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INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES 12 SPORTS

INDIA GETS ITS SPEAKER AND LoP



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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

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

Kejriwal incarcerated

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

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

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



WikiLeaks founder Assange returns to Australia a free man

AP ■ CANBERRA

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

3 ultras killed ahead of Amarnath Yatra

MOHIT KANDHARI ■ JAMMU

The entire security grid has been kept on a state of high alert across Jammu and Kashmir after Punjab police late Tuesday night noticed the movement of two armed suspects moving closer to the forward areas bordering Kathua district in the run-up to the beginning of the 52-day-long Amarnath Yatra on June 29. Meanwhile, one terrorist was killed by the joint team of security forces in an ongoing encounter in a forest area of Gandoh in Doda district. According to ADGP, Anand Jain, "Two more terrorists have been neutralised in an ongoing joint operation in the Gandoh, Bhandarwah sector of district Doda. Arms and ammunition have been recovered from their possession." Separate searches were also conducted in the Reasi district after some locals reported the suspected movement of three armed persons in the Kanda area on Tuesday evening, prompting the Army, CRPF, and police to launch the search operation. Though elaborate security

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



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

Doda encounter, Additional Director General of Police, Jammu Anand Jain in a post on X said one terrorist had been gunned down while the operation was still going on in the Bhandarwah area of Doda.

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

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

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

Nagaland holds local polls after 20 yrs



Voters exercise their franchise in the Nagaland civic polls

PTI ■ KOHIMA

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

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

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

TAJ ON A RAINY DAY



Tourists enjoy rain at the Taj Mahal in Agra

PTI Photo

Modi lauds Birla for condemning Emergency

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauded Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for his condemnation of the Emergency in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday and said it was a wonderful gesture to stand in silence in honour of all those who suffered during those days.

resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and termed the decision by then prime minister Indira Gandhi an attack on the Constitution, triggering a wave of protests by