for D-Day, and I spoke to all about those heroes that died. I went to the World War II cemetery — the World War I cemetery he refused to go to," Biden, the presumptive candidate of the Democratic Party, said, referring to Trump, who declined to visit the cemetery in 2018.

"He was standing with his four-star general, and he told me, he said, 'I don't want to go in

there, because they're a bunch of losers and suckers. My son was not a loser. He's not a sucker. You're the sucker. You're the loser," Biden said.

Trump said that the quotes were made up in a third-rate magazine and he later fired the general.

On the age factor, Biden reminded Trump that he was just three years younger than him. At 81, Biden is the oldest president in US history.

Trump called Biden a criminal after the latter called him a "convicted felon," referring to his conviction in a New York hush-money case.

"Joe could be a convicted felon with all of the things that he's done, he's done horrible things. This man is a criminal. This man, you're lucky, you're lucky, I did nothing wrong. We have a system that is rigged and disgusting," Trump said.

"When he talks about a convicted felon, his son (Hunter Biden) is a convicted felon, at a very high level," he alleged. As the two leaders sparred over

various issues, Biden accused Trump that he does not know what he is talking about.

Biden alleged that Trump has the morals of an alley cat. "How many billions of dollars do you owe in civil penalties for, for molesting a woman in public, for doing a whole range of things, for having sex with a porn star on the night — while your wife was pregnant? What are you talking about? You have the morals of an alley cat," he said. "Could you ever think you heard any president say that I'm going to seek retribution? This guy has no sense of American democracy," Biden said. Trump slammed his successor Biden on his immigration policies, alleging that it made the country insecure.

"We're literally, an uncivilized country now. He doesn't want it to be. He just doesn't know. He opened the borders nobody's ever seen anything like, and we have to get a lot of these people out and we have to get them out fast because they're going to destroy our country,"

Ultra-orthodox jews protest Israel's new military service mandate

Bnei Brak (Israel) (AP): Hundreds of ultra-Orthodox Jewish men blocked a major highway in central Israel for two hours on Thursday to protest a recent Supreme Court decision ordering young religious men to enlist for military service. Military service is compulsory for most Jewish men and women in Israel. But politically powerful ultra-Orthodox parties have won draft exemptions for their followers that allow them instead to study in religious seminaries. This long-standing arrangement has bred widespread resentment among the broader public — a sentiment that has grown stronger during the eight-month war against Hamas in Gaza. Over 600 soldiers have been killed, and tens of thousands of reservists have been activated, straining careers, businesses and family lives.

Protesters sat on the highway and lay on the ground as police lifted them up and dragged them away. Officers mounted on horseback charged into the crowd. Many demonstrators held signs and chanted "To prison! Not to the army!" "We all came here for one goal, we reflect the position of all the Orthodox public," said a young man, identifying himself only by his first name Ozer. "All the Orthodox public prefers to go to prison and not to the army." The ultra-Orthodox see their full-time religious study as their part in protecting the state.

Many fear that greater contact with secular society through the military will distance adherents from strict observance of the faith. The Supreme Court this week ordered the government to begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men, saying the system of exemptions is unequal. The decision could lead to the collapse of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government. Ultra-Orthodox parties and their followers oppose any change in the system.

UK PM Rishi Sunak 'hurt' after far-right party campaigner filmed using racist slur for him

PTI ■ LONDON

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak on Friday reacted to a racist slur targeted at him, saying it made him "hurt and angry". Speaking to reporters on the general election campaign trail, Sunak said his two daughters, Krishna and Anoushka, had to see and hear Reform UK activists who campaigned for party leader Nigel Farage "calling me a Paki".

"It hurts, and it makes me angry," the 44-year-old British Indian leader said, adding that Farage has questions to answer. Sunak noted: "I don't repeat those words lightly. I do so deliberately because this is too important not to call out clearly for what it is."

"When you see Reform candidates and campaigners, seemingly using racist and misogynistic language and opinions seemingly without challenge, I think it tells you something about the culture within the



Reform Party." He was speaking after a campaigner for the far-right Reform UK was filmed using the slur considered racist towards people of South Asian heritage, forcing the party's leader and general election candidate Nigel Farage to condemn the actions as "appalling". Reform UK is fielding hun-

dreds of candidates in the July 4 election on an anti-immigration stance with the hope of posing a major challenge for the incumbent Conservative Party, which is heavily trailing in the polls. However, with the election called earlier than expected, the party has been unable to fully vet all its campaigners and one of them — Andrew Parker — was filmed by an undercover reporter from Channel 4.

"The appalling sentiments expressed by some in these exchanges bear no relation to my own views, those of the vast majority of our supporters or Reform UK," Farage said in a statement.

The same activist was also heard suggesting army recruits with guns should be posted to "just shoot" illegal migrants landing on UK beaches. Speaking at a campaign event on Thursday, Farage said that "one or two people let us down and we let them go" but added

that "in most cases they're just speaking like ordinary folk".

The 60-year-old divisive politician is making his eighth attempt to be elected to Parliament after seven failed bids. This time, polls suggest a comfortable lead for him in the race to represent the seaside town of Clacton-on-Sea.

While Reform is likely to win only a handful of seats, at most, in the 650-seat House of Commons, Farage says his goal is to get a foothold and lead the "real" Opposition to a Labour Party government — which is widely expected to succeed the Sunak-led Tories after the general election. The British Indian leader has, meanwhile, warned voters that a vote for Reform UK was effectively a vote in favour of a tax-raising Labour Party. He has also hit back at Farage's own controversial statements claiming that the West had provoked Russian President Vladimir Putin into attacking Ukraine.

Turkiye's pres expresses willingness to restore diplomatic ties with Syria

AP ■ ANKARA

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Friday that there is no obstacle preventing Turkiye and Syria from restoring diplomatic ties that were cut off at the start of the Syrian civil war more than a decade ago. His comments came just days after Syrian President Bashar Assad made similar remarks, indicating a willingness among the two neighbouring countries to end tensions and normalise relations. "There is no reason why (diplomatic ties) should not be established," Erdogan told reporters.

"In the same way that we kept our relations with Syria alive in the past — we had these meetings with Mr Assad that included family meetings — we cannot say that it will not happen again," Erdogan said. He was referring to a vacation that the Erdogan and Assad families took in southern Turkiye in 2008, before their relationship soured.



During the Syrian conflict, Turkiye supported armed opposition groups in the country's northwest aiming to oust Assad from power. The Syrian government has repeatedly condemned Ankara's control over a territory that it took hold of through several military incursions since 2016 targeting US-backed Kurdish forces that Turkiye regards as terrorists. On Wednesday, Syrian state

media reported that in a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin's special envoy to Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, Assad "affirmed Syria's openness to all initiatives related to the relationship between Syria and Turkiye, based on the sovereignty of the Syrian state over all its territories on the one hand, and combating all forms of terrorism and its organizations on the other hand".

The Russian envoy, in turn, said that "the current circumstances seem more suitable than ever for the success of mediations, and that Russia is ready to work to push the negotiations forward, and that the goal is to succeed in restoring relations between Syria and Turkiye," Syrian state-run news agency SANA reported.

Erdogan told reporters that Turkiye respects Syria's sovereignty. "There is no question of us having the aim of interfering in Syria's internal affairs," Erdogan said. "The people of Syria are our brothers."

7.2 magnitude earthquake shakes southern Peru

Lima (AP): A magnitude 7.2 earthquake shook the southern coast of Peru early Friday. Authorities say there are no immediate reports of casualties. The US Geological Survey said the earthquake occurred at 12:36 am (05:36 GMT). The epicentre was located in the Pacific Ocean, some 5 miles (8 kilometres) west of the district of Atiquipa, in the province of Caraveli. That is some 380 miles south of the capital, Lima, near the borders with Chile and Bolivia. The depth was 17 miles (28 kilometres). The earthquake was felt in the nearby regions of Ayacucho, Ica, and the capital, local media reported. Eder Allica, the mayor of the district of Sancos, in the Ayacucho region, told the local radio station RPP that a road in his district suffered rock slides that left several localities cut off.

Mongolia commences voting for expanded 126-seat parliament

Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) (AP): Voters in the youthful democracy of Mongolia are electing a new parliament on Friday in the landlocked Asian democracy that is squeezed between China and Russia, two much larger authoritarian states.

At stake are 126 seats in an expanded parliament, 50 more than in the previous election in 2020. That contest was won by the Mongolian People's Party in a landslide. The ruling party still appears to hold the upper hand, but other parties may be able to capitalize on voter discontent to eat into its majority. About two dozen voters lined up on a staircase heading down to a polling station in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar, some muttering complaints because it opened 10 minutes late. Some of the older voters, including community leaders, dressed up in formal silk robes

sinched with large leather belts for the occasion. Inside, voters sat to fill out their ballot and then put it into an electronic vote counting machine. An indelible mark was put on one of their fingers to prevent them from trying to vote again.

Many in the district, a "ger" area where people originally settled in nomadic tents, are supporters of the ruling Mongolian People's Party. But some younger voters expressed disappointment with the People's Party, and said they chose younger candidates that they hoped would bring change. Enkhmandakh Boldbaatar, who is 38, said he voted for neither the People's Party nor the main opposition party, the Democratic Party, saying they also had not performed well. There are 19 parties vying for seat in the parliament.

"I've been living here for 38 years, yet the area is the same,"

he said "Only this road and some buildings were constructed. Things would have been different if they worked for the people."

There are 2,198 polling stations spread out across the sparsely populated country, which is large geographically but has a population of only 3.4 million people. The voting stations close at 10 p.m. with preliminary results expected early Saturday morning. Mongolia became a democracy in 1990, ending more than six decades of one-party communist rule under the same People's Party that is in power today. The ruling party has transformed into a center-left party in the democratic era. Naranchimeg Lamjav, a 69-year-old People's Party member wearing a traditional blue robe, cited a party election slogan of building on the first three decades under democracy.

Israel allows 19 wounded children to leave Gaza in first medical evacuation

Khan Younis (Gaza Strip) (AP): Israeli authorities say 68 people — 19 sick or wounded children plus their companions — have been allowed out of the Gaza Strip and into Egypt in the first medical evacuation since early May, when the territory's sole travel crossing was shut down after Israel captured it.

The nearly nine-month Israel-Hamas war has devastated Gaza's health sector and forced most of its hospitals to shut down. Health officials say thousands of people need medical treatment abroad, including hundreds of urgent cases. The Israeli military body responsible for Palestinian civilian affairs, known by its acronym COGAT, said Thursday that the evacuation was carried out in coordination with officials from the United States, Egypt and the international community. The children and their companions

left Gaza via the Kerem Shalom cargo crossing, and the patients were to travel to Egypt and farther abroad for medical treatment.

Family members bade a tearful goodbye to the kids at Nasser Hospital in the southern Gaza town of Khan Younis. Many of the families appeared anxious — most relatives had to stay behind, and even those allowed to accompany the patients did not know their final destination.

Nour Abu Zahri wept as he kissed his young daughter goodbye. The girl has severe burns on her head from an Israeli airstrike. He said he didn't get clearance to leave Gaza with her, although her mother did.

"It's been almost 10 months, and there is no solution for the hospitals here," he said. Kamela Abukweik burst into tears after her son got on the bus heading to the crossing

with her mother. Neither she nor her husband were cleared to leave.

"He has tumors spread all over his body and we don't know what the reason is. And he constantly has a fever," she said. "I still don't know where he is going."

The Rafah crossing between Gaza and Egypt, the only one available for people to travel in or out, shut down after Israeli forces captured it during their operation in the city early last month. Egypt has refused to reopen its side of the crossing until the Gaza side is returned to Palestinian control. Six of the children were transferred to Nasser Hospital from Al-Ahli Hospital in Gaza City earlier this week. Five have cancer and one suffers from metabolic syndrome. That evacuation was organized by the World Health Organization, which could not immediately be reached for comment.

At a press conference at Nasser Hospital on Thursday, Dr. Mohammed Zaout, the head of Gaza's hospitals, said the evacuation was being conducted in coordination with the WHO and three American charities.

Zaout said over 25,000 patients in Gaza require treatment abroad, including some 980 children with cancer, a quarter of whom need "urgent and immediate evacuation." He said the cases included in Thursday's evacuation are "a drop in the ocean" and that the complicated route through Kerem Shalom and into Egypt cannot serve as an alternative to the Rafah crossing. Zaout said 21 children had originally been scheduled to leave Thursday, but one arrived at the hospital too late to make the departure. It was not immediately clear what prevented the other child from joining the evacuation.

China's Chang'e-6 collects nearly two kgs of samples from Moon's far side

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's Chang'e-6 mission, which returned this week from the far side of the Moon, has brought back nearly two kilograms of samples for research which will further enhance the understanding of lunar evolution, the country's space agency announced on Friday.

Based on the preliminary measurement, the Chang'e-6 mission collected 1,935.3 grams of lunar samples, according to the China National Space Administration (CNSA).

"We have found that the samples brought back by Chang'e-6 were more viscous compared to previous samples, with the presence of clumps. These are observable characteristics," Ge Ping, Deputy Director of the CNSA's Lunar Exploration and Space Engineering Centre, who is also the spokesperson for the Chang'e-6 mission, told the

media here. Researchers will then carry out the storage and processing of the lunar samples as planned and initiate scientific research work.

The lunar samples, which were collected from the far side of the moon for the first time in human history, hold unique scientific significance as they will further enhance the understanding of lunar evolution, accelerate the pace of peaceful exploration and utilization of lunar resources, and serve as an important asset for all humanity, the CNSA said.

It said it would organise scientific research on the samples, sharing China's lunar exploration achievements with the international community. Based on the lunar sample management rules released by the CNSA and the experience in dealing with the applications for lunar samples collected by the Chang'e-5 mission, appli-

cations for the Chang'e-6 samples are expected to open to domestic research institutions and scientists in about six months, Ge said, state-run Xinhua news agency reported. Regarding international applications, Ge noted that China welcomes scientists from all countries to submit applications under relevant procedures.

Previously, significant scientific achievements have been made through in-depth research on the lunar samples brought back by the Chang'e-5 mission, in areas such as lunar formation and evolution, space weathering, and resource utilisation, the CNSA said. The Chang'e-6 probe was launched into orbit on May 3. Its returner, carrying the lunar samples, landed precisely in its designated area in Siziwang Banner, north China's Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region on June 25, marking a complete success for the mission.

Olympian Bindra, Malik honoured with special award in UK

London (PTI): India's first individual gold medallist, Abhinav Bindra, and Paralympian Deepa Malik have been honoured with Special Recognition Awards at a ceremony celebrating Indians who have made a significant impact globally. India Global Forum's (IGF) annual UK-India Awards 2024 at Fairmont Windsor Park, near London, on Thursday evening, honoured the sporting legends alongside a 'Global Indian Icon Award' for social crusader Arunachalam Muruganatham, in recognition of his revolutionary work in menstrual hygiene captured in the 2018 Akshay Kumar film 'Pad Man'.

Lord Anthony Bamford, founder of multinational construction giant JCB, was honoured with the Lifetime Contribution to UK-India Relations. "For a global sport

like the Olympics, it makes complete sense to have a closer relationship with the world's largest population. Every fourth or fifth person in the world is in India, so there's a lot of synergy there," said Bindra, on India potentially hosting the Olympics during a discussion around the future of sport in the country.

"But more than infrastructure, I think what we need is a vision that actually transcends far beyond the sporting events itself. The Olympics, whenever held in India, has to be seen as a catalyst for change, how the Games can really address challenges and how it can seize opportunities. "It really has to be a springboard for how we can make India healthier and make India a more inclusive country," he said. "We have to use it as a guide to make India better through sport," Bindra said.

5 missiles land near ship in Red Sea in latest Houthi attack

Dubai (AP): A ship travelling through the Red Sea came under repeated missile fire on Friday in a likely attack launched by Yemen's Houthi rebels, authorities said, the latest targeting the crucial maritime route.

Five missiles landed near the vessel as it traveled off the coast of the rebel-held port city of Hodeida in Yemen, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. The missiles landed near the vessel, but caused no damage, the UKTMO added.

The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack. However, it can take them hours or even days before they acknowledge an assault. The rebels have targeted more than 60 vessels by firing missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed four sailors.

SC allows cities to enforce bans on homeless people

Washington (AP): The Supreme Court decided on Friday that cities can enforce bans on homeless people sleeping outdoors in West Coast areas where shelter space is lacking. The case is the most significant to come before the high court in decades on the issue and comes as a rising number of people in the US are without a permanent place to live. In a 6-3 decision, the high court reversed a ruling by a San Francisco-based appeals court that found outdoor sleeping bans amount to cruel and unusual punishment. A bipartisan group of leaders had argued the ruling made it harder for them to manage outdoor encampments encroaching on sidewalks and other public spaces in nine Western states. That includes California, which is home to one-third of the country's homeless population. Homeless advocates, on the other hand, said that allowing cities to punish people who

need a place to sleep would criminalise homelessness and ultimately make the crisis worse. Cities had been allowed to regulate encampments but couldn't bar people from sleeping outdoors.

The case came from the rural Oregon town of Grants Pass, which appealed a ruling striking down local ordinances that fined people USD 295 for sleeping outside after tents began crowding public parks. The US 9th Circuit Court of Appeals, which has jurisdiction over the nine Western states, has held since 2018 that such bans violate the Eighth Amendment in areas where there aren't enough shelter beds. The ruling comes after homelessness in the United States grew a dramatic 12 per cent last year to its highest reported level, with soaring rents and a decline in coronavirus pandemic assistance combined to put housing out of reach for more people.

Iranians vote to replace prez killed in helicopter crash

AP ■ DUBAI

Iranians were voting Friday in a snap election to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi, killed in a helicopter crash last month, as public apathy has become pervasive in the Islamic Republic after years of economic woes, mass protests and tensions in the Middle East.

Voters face a choice between hard-line candidates and a little-known politician who belongs to Iran's reformist movement that seeks to change its Shiite theocracy from within. As has been the case since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, women and those calling for radical change have been barred from the ballot while the vote itself will have no oversight from internationally recognised monitors.

The voting comes as wider tensions have gripped the Middle East over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. In April, Iran launched its first-ever direct attack on Israel over the war in Gaza, while militia groups that Tehran arms in the region — such as the Lebanese Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthis rebels — are engaged in the fighting and have escalated their attacks.

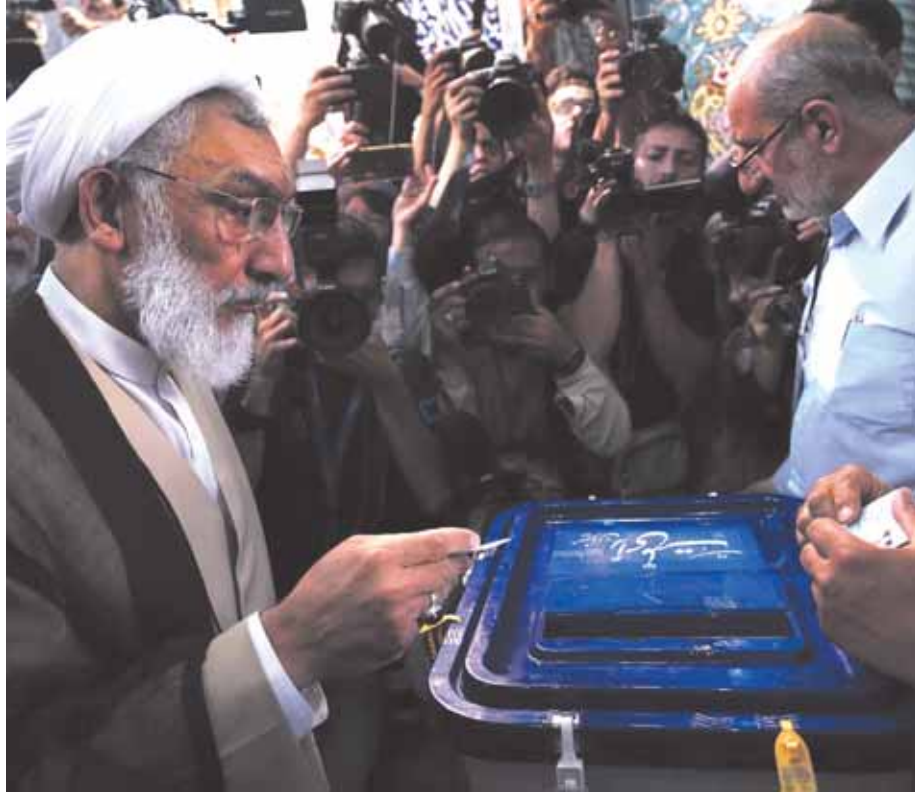
Meanwhile, Iran continues to enrich uranium at near weapons-grade levels and maintains a stockpile large enough to build — should it choose to do so — several nuclear weapons.

While Iran's 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has the final say on all matters of state, presidents can bend the country's policies toward confrontation or negotiation with the West.

However, given the record-low turnout in recent elections, it remains unclear just how many Iranians will take part in Friday's poll. Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi, who is in charge of overseeing the election, announced all the polls had opened just at 8 am local time. Khamenei cast one of the election's first votes, urging the public to turn out.

"People's turnout with enthusiasm, and higher number of voters — this is a definite need for the Islamic Republic," Khamenei said.

State television later broadcast images of polling places across



Candidate for the Iranian presidential election Mostafa Pourmohammadi casts his ballot in a polling station, in Tehran, Iran, on Friday. AP/PTI

the country with modest lines. Analysts broadly describe the race as a three-way contest. There are two hard-liners, former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and the parliament speaker, Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf. A Shiite cleric, Mostafa Pourmohammadi, also has remained in the race despite polling poorly.

Then there's the reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian, who has aligned himself with figures such as former President Hassan Rouhani under whose administration Tehran struck the landmark 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

The nuclear deal eventually collapsed and hard-liners were back firmly at the helm. The 69-year-old heart surgeon seeks a return to the atomic accord and better relations with the West. After voting, he told journalists: "God willing, we will try to have friendly relations with all countries except Israel."

Coming after he faced a thinly veiled warning from Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei over his outreach to the United States, the comment

marked the candidate's effort to energise those who want more engagement with the West after the collapse of the country's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

However, close ties to the West — particularly the US — would be anathema to the hard-liners he faces. A higher turnout could boost Pezeshkian's chances, but it remains unclear if he can gain the momentum needed to draw voters to the ballot. There have been calls for a boycott, including from imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi.

The voting began just after President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump concluded their first televised debate for the US presidential election, during which Iran came up.

Trump described Iran as "broke" under his administration and highlighted his decision to launch a 2020 drone strike that killed Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani. That attack was part of a spiral of escalating tensions between America and Iran since Trump unilaterally withdrew the US in 2018 from

Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers.

More than 61 million Iranians over the age of 18 are eligible to vote, with about 18 million of them between 18 to 30. Iranian law requires that a winner gets more than 50 of all votes cast. If that doesn't happen, the race's top two candidates will advance to a runoff a week later. There's been only one runoff presidential election in Iran's history, in 2005, when hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad bested former President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani.

The 63-year-old Raisi died in the May 19 helicopter crash that also killed the country's foreign minister and others. He was seen as a protégé of Khamenei and a potential successor as supreme leader.

Still, many knew him for his involvement in the mass executions that Iran conducted in 1988, and for his role in the bloody crackdowns on dissent that followed protests over the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a young woman detained by police over allegedly improperly wearing the mandatory headscarf, or hijab.

Japan's space agency delays launch of upgraded observation satellite

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

Tokyo (AP): Japan's space agency said on Friday its planned launch this weekend of a satellite on its new flagship H3 rocket will be postponed until Monday due to expected bad weather. The Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency, or JAXA, said it is postponing the launch because of rain and thunder predicted for Saturday night when the rocket was to be moved to the launch site at the Tanegashima Space Centre on a southwestern Japanese island.

The launch was initially scheduled for Sunday. The rocket will be carrying an Advanced Land Observation Satellite, ALOS-4, tasked primarily with Earth observation and data collection for disaster response and mapping, as well as with monitoring military activity, such as missile launches, with an infrared sensor developed by the Defence Ministry. The ALOS-4 is a successor to the current ALOS-2 and can observe a much wider area.

ISIS ideology resonates in Southeast Asia: Minister

PTI ■ SINGAPORE

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) ideology continues to resonate in the Southeast Asian region and is fuelled by a virtual network of supporters, Singapore's Home Affairs and Law Minister K Shanmugam has warned. "ISIS' violent ideology continues to resonate in this region and is fuelled by a virtual network of supporters," The Straits Times quoted the Minister as saying on Friday.

Shanmugam expressed concern in comments that the latest spate of arrests in Malaysia shows that violent ISIS ideology continues to resonate in the region. While the authorities in Singapore will do their best to detect and prevent any terrorist attack here, Singaporeans need to stay vigilant and report any suspicious behaviour, he underscored.

Shanmugam spoke to reporters four days after Malaysia's Home

Minister Saifuddin Nasution Ismail announced the arrest of eight people — six men and two women, aged 25 to 70 — over the past weekend, which thwarted possible threats against Malaysia's leadership. Preliminary investigations into the eight arrested for suspected links to extremist ideologies had shown the existence of threats against Malaysia's King, Sultan Ibrahim Iskandar, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and other VIPs, said Saifuddin on June 24. The suspects came from various occupational and economic backgrounds and included housewives, retirees and professionals.

Noting that the targets were top Malaysian leaders, Shanmugam said: "The ultimate aim of the terrorists was to topple the Malaysian government."

"Extremist narratives have radicalised many individuals, including here in Singapore. As long as these ideologies persist, they will continue to inspire

attacks," the Singapore daily quoted Shanmugam as saying. Following the May 17 pre-dawn attack on the Ulu Tiram police station in Johor that left two police personnel dead and another injured, Malaysian police arrested five family members of the attacker, as well as at least 15 other pro-ISIS suspects in a series of operations. Asked if his assessment of Singapore's terror threat has shifted given the latest developments, Shanmugam said the Internal Security Department (ISD) makes regular assessments, and while the arrests are something to be factored in, "I won't say it comes as a big shock".

"If you look around the region, ISIS ideology is prevalent in many countries, and this must be seen in that context," he added. But what happens in Malaysia will have an impact on Singapore's security landscape, given the two countries' proximity to one another, he added.

Xi lauds relevance of Panchsheel to put an end to world conflicts

PTI ■ BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday highlighted the relevance of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which gained traction with the Non-Aligned Movement, to end the present-day conflicts and sought to expand influence in the Global South amid its tussle with the West.

Xi, 71, invoked the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, termed as Panchsheel by India, at a conference here to mark its 70th anniversary and also sought to juxtapose them with his new concept of Global Security Initiative envisaging a shared future for mankind.

The Panchsheel pointers were first formally enunciated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India signed on April 29, 1954, according to the Ministry of External Affairs.

The five principles formed part of the legacy of the then Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and his Chinese counterpart Zhou

Enlai in their unsuccessful quest to find a solution to the vexed boundary issue.

"The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence answered the call of the times, and its initiation was an inevitable historic development. The Chinese leadership in the past specified the Five Principles in their entirety for the first time, namely, 'mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity', 'mutual non-aggression', 'mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs', 'equality and mutual benefit', and 'peaceful coexistence'," Xi said. "They included the Five Principles in the China-India and China-Myanmar joint statements which jointly called for making them basic norms for state-to-state relations," Xi said at the conference where the invitees included former Sri Lankan President Mahinda Rajapaksa and several political leaders and officials from various countries closely associated with China over the years.

The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were born in Asia but quickly



ascended to the world stage. In 1955, more than 20 Asian and African countries attended the Bandung Conference, Xi recalled in his address.

The Non-Aligned Movement that rose in the 1960s adopted the Five Principles as its guiding principles, he said.

"The Five Principles have set a historic benchmark for international relations and interna-

tional rule of law," he said, highlighting their relevance to ending the present-day conflicts. They fully conform with the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, with the evolving trend of international relations of our times, and with the fundamental interests of all nations, Xi said and sought to juxtapose them with his new concepts of Global Security Initiative (GSI) which advocates for joint security of nations and the "Vision of Building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind".

Xi, who commenced his unprecedented third five-year term in power last year, has been advocating several initiatives, including his billion-dollar pet project the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to enhance China's global influence. Under the BRI, Beijing has made huge investments in infrastructure projects in smaller countries which in subsequent years attracted allegations of debt diplomacy as many countries struggled to pay back loans taken from China.

EU leaders agree on top officials to be face of largest trading bloc

AP ■ BRUSSELS

European Union leaders signed off on a trio of top appointments for their shared political institutions on Thursday, reinstalling German conservative Ursula von der Leyen as president of the European Commission for another five years.

At the side of von der Leyen, who heads the EU's executive branch, would be two new faces: Antonio Costa of Portugal as European Council president and Estonia's Kaja Kallas as the top diplomat of the world's largest trading bloc.

"Mission Accomplished," outgoing EU Council President Charles Michel told reporters after chairing a summit of the bloc's leaders, as von der Leyen and Kallas accompanied him at a joint news conference. Costa took part via video-link.

Von der Leyen expressed her gratitude for a shot at a second term of office, saying: "I'm very honored and I'm delighted to share this moment."

Kallas, who as the EU's top diplomat will lead the bloc's foreign and security policy with Russia's war on Ukraine in its third year, noted that "there is war in Europe, also growing instability globally. My aim is definitely to work for the European Union."

Both von der Leyen and Kallas should now be approved by European lawmakers. Costa's nomination only needed the leaders' approval, and he will start in his new role in fall.

After the three centrist political families in the European Parliament struck a deal earlier this week, the top jobs package was widely expected to be approved without controversy at the summit in Brussels. But far-right politicians, emboldened by their strong showing in

EU parliament elections earlier this month, slammed it as a stitch-up.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni made clear her displeasure at being excluded from preparatory talks with a small group of leaders who divvied up the top jobs. Her nationalist European Conservatives and Reformists group emerged as the third force in the EU parliament elections earlier this month.

Meloni voted against Portugal's Costa and Estonia's Kallas, two sources close to the discussions told The Associated Press on condition of anonymity. Meloni abstained on von der Leyen for European Commission president, the same sources confirmed. The officials requested anonymity in line with EU practice.

In a post on X, Meloni said the way that mainstream parties put forward the trio "is wrong in method and substance. I decided not to support it out of respect for the citizens and the indications that came from those citizens during the elections."

In the end only one leader, nationalist Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, rejected the three outright.

"European voters were cheated," he said on Facebook Thursday evening. "We do not support this shameful agreement!" His objections were moot: the package only needed a two-thirds majority to pass. The June 6-9 election saw the EU's legislature shift to the right and dealt major blows to mainstream governing parties in France and Germany, but the three mainstream groups managed to hold a narrow majority of seats. Costa, a former Portuguese prime minister, hails from the center-left Socialists and Democrats group, which came second. Kallas is prime minister of her tiny Baltic home country.

1 Indian, 2 Indian-origin persons charged in \$2.75-bn fraud

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

At least one Indian and two Indian-origin persons were among 193 medical professionals charged by the US for their alleged participation in massive health care fraud schemes involving approximately USD 2.75 billion in intended losses and USD 1.6 billion in actual losses, the Justice Department has said.

The Justice Department on Thursday announced the 2024 National Health Care Fraud Enforcement Action, under which criminal charges were filed against 193 defendants, including 76 doctors, nurse practitioners, and other licensed medical professionals in 32 districts across the US.

The fraud schemes for which the people were charged involved approximately USD 2.75 billion in intended losses and USD 1.6 billion in actual losses, the department said in an official statement. The government seized over USD 231 million in cash, lux-

ury vehicles, gold, and other assets, it said.

Dr Vijil Rahulan, 52, of Hyderabad, was charged with conspiracy to commit health care fraud and health care fraud in connection with an alleged scheme to fraudulently obtain over USD 82 million in Medicare funds.

"Rahulan caused the submission of false and fraudulent claims for durable medical equipment and genetic testing that were medically unnecessary or otherwise ineligible for reimbursement through Medicare because they were not the product of a doctor-patient relationship and examination," according to the case summary. The indictment further alleged that his fraudulent conduct resulted in over USD 28.7 million being paid by Medicare. Jaspreet Jagpal, the owner of One World Therapy, was charged with insurance fraud and an enhancement for aggravated white-collar crime in connection with billing for behavioural analysis services

not rendered to five minor children. The 34-year-old's fraudulent scheme caused a loss of approximately USD 166,755.50 over ten months, the case summary said. As alleged in the complaint through which he was charged, the California resident claimed that behavioural analysis services were provided to minor children that never occurred.

Rama Prayaga, 59, a psychiatrist with offices in northern Virginia and the District of Columbia, was charged by criminal complaint with healthcare fraud in connection with a USD 27.1 million insurance scheme to defraud health insurance companies. The case summary said that Prayaga, of Virginia, allegedly used billing codes associated with longer, moderately complex patient visits to bill for negligible telemedicine patient encounters, some of which lasted less than a minute. This overbilling resulted in his billing insur-

ance companies for "impossible days" — i.e., billing more than 24 hours a day. Prayaga also pushed medically unnecessary transcranial magnetic stimulation treatments on patients, which were administered either by him or his untrained staff members. He also pushed ketamine treatment, which his staff administered to patients mixed with soda. "Prayaga was paid over USD 14.8 million based on the false and fraudulent claims," it said. The Justice Department said that the charges filed under the 2024 National Health Care Fraud Enforcement Action include "over USD 900 million fraud scheme committed in connection with amniotic wound grafts; the unlawful distribution of millions of pills of Aderall and other stimulants by five defendants associated with a digital technology company and an over USD 90 million fraud committed by corporate executives distributing adulterated

and misbranded HIV medication." The charges also included "over USD 146 million in fraudulent addiction treatment schemes; over USD 1.1 billion in telemedicine and laboratory fraud; and over USD 450 million in other health care fraud and opioid schemes."

'Pak can target TTP sanctuaries in Af under new counter-terrorism op'

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has warned that Pakistan can target sanctuaries of the outlawed terrorist group TTP in Afghanistan under the newly launched military operation, as he ruled out any dialogue with the dreaded outfit as there was no "common ground".

The government announced the launch of 'Operation Azm-i-Istehkam' last week to tackle the rising threat of terrorism in the wake of lukewarm support by the Afghan Taliban to stop the use of their soil by the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) rebels against Pakistan. In an interview with the Voice of

America, Asif said that the decision to launch the counter-terrorism operation was not made in haste, The Express Tribune newspaper reported.

"The decision about Azm-e-Istehkam was taken because of the economic difficulties, and it may also target TTP's sanctuaries across the border," he told the state-owned American news network and international radio broadcaster. The minister said that it would not be against international law since Afghanistan had been "exporting" terrorism to Pakistan, and the "exporters" were being harboured there, the Dawn newspaper reported.

Asif said that although the TTP was operating from the neighbouring country, its cadre, about a few thousand in number, "are operating from within the country". He also ruled out any chances of dialogue with the banned outfit, saying there was no common ground. Asif blamed jailed former prime minister Imran Khan's government for the resettlement of the Taliban militants in Pakistan, according to the report. Khan-led Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) "government brought back the 4,000 to 5,000 Taliban after negotiations. If that experiment was successful, let us know we can replicate it," he said. Talking about the Opposition's criticism of Operation Azm-i-

Istehkam, Asif said that the concerns of political parties would be addressed. "The government will bring this matter to the National Assembly so that the questions and concerns of the members can be answered and they are taken into confidence," he said. "This is also our duty," he was quoted as saying.

Major opposition parties, including the PTI of Imran Khan, who was also dubbed as "Taliban Khan" for his support for the Taliban, right-wing Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) of Maulana Fazlur Rehman and secular Awami National Party (ANP) of the family of Ghaffar Khan opposed any new military offensive.

PARADIP PORT AUTHORITY MARINE DEPARTMENT
 No. MD/ACCTS/W/R-18/2023/703 Date: 25.06.2024
E-TENDER CALL NOTICE-DUM-E-AUCTION
 Name of the work: Manning, Maintenance and Commercial Operation of PPA Dry Dock and Other Ancillaries on payment of Licence Fee for a period of 05 (Five) years. **Reserved price: Rs.13,97,52,584/- plus GST as applicable for 05 years.** Last date & time of Submission of tender through on-line bidding is **15:00 hours on dt.16.07.2024.** Date & time for opening of Technical Bid is **15:30 hours on dt.17.07.2024.** For details, please log on to the website: <https://eprocure.gov.in/eprocure/app>.
 Sd/- Deputy Conservator, Paradip Port Authority
 PPA/PR/19/2024-2025 dtd.27.06.2024

JITF INFRALOGISTICS LIMITED
 CIN NO. : L60231CT2008PLC016434
Registered Office: A-11(7), Udaya Society, Sector-3, Tatibandh, Raipur-492099, Dharsiwa, Chhattisgarh, India
Website: www.jindalinfalogistics.com, **E-mail:** contactus@jindalinfalogistics.com

NOTICE OF THE 17TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the 17th Annual General Meeting ("AGM") of the Company will be held on Monday, 22nd July 2024 at 12.30 P.M. at Hotel Grand Rajputana, Telghani Naka Chowk, Station Road, Raipur-492001, Chhattisgarh to transact the business as set out in the Notice convening the said Annual General Meeting. The Notice of AGM along with Annual Report for the Financial Year ended 31st March 2024 has been sent to the members who hold shares as on record date, i.e., 21st June 2024, by email, whose email id is registered with the Company/Depository(s) and the physical copy to all the other members. The said documents can also be viewed on the company's website at www.jindalinfalogistics.com.

Notice is also hereby given that pursuant to section 91 of the Companies Act, 2013 and regulation 42 of SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, the Register of Members and Share Transfer Books of the Company shall remain closed from 16th July 2024 to 22nd July 2024 (both days inclusive) for the purpose of AGM.

Further, pursuant to the provisions of section 108 of the Companies Act, 2013 read with rule 20 of Companies (Management and Administration) Rules, 2014 and regulation 44 of SEBI (Listing Obligations and Disclosure Requirements) Regulations, 2015, the Company is providing remote e-voting facility to its members to cast their vote electronically on the resolutions to be transacted at 17th AGM of the Company.

The member please note the following:

- The remote e-voting shall commence at 9.00 a.m. on Friday, 19th July, 2024 and shall end at 5.00 p.m. on Sunday, 21st July 2024.
- The remote e-voting shall not be available beyond 5.00 p.m. on Sunday, 21st July 2024.
- The cut-off date for determining the eligibility of members for remote e-voting and voting through poll at AGM is 16th July 2024.
- Any person who becomes member of the Company after dispatch of notice of the meeting and holding shares as on cut-off date i.e. 16th July, 2024, may obtain the user id and password by contacting RCMC Shares Registry (Pvt.) Ltd., R & T Agent of the Company at B-25/1, Okhla Industrial Area Phase II, New Delhi - 110020, phone-011-26387320-21, Fax-011-26387322, Email-evoting.services@rcmcindia.com.
- The members who cast their vote through remote e-voting may also attend the AGM but shall not be allowed to cast their vote at AGM.
- The facility of voting through poll shall be available at the AGM to those members who have not casted their vote through remote e-voting.
- Members may go through the e-voting instructions provided in the AGM Notice or visit <https://evoting.nslid.com> and in case of any queries, you may refer the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for members and e-voting User Manual for members available at the download section of <https://evoting.nslid.com>.

For JITF Infalogistics Limited
Sd/-
Alok Kumar
 Company Secretary
 ACS-19819

Place: New Delhi
Date: 28.06.2024

Markets snap record-breaking rally

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Market benchmarks Sensex and Nifty halted their three-day record-hitting rally to close with losses on Friday as investors booked profit in banking, finance and tech stocks despite a positive trend in global equities. Snapping a four-session winning run, equity indices succumbed to selling pressure after mid-session when profit-taking emerged on select counters. After hitting fresh all-time high level in early trade, the 30-share index declined 210.45 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 79,032.73. During the day, it jumped 428.4 points or 0.54 per cent to hit a fresh record peak of 79,671.58. The Nifty went lower by 33.90 points or 0.14 per cent to 24,010.60. During the day, it climbed 129.5 points or 0.53 per cent to hit a new lifetime high of 24,174. "Profit taking in banking stocks led the downfall in key benchmark indices, which had hit fresh intra-day highs in early optimism. While markets displayed volatility and ended weak in late selling, both Sensex and Nifty managed to close above



their psychological levels of 79k and 24k, respectively," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said. The Sensex breached the historic 79,000 mark on Thursday, and the Nifty hit the 24,000 level for the first time in intra-day trade. In the past four trading days, the BSE benchmark jumped 2,033.28 points or 2.63 per cent. On the weekly front, the BSE benchmark jumped 1,822.83 points or 2.36 per cent, and the Nifty climbed 509.5 points or 2.16 per cent. Sensex recorded the best

monthly gain in June by climbing 7.14 per cent. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed firms hit an all-time high of Rs 439.24 lakh crore (USD 5.26 trillion). IndusInd Bank was the biggest loser on the Sensex chart, slipping 2.61 per cent, followed by Axis Bank, ICICI Bank, Bharti Airtel, Kotak Mahindra Bank, Maruti, JSW Steel and Bajaj Finserv. In contrast, Reliance Industries, Tata Motors, Asian Paints, Nestle and Titan were the biggest gainers. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed

0.56 per cent, and midcap went up by 0.41 per cent. "India's optimism about the upcoming budget and upgrade in GDP forecasts continues to provide momentum in the market. Large caps are in favour due to the comeback of FIIs. However, profit booking ensued at the end of the week, at higher levels, in financials, especially private banks, which dragged the market down after the recent rally," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. Among indices, bankex declined 1.04 per cent, telecommunication (0.65 per cent), financial services (0.52 per cent), teck (0.42 per cent) and industrials (0.26 per cent). Healthcare, energy, metal, oil & gas, utilities and commodities were among the gainers. "Asian stocks rose Friday as traders looked ahead to a key report on inflation that could influence the Federal Reserve's next move on interest rates. European stocks mostly moved higher...With investors tensed ahead of the weekend's French election," said Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC

Securities. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled in the green. European markets were trading mostly higher. US markets ended in positive territory on Thursday. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 7,658.77 crore on Thursday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.89 per cent to USD 87.16 a barrel. The BSE benchmark jumped 568.93 points or 0.72 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 79,243.18 on Thursday. The Nifty ended at a fresh record high of 24,044.50, rising 175.70 points or 0.74 per cent. "We expect this positive momentum to continue at a steady pace with stock-specific action. However, the release of economic data points next week would keep a little volatility in the market. "Sector like Auto is expected to be in the limelight as OEMs would release their monthly auto Sales number," Siddhartha Khemka, Senior Group VP, Head - Research, Broking & Distribution, Motilal Oswal Financial Services Ltd, said.

FATF report hailing India's anti-money laundering drive exemplary, satisfying: Sources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The FATF mutual evaluation report recognising India's fight against money laundering and terror financing is satisfying and exemplary, highly placed sources said. As regards the issues flagged by the international watchdog to combat money laundering and terror financing, sources said these were not fundamental or significant deficiencies. The Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the global financial crime watchdog, on Friday said India has reached a high level of 'technical compliance' with its norms and the country's anti-money laundering and terror financing efforts is achieving good results. The mutual evaluation report on India was adopted at the FATF June 2024 plenary in Singapore. In the fourth round of FATF mutual evaluations, 17 countries from G-20 nations were evaluated of which only 4, including India, are placed in 'regular follow-up' category. The remaining G-20



nations were placed in 'enhanced follow-up' and one in 'grey list'. Sources said 'regular follow-up' indicates that India needs to submit progress report on recommended actions in October 2027. Those in the 'enhanced follow-up' category would have to submit follow-up report every year. "Overall India's performance is exemplary and satisfying. Given the diverse country there is always room for improvement," sources said. The FATF, however, observed that India needs to strengthen the supervision and implementation of preventive measures in some of the non-financial sectors. It also noted that India needs to address delays relating to concluding

money laundering and terror financing prosecutions. Sources said these are not fundamental or significant deficiencies. In a statement, the finance ministry said India's performance on the FATF mutual evaluation holds significant advantages for the country's growing economy, as it demonstrates the overall stability and integrity of the financial system. "Good ratings will lead to better access to global financial markets and institutions and increase investor confidence. It will also help in the global expansion of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI), India's fast payment system," the ministry said.

Fiscal deficit at 3% of full year Budget estimates at May-end 2024: CGA data

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The central government's fiscal deficit was only at 3 per cent of the annual estimates at May-end 2024-25, the first two months of the financial year during which model code of conduct was in place due to Lok Sabha elections. The fiscal deficit or the gap between the government's expenditure and revenue was 11.8 per cent of Budget Estimates (BE) of 2023-24 in the first two months of the previous financial year. For the current financial year (2024-25), the government estimates the fiscal deficit at 5.1 per cent of the GDP, or Rs 16,85,494 crore. According to data released by



the Controller General of Accounts (CGA), fiscal deficit during April-May 2024 was Rs 50,615 crore or 3 per cent of the BE 2024-25. In the corresponding period of the last fiscal it was 11.8 per

cent of that year's BE. Net tax revenue was Rs 3.19 lakh crore or 12.3 per cent of BE 2024-25. In the corresponding period it was 11.9 per cent of BE 2023-24. Total expenditure at May-end

2024 was Rs 6.23 lakh crore or 13.1 per cent of this fiscal BE. In the year-ago period it was 13.9 per cent of BE. Generally, the government refrains from making expenditure on new projects when the election commission puts in place model of conduct. The central government's fiscal deficit during 2023-24 at 5.6 per cent of the GDP was better than previous estimates of 5.8 per cent on account of higher revenue realisation and lower expenditure. As per the Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management (FRBM) Act, the government plans to achieve a fiscal deficit of 4.5 per cent in 2025-26.

Gold climbs ₹370; silver jumps ₹600 amid strong global cues

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Gold prices climbed Rs 370 to Rs 72,550 per 10 grams in the national capital on Friday amid a rise in precious metal rates internationally, according to HDFC Securities. The yellow metal prices had settled at Rs 72,180 per 10 grams on Thursday. Silver prices also jumped Rs 600 to Rs 91,200 per kg. It had closed at Rs 90,600 per kg in the previous session. "In Delhi markets, spot gold prices (24 carats) are trading at Rs 72,550 per 10 grams, up by Rs 370 from the previous close," Saumil Gandhi, Research Analyst at HDFC Securities, said. In the overseas markets, spot gold at Comex was trading at



USD 2,322 per ounce, up USD 17 from the previous close. Gold climbed for the first time in three days, boosted by recent US jobless data which suggested the US labour market was weakening from its tight levels during the post-pandemic recovery, supporting the voice of early

interest rate cuts by the Federal Reserve, Gandhi said. In addition, silver was quoted higher at USD 29.20 per ounce. It had ended at USD 28.94 per ounce in the previous session. According to Praveen Singh, Associate VP, Fundamental Currencies and Commodities at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas, traders will be awaiting the upcoming US Personal Consumption Expenditures (PCE) inflation data, the Fed's preferred gauge of inflation, going to be released later on Friday, which will be crucial for the bullion prices. Overall, the outlook is still bearish in the short term on hawkish statements from the Federal Reserve, inflation concerns and a firm US dollar, Singh added.

GAIL advances net zero emission target to 2035

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd on Friday said it has advanced the target to achieve net zero carbon emission by five years to 2035 as it takes multi-prolonged approach to reaching the goal. The company was previously targeting net zero carbon emissions by 2040. "GAIL Board accorded approval to advance its net zero target for Scope-I and 2 emissions by five years, from the year 2040 to year 2035," the company said in a statement. Scope 1 covers emissions from sources that an organisation owns or controls directly—for example from burning fuel in factories or even in its fleet of vehicles.

Govt's gross liabilities rise by 3.4% to ₹171.78 lakh crore at March-end: Finance Ministry

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Total gross liabilities of the government increased to Rs 171.78 lakh crore at the end of March 2024 from Rs 166.14 lakh crore at December-end, the finance ministry has said. This represented a quarter-on-quarter increase of 3.4 per cent in the fourth quarter of 2023-24, said the public debt management quarterly report (January-March, 2024). Public debt accounted for 90.2 per cent of total gross liabilities during the quarter, it said. "During the quarter, the yield on Indian domestic bond softened on account of lower than anticipated borrowing plan announced in interim budget, adjustment of the fiscal deficit to 5.1 per cent of

the GDP for FY25, a targeted reduction of the fiscal deficit at or below 4.5 per cent by FY26, FPI inflows and steady inflation," it said. On the other hand, it said, US treasury yields remained volatile during the quarter mostly affected by Federal Reserve action, inflation, and employment data. US 10-year yields touched a high of 4.33 per cent during the quarter. The weighted average yield softened to 7.19 per cent in Q4 2023-24 relative to 7.37 per cent in Q3 2023-24 on new issuance, it said. Further, it said, the weighted average maturity of issuances of dated securities moderated to 18.75 years in Q4 2023-24 (18.80 years in Q3 2023-24). The weighted average maturity of outstanding stock

of dated securities increased to 12.54 years at the end of Q4 of 2023-24 relative to 12.52 years at the end of Q3 of 2023-24, it said. The ownership pattern of central government securities indicates that the share of commercial banks surged to 37.7 per cent at end-March 2024 as compared to 36.6 per cent in March 2023, it said. Further, it said, the share of insurance companies remained constant at 26.0 per cent in March 2024 whereas FPIs' share improved to 2.3 per cent at end March 2024 relative to 1.4 per cent in March 2023. The share of RBI continued to decline to 12.3 per cent at the end of March 2024 relative to 14.3 per cent during the corresponding period previous year, it added.

Wockhardt aims to launch antibiotic with USD 25 bn mkt potential by early FY26

PTI ■ MUMBAI

Drugmaker Wockhardt on Friday said research and trials on the antibiotic Zaynich are progressing satisfactorily, and it is aiming for an early FY26 launch. Zaynich has a market potential of USD 25 billion, the city-based company's founder chairman Habil Khorakiwala told reporters here. The company has invested over USD 500 million on its research efforts till now, which have yielded six successes, including Zaynich which are at different levels of development and marketing, he said. Zaynich has been granted a susceptibility breakpoint of 64 mg per litre for around 10 gram negative pathogens showing high

resistance rates by the American Clinical and Laboratory Standards Institute, according to a statement. He said the company expects the final approvals from the Indian regulators to launch the antibiotic by the end of FY25 and will soon be launching it commercially after that. For the developed markets as well, the company expects approvals to come in similar timelines or maybe with some lag, Khorakiwala said, outlining the commercial strategies. In India, the company plans to sell the antibiotic at a tenth of the price in developed markets, and will primarily be targeting pneumonia patients, he said. In the developed markets, it

will be looking for partners willing to establish networks to sell the antibiotic, he said. Khorakiwala said that antibiotic resistance levels are as high as 60 per cent locally and at an elevated 35 per cent globally which makes it a decent opportunity. The antibiotic is showing efficacy in both treatment and safety in the trials, he claimed. The company used USD 25 million from a recent Rs 480 crore equity capital raise towards the research and development of Zaynich, while Rs 100 crore was utilised to reduce the debt, an official said. The external debt stands at about Rs 900 crore, of which Rs 500 crore is for working capital purposes, Khorakiwala said, stressing that it is comfortable from a liquidity standpoint.

Lightweight tractor developed for small scale farmers



ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

A lightweight frame tractor having compact 9 HP diesel has been developed by CSIR-Central Mechanical Engineering Research Institute (CSIR-CMERI), specifically for small-scale farmers who have been mostly relying on bullock-driven carts or high-powered costly tractors for the cultivation. This tractor boasts practical front and rear wheel sizes, a manageable wheelbase, ground clearance, and turning radius, making it easy to maneuver in small farm plots. Currently, over 80 per cent of cultivators in the country fall into these categories, many of whom still rely on bullock-driven farming due to the cost and operational challenges associated with existing options like power tillers and traditional tractors. "The introduction of this technology aims to significantly enhance farming efficiency, allowing tasks that traditionally took days with bullock carts to be completed in mere hours. Moreover, it reduces the capital investment and maintenance costs burdening small

farmers," said an official from the DST under the Union Ministry of Science and Technology. He explained, "a large number of framers still depend on bullock driven farming in which operational costs, maintenance costs and poor returns pose a challenge. Though power tillers are replacing bullock driven plough, they are cumbersome to operate. Tractors on the other hand are unsuitable for small farmers and unaffordable for most small farmers." The indigenous technology was demonstrated in nearby villages and to various manufacturers. Recognizing its potential impact, a Ranchi-based MSME has expressed its keenness to establish a manufacturing plant for mass production of these tractors. "Their goal is to supply these affordable machines to farmers through state government tenders, ensuring accessibility through subsidised rates. This initiative not only promises to improve agricultural outcomes but also supports local economies by promoting manufacturing and job creation within the region," said the official.

About 60% of MSMEs plan to digitise their business processes by 2025: Vi study

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Almost 60 per cent of MSMEs plan to digitise their business processes, and 43 per cent plan to increase their digitalisation budget by 2025, according to a study by Vi Business, the enterprise arm of Vi (Vodafone Idea). Medium, Small, and Micro Enterprises (MSMEs) are the backbone of India's economy, currently contributing nearly 30 per cent to the country's GDP, the report said. There are several studies that suggest MSMEs will boost their GDP contribution to 35-40 per cent by 2027. Hence, MSMEs must adopt digital transformation to unleash their growth potential and play a pivotal role in making India a Viksit



Bharat (a developed economy) by 2047, it said. The 'Vi Business ReadyForNext MSME Growth Insights Study' drew insights from 1.6 lakh respondents across 16 industries. "In FY 2025, MSMEs are looking to prioritise

digitalising business processes (59 per cent) over workspace optimisation (29 per cent), and customer engagement (12 per cent), indicating need for future-proofing business operations and growth. Over 50 per cent of MSMEs focusing on business digitalisation plan to increase

their budget," the report noted. It also said, "43 per cent of MSMEs plan to increase their overall digitalisation budget by 2025. Sectors with lower Digital Maturity Index (DMI) are particularly inclined to increase their investments reflecting a growing commitment towards digital transformation." IT-ITES (information technology and IT-enabled services), financial services and transportation were the top three sectors that emerged as the most digitally matured. "Digitalisation has a direct positive correlation with the turnover. Further, as the firm size increases, the variation in digital maturity level narrows, indicating that medium to large firms have embraced

digitalization and there is scattered digital adoption among micro and small firms," it said. During COVID-19, while MSMEs prioritised digitalising their workspaces, the focus has moved on to engaging with their customers digitally in 2024, it said. "India's vibrant MSME sector, boasting over 6.3 crore enterprises, is a cornerstone of our nation's economic strength. These businesses are not just engines of growth, contributing roughly 30 per cent of GDP, but also vital job creators, employing a staggering 11 crore individuals," said Arvind Nevatia, Chief Enterprise Business Officer, Vodafone Idea Limited.

India, US extend digital tax on e-commerce supplies till June 30

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

India and the US have decided to extend a 2 per cent equalisation levy or digital tax on e-commerce supplies until June 30, the finance ministry said on Friday. In a major reform of the international tax system, India and the US have joined 134 other members of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework (including Austria, France, Italy, Spain, and the UK) in reaching an agreement on October 8, 2021, on the statement on a two-pillar solution to address the tax challenges arising from the digitalisation of the economy.

USA's Casey, world's number 1-ranked women's archer, seeks gold in Paris



AP ■ PARIS
It didn't take long for Brady Ellison to see that Casey Kaufhold was heading toward greatness. Ellison is a former world No. 1 men's archer who is heading to his fifth Olympics this year. He said when he first started teaming up with Kaufhold in 2019, the 15-year-old sometimes would beat him when they practiced. They won gold for the United States in the mixed team category at the Pan-American Games that year. "The beauty of the archery is that you get these talented people, and it doesn't really matter how old they are, they can hit," Ellison said. "And I knew that she

was good. Like, as soon as she made the World Cup teams and she was (an under-18) shooter that was making our senior teams, she was one of the best in the country. And if she made the team, any team that we were on, we had a chance to win." The fact that Ellison was a former world No. 1 resonated with Kaufhold, now 20 years old, and drove her to reach that status last year on the women's side. She became the first American woman to reach the top of the Sanlida World Archery rankings since they were established in 2001. She tops the recurve category. "That was huge for me," she said. "And I wanted to be that. And so to

accomplish that at 19 for the first time, that was like - I always knew I was going to get there, but never in a million years would I have imagined it would have been at 19." The rising star from Lancaster, Pennsylvania looks to become the first American to win Olympic gold in archery since 1996. She could become the first American woman to claim an individual medal since 1976, when Luann Ryon won gold in Montreal. Kaufhold also will participate in the team event with Catalina Gnoriega and Jennifer Mucino-Fernandez. Kaufhold qualified for the Tokyo Games at age 17 but didn't medal. She considered her performance

disappointing and said she learned the cost of not trusting herself. "Even though it is on the Olympic stage or even though there are however many people watching on TV, like, it doesn't change your shot," she said. "It doesn't change that the target is the same distance away as it always is, even though the surroundings might be different, it's still you, your bow and the target, and you shouldn't change the way you think or the way you shoot." What she considered a slump continued when she finished fourth at the youth world championships after the Olympics. She bounced back. Perhaps her most important medal was the silver she earned at the world championships later that year. "That was huge for me," she said. "That was my first individual international medal. And so that was just a huge confidence booster. And I feel like that experience has carried a lot with me throughout my last few years of my career." She has continued to thrive since. Last year, she won the Olympic test event in Paris, which led to her No. 1 ranking. It was among three straight top-four finishes for her in World Cup events. She won gold in the mixed team and team events and bronze in the individual event at the Pan-Am Games later that year in Santiago, Chile. This year, she won gold in the individual and team events at the Pan-American Championships in Medellin, Colombia. Kaufhold said her parents have helped. Rob Kaufhold is the founder and president of Lancaster Archery Supply and Carole Kaufhold is the CEO.



Javelin thrower DP Manu could be in dope net; NADA asks AFI to stop him from competing

PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)
Javelin thrower DP Manu has been asked to stay away from competitions by the Athletics Federation of India on the instructions of the National Anti-Doping Agency as the Olympic hopeful is suspected to have been caught in the dope net. The 24-year-old Manu, who won a silver medal at the 2023 Asian Championships, was more or less certain to qualify for the Olympics through world ranking quota but is set to miss the Paris bus after the latest development. He was in the initial entry list for the National Inter-State Championships which began on Thursday here. But his name has been dropped from

the updated roster. AFI president Adille Sumariwalla told PTI that NADA has asked the federation to stop Manu from competitions but he did not confirm whether the athlete has committed a doping offence. "There could be something like that, but we still don't know what is the actual thing. There was a phone call to AFI office (from the NADA) yesterday that he (Manu) be stopped from competitions," Sumariwalla said. "Otherwise there are no details (on what kind of possible violation). I think the athlete himself (DP Manu) is finding out from the NADA what is the exact thing." Manu finished second behind

Olympic champion Neeraj Chopra with a throw of 82.06m in the Federation Cup from May 15 to 19 in Bhubaneswar. He later won gold in Taiwan Athletics Open in Taipei City on June 1 with a throw of 81.58m. Manu was 15th in the World Athletics Road to Paris list and on course to qualify for Paris Olympics as 32 athletes will compete in the men's javelin throw event. The qualification deadline is June 30. Chopra and Kishore Jena have already secured automatic qualification for the Olympics after breaching the entry standard of 85.50m. A country can have a maximum of three athletes in an Olympics track and field event.

Germany aims to ride the host-nation buzz against Denmark for a quarterfinal spot

AP ■ DORTMUND (GERMANY)
Germany takes on Denmark in the round of 16 at Euro 2024 on Saturday. Germany will have to make changes in defense for the game as it tries to carry the host-nation buzz deeper into the knockout stages. Kickoff is at 9 p.m. Local (1900 GMT) in Dortmund. Here's what to know about the match: Match facts- This is the only game in the round of 16 that features two unbeaten teams. Germany finished top of Group A with wins over Scotland and Hungary and a draw with Switzerland. Denmark drew all of its games against Slovenia, England and Serbia. - Germany was eliminated by eventual runner-up England in the round of 16 at Euro 2020 and hasn't won a knockout game at a major tournament since Euro 2016.



- Denmark went all the way to the semifinals at Euro 2020 before losing to England, its biggest success since winning the European title in 1992. - Three games into its Euro 2024 campaign, the German team hasn't yet ignited quite the same kind of patriotic fervor that it had at the 2006 World Cup. Flags have been popping up across the country and crowds in the stadiums are vocal, though, so a win over Denmark for a quarterfinal spot could build momentum. Team news- Germany will have to rethink the center of defense following a one-game suspension for Jonathan Tah and a

hamstring injury for Antonio Rüdiger. Nico Schlotterbeck is set to replace Tah, while Waldemar Anton could make his first Euro 2024 appearance if Rüdiger can't play. - Danish midfielder Morten Hjulmand - no relation to coach Kasper Hjulmand - is suspended after picking up two yellow cards. Thomas Delaney could replace him. - With six days between its last group game and the clash with Denmark, Germany had the benefit of extra rest. Coach Julian Nagelsmann gave his players a day off with their families Tuesday. Denmark was playing that day and had two days fewer to rest. By the numbers- Kai Havertz is on course to make his 50th appearance for Germany. He has started all of Germany's games so far at Euro 2024. Teammate Joshua Kimmich

can play his 90th international game. - Striker Niclas Füllkrug has scored 13 goals in 19 games for Germany and, being a Borussia Dortmund player, should get an especially warm reception from the Dortmund crowd. - Denmark hasn't beaten Germany since 2007, but three of their last four games have been draws. The most recent was 1-1 in a Euro 2020 warmup. What they're saying- "I think the stadium is something very special because it's simply the biggest in Germany, the most atmospheric in Germany. ... We have triggered a little euphoria in Germany and are now trying to spread it. And I think if we play a good game, then all the fans will be happy and can cheer us on." - Germany defender Nico Schlotterbeck, who plays his club soccer in Dortmund.

SYMBOLIC POSSESSION NOTICE

ICICI Bank Branch Office: ICICI Bank Ltd, Landmark Building, 4th Floor, 228A, A/C Bose Road, Kolkata 700020. CIN No: L65190G1994PLC021012, www.icicibank.com

The Authorised ICICI Bank Officer under the Securitisation, Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 and in exercise of the powers conferred under section 13(12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002, issued Demand Notices to the borrower(s) mentioned below, to repay the amount mentioned in the Notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said Notice.

Having failed to repay the amount, the Notice is issued to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken symbolic possession of the property described below, by exercising powers conferred on him/her under Section 13(4) of the said Act read with Rule 8 of the said rules on the below-mentioned terms. Any dealings with the property will be subject to charges of ICICI Bank Limited.

Sr. No.	Name of the Borrower(s)/ Loan Account Number	Description of Property/ Date of Symbolic Possession	Date of Demand Notice (Rs)	Name of Branch
1.	Shadab Iqbal/ Mohammad Arshad/ Nagma Tabessum/ Galaxy House No.330 Ward No.09 Behind Gopesh Churni, Farid Nagar Supela Bhlai/ Chhattisgarh Durg-490023/ LBLL00005461807	Address-1 Plot No.-1, Block No.-A, Mouza Bhlai, Ward No.3, Radhika Nagar Residential Cum Commercial Scheme, Supela Bhlai, Tehsil & District Durg, Jaydard Nagar Inside Limits of Palik Nagar Nigam, Chhattisgarh- 490023 Admeasuring an Area- Total Area 90 Sq. Mt, Built Up Area 488.40 Sq. Ft. Shop Area 268 Sq. Ft, Godown Area 212 Sq. Ft, Ground Floor Built Up Area 207 Sq. Ft, Property Address-2, Plot No.-2, Block No.-A, Mouza Bhlai, Ward No.3, Radhika Nagar Residential Cum Commercial Scheme, Supela Bhlai, Tehsil & District Durg, Jaydard Nagar Inside Limits of Palik Nagar Nigam, Chhattisgarh- 490023 Admeasuring an Area- Total Area 90 Sq. Mt, Built Up Area 481.6 Sq. Ft Residential Area, 186.40 Sq. Ft Godown Area, 318 Sq. Ft Ground Floor Built Up Area/ Date of Symbolic 25.06.2024	March 14, 2024 Rs. 46,21,021/-	Durg
2.	Satya Sagar Shukla/ Hricha Shukla/ Pwd 172 Ward No-25 Bhlai-1, Police Line Chhawani Thana Camp-2 Chhattisgarh Bhlai- 490001/ LBDR00004973808	Shop No.10, The One Ground Floor, Ward No.37, P.H.N. 18, Khedra No.282/1, Khursipar Zone 1, Mouza Chhanna, Chandrasekhar Azad Nagar Ward Under Chhanna Market, R.N. Durg 01, Tehsil and Dist. Durg, Chhattisgarh, (Admeasuring an Area of 0.003 Hectare=312.5 Sq. Ft.-29.04 Sq. Mtr/ Date of Symbolic 25.06.2024	December 20, 2023 Rs. 6,37,620/-	Bhlai

The above-mentioned borrower(s)/guarantor(s) is/are hereby issued a 30 day Notice to repay the amount, else the mortgaged properties will be sold on 30 days from the date of publishing this Notice, as per the provisions under Rules 8 and 9 of Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules 2002.

Date : June 29, 2024
Place: Durg & Bhlai

Sincerely Authorised Signatory
For ICICI Bank Ltd.

Carlos Alcaraz and Jannik Sinner, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff are taking over tennis

AP ■ WIMBLEDON (ENGLAND)
There is a real shift happening at the top of tennis, a youth movement that long seemed inevitable but never actually arrived until now. As the sport's attention shifts to the grass of Wimbledon, where play begins Monday, Carlos Alcaraz, Jannik Sinner, Iga Swiatek and Coco Gauff are the players whose names are on everyone's lips. Alcaraz is the defending men's champion and owner of three Grand Slam titles at the age of 21 after his triumph at the French Open. Sinner, 22, is the top-seeded man at Wimbledon and won the Australian Open in January. Swiatek, 23, is the top-seeded woman and just earned her fourth championship at Roland Garros and fifth major overall. Gauff, the youngest of the bunch at 20, is ranked a career-best No. 2, has reached at least the semifinals at the past three Slam tournaments and won her first such trophy at last year's U.S. Open. While Swiatek has entrenched herself at No. 1 in the women's game, and is now 11-1 against Gauff, neither has been past the quarterfinals at Wimbledon, and there is a much more closely contested and intriguing rivalry developing between Alcaraz and Sinner (Alcaraz leads 5-4 after winning their semifinal at the



French Open in five sets). Then there's this: For so long, people wondered when the men's game would evolve from the extended dominance of Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, owners of a combined 66 majors, and that trio would cede space to others. That time, it seems, is now - and Alcaraz and Sinner are beginning to separate themselves from the rest. "These two guys will win many, many Grand Slams. How many? That's the question. Of course, they will be the best for 10 years, I imagine - Alcaraz and Sinner. I have no doubt about it," said Richard Gasquet, a three-time major semifinalist, including twice at Wimbledon. "They will be the future of the game. ... The new generation is coming." Gasquet, a 38-year-old Frenchman who got to No. 7 in the rankings, knows all too

whether his knee had healed enough for him to compete at the All England Club, where his streak of four consecutive trophies ended last year in a five-set loss to Alcaraz in the final. Sinner was eliminated by Djokovic at Wimbledon each of the past two years, in the 2022 quarterfinals and 2023 semifinals. But Sinner won their two most recent matchups, at last year's Davis Cup Finals and in this year's Australian Open semifinals. Both Alcaraz and Sinner excel at court coverage and big hitting. Both bring excitement, too, whether it's Alcaraz's creative shot-making or Sinner's all-out dives along the way to his first career grass-court title at Halle, Germany, in June, a rare instance of a man winning his first tournament after making his debut at No. 1. "No one has ever played like Alcaraz. No chance. And Sinner? The same thing," said Mats Wilander, a seven-time Slam champ in the 1980s. "They're like, Whoa! What and where did they come from?" Alcaraz and Sinner realize they are well-positioned to take over. They're also aware that they've only just started down a path to possible greatness. "We have to see what we do from now on," Sinner said, "(and) do it year after year after year after year.

PNB HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED

APPENDIX -IV-A- E-AUCTION-PUBLIC SALE NOTICE OF IMMOVABLE PROPERTY/IES

E-AUCTION-SALE NOTICE FOR SALE OF IMMOVABLE ASSETS UNDER THE SECURITISATION AND RECONSTRUCTION OF FINANCIAL ASSETS AND ENFORCEMENT OF SECURITY INTEREST ACT, 2002 READ WITH PROVISION TO RULE 8(6) OF THE SECURITY INTEREST (ENFORCEMENT) RULES, 2002

Reg. Off: 9th Floor, Antriksh Bhawan, 22 Kasturba Gandhi Marg, New Delhi-110001. Phones: 011-23357171, 23357172, 23357173. Web: www.pnbhousing.com

BRANCH OFF: OFFICE NO. 111-112, FIRST FLOOR, PLOT NO. 1, BLOCK NO. 9, DB CORPORATE PARK, RAJBANDHA MAIDAN, RAIPUR, CHHATTISGARH - 492001

Notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the borrower(s) and guarantor(s) indicated in Column no-A that the below described immovable property (ies) described in Column no-D mortgaged/charged to the Secured Creditor, the constructive/Physical Possession of which has been taken (as described in Column no-C) by the authorized Officer of M/s PNB Housing Finance Limited/Secured Creditor, will be sold on "AS IS WHERE IS, AS IS WHAT IS AND WHATEVER THERE IS BASIS" as per the details mentioned below. Notice is hereby given to borrower(s)/mortgagor(s)/Legal Heirs, Legal Representative, (whether Known or Unknown), executor(s), administrator(s), successor(s), assignee(s) of the respective borrower(s)/mortgagor(s)(since deceased) as the case may be indicated in Column no-A under Rule-8(6) & 9 of the Security Interest Enforcement Rules, 2002 amended as on date. For detailed terms and conditions of the sale, please refer to the link provided in M/s PNB Housing Finance Limited's secured creditor website i.e. www.pnbhousing.com

Loan No. Name of the Borrower/Co-Borrower/Guarantor/ Legal heirs (A)	Demand & Amount of possession (B)	Description of the Property mortgaged (C)	Reserve Price (RP) (E)	EMD (10% of RP) (F)	Last Date of Submission of Bid (G)	Bid Incremental Rate (H)	Inspection Date & Time (I)	Date of Auction & Time (J)	Known Encumbrances/ Court Case if any (K)
NHL/RAI/0317364331 Basant Bihari Sharma /Saroj Kumar Sharma B.O.: Raipur	Rs. 16,68,676.91 as on date 19-04-2019	(Physical) Shop No.108, Ground Floor, Ph. No.103/46, Plot Ktn.no. 781/62 & 781/106, Shyam Chamber Gram-Heerapur, Veer Sawarkar Nagar Ward No.01, Raipur, Kasim Motors, Raipur, Chhattisgarh -492001	Rs. 20,16,000/-	Rs. 2,01,600/-	18.07.2024	Rs. 10,000/-	02.07.2024 Between 12:00 PM to 04:00 PM	19-07-2024 Between 01:30 PM to 03:00 PM	"NIL"/NOT KNOWN

*Together with the further interest @18% p.a. as applicable, incidental expenses, cost, charges etc. incurred upto the date of payment and/or realization thereof. ** To the best knowledge and information of the authorized Officer of PNB Housing Finance Limited, there are no other encumbrances/claims in respect of above mentioned immovable/secured assets except what is disclosed in the Column no. - K. Further such encumbrances to be catered/paid by the successful purchaser/bidder at his/her end. The prospective purchaser(s)/bidders are requested to independently ascertain the veracity of the mentioned encumbrances.

(1) As on date, there is no order restraining and/or court injunction PNBHFL/the authorized Officer of PNBHFL from selling, alienating and/or disposing of the above immovable properties/secured assets and status is mentioned in column no-K (2) The prospective purchaser/bidder and interested parties may independently take the inspection of the pleadings in all proceedings/orders passed etc. if any, stated in column no-K, including but not limited to the title of the documents of the title pertaining thereto available with the PNBHFL and satisfy themselves in respect of submitting tender/bid application form or making Offer(s). The bidder(s) has to sign the terms and conditions of this auction along with the Bid Form. (3) Please note that in terms of Rule 9(3) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002, the bidder(s)/the purchaser is legally bound to deposit 25% of the amount of sale price, (inclusive of earnest money) on the same day or not later than next working day. The sale may be confirmed in favour of (bidder/s) only after receipt of 25% of the sale price by the secured creditor in accordance with Rule 9(2) of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002. (4) The bidder(s) has to deposit the sale consideration amount to be deposited by the purchaser within 15 days from the date of acknowledgement of sale confirmation letter and in default of such deposit, the authorized officer shall forfeit the part payment of sale consideration amount within 15 days from the date of expiry of mandatory period of 15 days mentioned in the sale confirmation letter and the property/secured asset shall be resold as per the provisions of Section Act. (4) M/s C1 India Private Limited would be assisting the authorized officer in conducting sale through an e-auction having its Corporate Office at Plot No. 68, 3rd Floor, Sarfoa 44, Gurgaon, Haryana 122003 Website -www.bankauctions.com For any assistance related to inspection of the property or obtaining the Bid Documents and for any other query or for registration, you have to co-ordinate with Mr. Vivek Lodha, Toll Free No.: 1800 120 8800, E-Mail: auction@pnbhousing.com, is authorised Person of PNBHFL or refer to www.pnbhousing.com

PLACE: RAIPUR, DATE: 28.06.2024

SD/- AUTHORIZED OFFICER, PNB HOUSING FINANCE LIMITED

AU SMALL FINANCE BANK LIMITED (A Scheduled Commercial Bank)

Regd. Office: 19-A, Dhuleshwar Garden, Ajmer Road, Jaipur - 302001 (CIN:L36911R1996PLC011381)

APPENDIX IV [SEE RULE 8(1)] POSSESSION NOTICE

Whereas, the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of the AU Small Finance Bank Limited (A Scheduled Commercial Bank) under the "Securitization and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (54 of 2002) and in exercise of powers conferred under section 13(12) read with rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 issued demand notice on the date as mentioned below calling upon the borrowers to repay the amount mentioned in the said notice within 60 days from the date of receipt of the said notice as per the details given in below table:-

Name of Borrower/ Co-Borrower/ Mortgagor/Guarantor/Loan A/c No.	13(2) Notice Date & Amount	Description of Mortgaged Property	Date of Possession Taken
(Loan A/c No.) L9001060128980944, Smt. Manjulata Bramhad (Borrower) Laxmi Narayan (Co-Borrower)	12-Jan-24 ₹ 2,97,301/- Rs. Two Lac Ninety-Seven Thousand Three Hundred One Only as on 10-Jan-24	All That Part And Parcel Of Residential/Commercial Property Land / Building / Structure And Fixtures Property Situated At- Khasra No 557-369, Ph No 22, Balodabazar, Village- Palari, Dist- Raipur, Chhattisgarh Admeasuring 120 Sq.Mtr	24-Jun-24
(Loan A/c No.) L9001060133870865, Vinod Kumar Suryavanshi (Borrower), Manharan Kariyare (Co-Borrower)	13-Feb-24 ₹ 16,59,061/- Rs. Sixteen Lac Fifty-Nine Thousand Sixty-One Only as on 12-Feb-24	All That Part And Parcel Of Residential/Commercial Property Land / Building / Structure And Fixtures Property Situated At- Freehold - Within Municipal Limit-Survey No 2456-3,P H No 18, Mpi Council Janjgir Naila Limit,Village Janjgir RA NI Man Janjgir, 2456 Piece 2456 3,Dist-Janjgir Champa, Chhattisgarh Admeasuring 202.34 Sq. Mtr.	26-Jun-24

The borrower having failed to repay the amount, therefore notice is hereby given to the borrower and the public in general that the undersigned has taken possession of the property described herein above mentioned table in exercise of powers conferred on him/her under section 13(4) of the said Act 2002 read with Rule 8 of the said rule on the date mentioned in the above table.

"The borrower's attention is invited to provisions of sub section (8) of section 13 of the Act, in respect of time available, to redeem the secured assets."

The borrower in particular and the public in general is hereby cautioned not to deal with the property and any dealings with the property will be subject to the charge of the AU Small Finance Bank Limited (A Scheduled Commercial Bank) for the amount and interest thereon mentioned in the above table.

Date : 29/06/2024
Place : Chhattisgarh

sd/-
Authorised Officer AU Small Finance Bank Limited

Proteas will succumb to unplayable Axar, Kuldeep in final: Sarandeep

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Former India cricketer Sarandeep Singh feels the "unplayable" spin combination of Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel will be too much for the South Africans to handle during the T20 World Cup final in Bridgetown, Barbados on Saturday. Wrist spinner Kuldeep has taken 10 wickets in four games with a best of 3/19, while Axar has grabbed eight from seven games with a best of 3/23. Both left-arm spinners are expected to play in the final. "If you ask me, who are the two players who will win it for India in the final, I will say Kuldeep Yadav and Axar Patel. They are outright match-winners in spin-friendly conditions," Sarandeep told PTI Videos on Friday. "We are having at the world's best spinners at the moment. Look at the way Kuldeep and Axar came in, they are winning all the games. They are unplayable. Everyone is talking about Kuldeep. He is going to destroy the South African middle order. "He has done it against Australia (in Super 8s) and

England (in semifinals). Now it's the turn of South Africa. Axar is also a very dangerous slow left-arm orthodox bowler. An outright match-winner. Indian spinners will win the final." India and South Africa are coming into the final having not lost a single match in the World Cup. While South Africa won all their eight games, India were victorious in seven as the tie against Canada in Florida was washed out due to rain. Sarandeep, who played three Tests and five ODIs, added that Axar and Kuldeep would be even more potent on the spin-friendly Bridgetown wicket. "Axar starts getting wickets from the sixth over. It's not easy for Axar to bowl in powerplay. He comes, bowls, and makes things easy for the rest of the bowlers. Kuldeep and Axar are complementing each other so well. "The wickets in West Indies are not easy to play especially if you have world-class spinners like Kuldeep and Axar. It was not easy for England, it will not be easy for South Africa as well,"



Sarandeep observed. The former India off-spinner added that skipper Rohit Sharma was spot on in his assessment of Caribbean conditions and opted for four spinners. "Rohit opted for four spinners but (Yuzvendra) Chahal is not in the scheme of things. The reason is, others have done their job exceedingly well. (Ravindra) Jadeja is the senior-most player but he is not coming into powerplay. Axar knows how to bowl in these conditions. He is the best option for us to bowl into the powerplay. He is giving the results as well," he added. On whether South African spinners Keshav Maharaj and Tabraiz Shamsi could also trouble the Indian batters, Sarandeep said, "Yes they will. Keshav and Shamsi are also very good. Let's see how Indian batsmen handle the spinners. "India has a very strong middle order. India has left-handers like Rishabh Pant, Shivam Dube, Axar, and Jadeja. Four left-handers in the middle order. It will be interesting to see how Maharaj and Shamsi are going to tackle

them. And vice-versa. This will be a big challenge for them also." Sarandeep added that India has the best batting and bowling lineup in the world. "Bumrah's economy is 3.5 or 3.6. This is so unreal. Other bowlers go over 9 or 10. Even after eight games, his economy is 3.5. This is so unreal. What else can you ask from him? India is the favourites not only in batting but bowling as well." The former cricketer played down Virat Kohli's lack of form. Virat has scored only 76 runs in seven innings. "Virat is waiting for the final to perform. He is a world-class player, no doubt. He is mentally very strong. He is a team man. He is playing for the team. And there is some plan given to him. "Normally he opens only in the IPL. But here he had been given a clear-cut role. Virat is trying to hit from the first ball and trying to put more pressure on the bowlers. But somehow he is getting out quickly. But I am not worried about him. He is a big-match player. And that big game is coming. His big innings is coming against South Africa."

Buttler admits tactical mistake of not bowling Moeen Ali on turning Providence track

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)
Admitting that they were completely outplayed by India in the T20 World Cup semifinal, England skipper Jos Buttler said in hindsight it was a tactical mistake on his part to not bowl Moeen Ali on a turning Providence pitch here. Indian spin twin of Axar Patel and Kuldeep Yadav claimed three wickets each as the defending champions folded for 103 in 16.4 overs in their pursuit of 172 in a rain-interrupted semi-final here on Thursday. "Yeah, disappointing. I think we were outplayed by India. They fully deserved the victory," Buttler said in the post-match media interaction. "They had an above-par score. I was hoping to restrict them to 145-150 probably on that pitch. It was always going to be a tough chase from there." Having won the toss, the England skipper went in with an unchanged XI and it was Adil Rashid and Liam Livingstone who were his chosen spinners, overlooking Moeen Ali perhaps to deal with the damp conditions. Rashid and Livingstone conceded just 49 runs in their eight overs with the former also ending the explosive innings of India skipper Rohit Sharma for a 39-ball 57 in the 14th over. Asked if there was a failure of plans or execution, Buttler said: "A little bit of both. I thought they played well as well. I thought we bowled a little bit without luck in the power play, a few close calls there. "But, yes, I think the benefit of hindsight and reflecting, I



would have got Moeen (Ali) in the game of course. So, yes, bits and pieces here and there," Buttler admitted. The ball was turning viciously and staying low as Rohit placed close-in fielders that resembled playing Tests in India. "I think everyone knew what to expect from this wicket. I think traditionally the bounce is low. And yeah, I thought India played really well and they played the conditions better than we did." Asked about their playing combination, Buttler said: "We thought long and hard about selection, about whether we kept the same balance that had been working well, or did we need four seamers on that particular wicket. That was a really tough call that we made and we ended up sticking with what we had."

"India played a really good game of cricket, whatever team or whatever happened at the toss -- they were going to be a tough team to beat and we had to be at our best if we were going to win the game and we were short of our best today." India will face South Africa in the final and Buttler feels it will be a game of close margins. "The two top sides in the final is going to be a game of small margins and it's going to be a great game. Two really good teams," he said. The Buttler-led side managed to beat only one Test playing nation -- West Indies -- in this tournament and were on the brink of early elimination after a washout against Scotland and a defeat to Australia in the group stage. However, Australia handed them a lifeline by beating Scotland and they narrowly

managed to make the Super 8s beating Namibia via DLS method. "Reaching a semi-final of a World Cup is an achievement. We wanted to obviously go all the way. That was what we came here for," said Buttler, who led them to the T20 World Cup title in 2022 after taking over white-ball captaincy from Eoin Morgan. "We faced lots of challenges and adversity throughout the whole tournament and we've stuck together well and played well enough to get to this stage. But unfortunately, at this stage, we've fallen short." "I think everyone has made progress and we've played well and not well enough, but I think the stuff that we've been doing behind the scenes, the way we've prepared, the way we've trained, the way we've played in patches has been really good. "There's a lot of talent in the team. And yes, we came up against a top team today in these conditions," he said. Asked if there would be fresh faces the next time, he said: "Yeah, I think... I can't do that. I haven't taken in the defeat. Very much thinking about this game and what happened and yeah, I think they say there's some time between today and the next matches, and we can see what happens." On his future plans and whether he would stay on as captain until the Champions Trophy in Pakistan in February, he said: "To be honest, I'm just looking forward to some time away from the game. "As I sit here, emotional after a loss, I don't need to dive too deep into it right now. I just look forward to some space from the game."

Plan was to make it difficult for England without doing anything extraordinary: Axar

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)
His exploits in the powerplay set up India's massive win over England and left-arm spinner Axar Patel said keeping things simple was the key as it helped him make life difficult for rival batters "without doing anything extraordinary". Coming in to bowl in the fourth over, Axar (3/23) removed England skipper Jos Buttler off his very first delivery before dismissing Jonny Bairstow and Moeen Ali in consecutive overs to derail England's chase as they eventually folded for 103 in pursuit of 172 in the T20 World Cup semifinals here on Thursday. "Obviously in powerplay, it is difficult (to bowl) but when you know that you are getting help from the wicket, then without thinking much, without doing anything extraordinary, I thought that the more I keep it simple, the easier it would be for me," Axar said during the post-match press conference.



"We spoke in the dressing room that it's not an easy wicket (for batting), and I knew that the batsmen will charge at me. It wasn't going to be easy to hit me down the ground and (also) they couldn't hit off the back foot because the ball wasn't coming on the bat. "So my plan was to make it difficult for them, force them to think of playing some other shots, and, that's what hap-

pened on the first ball. So that was the plan." Axar sent his first ball from round the wicket and Buttler, looking for the reverse-sweep, ended up lobbing it up for wicketkeeper Rishabh Pant to do the rest. "I hadn't really planned to get a wicket on the first ball. My mindset was to put the ball in the right areas. Obviously, when you play knockouts, you want to start and finish well with the first and last ball," said Axar, who was adjudged the Player-of-the-Match. "I think it was difficult to hit big shots, to sweep and reverse sweep because some balls were keeping low on this wicket, so you can't connect it so easily." India scored 171 for 7 after being asked to take first strike and Axar said they were confident of defending the total. "I think 170 was a par score, we could defend it. Rohit bhai said after he finished batting that it was very difficult to hit big shots because the odd ball was spin-

ning, it was staying low and skidding as well. "When we made 170, we knew that we had scored 10-15 runs extra, which we could have defended." Batting at number eight, Axar also hit a six during his 10-run cameo and he said it gave him an idea about the nature of the surface as the pacers were bowling slower balls in the death overs. "Obviously, I got a clue from that (batting) as to what I could do and what I couldn't. When I went to bat, everyone was bowling slower, the ball was not coming at the speed I wanted so I couldn't connect properly. So giving pace would have made it easy for them. It was important to hit the ball at a good area. "It's also about pressure. When you are chasing, and you know that the wicket is helping the bowlers, as an opener, or anyone in the top four, they think of cashing in on the powerplay as much as possible but it didn't work out."

Shafali Verma becomes fastest woman double-centurion in Test cricket

PTI ■ CHENNAI
Dashing India opener Shafali Verma smashed the fastest double-century in the history of women's Test cricket, eclipsing Annabel Sutherland of Australia during the one-off Test against South Africa here on Friday. Shafali, 20, scored her double ton off just 194 balls, bettering Sutherland's feat, which came off 248 balls against South Africa earlier this year. Shafali also became the second Indian after former skipper Mithali Raj to hit a double century in Test cricket after almost 22 long years here. Mithali's 214 had come off 407 balls and the former India skipper achieved during

the drawn second Test against England at Taunton in August, 2022. Shafali struck 23 fours and eight maximums during her attacking knock. She brought up her twin ton with consecutive sixes of off-spinner Delmi Tucker, followed by a single. Shafali was finally run out at 205 off 197 balls. Besides, her opening partner Smriti Mandhana also made an attacking 149 off 161 balls with the help of 27 boundaries and one six to stitch a formidable opening partnership of 292 runs, which came off in just 52 overs. India are going great guns against South Africa on the opening day scoring at close to a run-a-ball.

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Last Tango: Possibly final time Rohit and Virat will play for India in T20I format

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
This Saturday afternoon in Barbados, no Indian fan would want Rohit Sharma to drag his jaded body towards the dug-out trying to hide a tear welling up at the corner of his eye. No Indian fan would want to revisit Virat Kohli's blank stare towards the podium where the coveted ODI World Cup trophy rested exactly seven months and 10 days back. What they would surely want is to see the two greats do a memorable tango in probably their 'Last Dance' in the game's shortest format, at least in India colours. If one understands the drift of Indian cricket's ecosystem, whether it is the BCCI mandarins or the national selectors, they want the troika of Kohli, Rohit and also Ravindra Jadeja to go out on a high from the format. This is because next month's Zimbabwe series would certainly usher in a new dawn keeping in mind the 2026 T20 World Cup in India. To prepare for any global trophy, the core needs to be finalised two years in advance and in 2026, a 39-year-old Rohit or a nearly 38-year-

old Kohli or even Jadeja are unlikely to fit in. At this point, with the focus firmly on the final, no one wants to use the sensitive 'R' word as far as T20Is are concerned but it is believed that if India can beat South Africa in Barbados on Saturday, both skipper Rohit and Kohli would know that in this format, they have nothing more left to achieve. There may or may not be a formal announcement as they would continue to be a part of IPL, where they are still two of the biggest brands apart from Mahendra Singh Dhoni and the non-cricketer -- Shah Rukh Khan. For Kohli, it will be the completion of a cycle with all three ICC white-ball trophies (2011 ODI World Cup, 2013 Champions Trophy) in his cabinet. Just like Mahela Jayawardene and Kumar Sangakkara decided immediately after beating India in that 2014 T20 World Cup final that they would both quit the shortest format, one doesn't know if the two greats would do something similar. Kohli and Rohit, the two generational talents with 8334 T20I runs, six centuries, 69 fifties



and 119 catches between them are the last bridge between the old and new and they both deserve to be in the same frame with that trophy in hand. Both are World Cup winners but those two victories belonged to the Dhoni, Sachin Tendulkars, and Yuvraj Singhs way more. This trophy would rightfully belong to them. Champions have egos -- some have pretty pronounced ones, while few others keep them concealed. One could gauge the pain in Kohli's eyes after he got out against England and if anyone wants to count the 'King' out of the final, do it at your own peril. For Rohit, if one wants to sum up November 19, 2023 for him, the apt coinage would be Sudhir Mishra's 1996 cult classic "Is Raat Ki Subaah Nah". Even if he asserts that he has moved on, the wounds have healed, he would still be itching for a closure. One can say with a degree of certainty that had India won the 2023 ODI World Cup, Rohit would not have been desperate to play this edition of the T20 World Cup.

He wants some kind of closure as far as white ball global triumph is concerned. A T20 World Cup triumph would give him that. His popularity is organic. Dhoni was "Mahi bhai" to his juniors, a man they revered. Kohli earned respect with his humongous on-field achievements. But Rohit gets love, unadulterated -- from peers as well as juniors. No wonder Ravichandran Ashwin chokes while narrating how the skipper asked one of the team physios to accompany the spinner to Chennai after his mother had a health scare and that too in the middle of a Test match. They have seen the crests and troughs of Indian cricket together for more than a decade. They had arrived when Nokia 3310 was in vogue and in their twilight zone, they are witness to change in nature of fandom -- every third android phone owner is either a 'Viratian' or a 'Rohitian'. Thankfully for Rohit and Kohli, there is nothing more to prove. If Saturday indeed is their 'Last Dance' in T20Is, the void will be difficult to fill not just in terms of quality but also, and perhaps more so, emotionally.

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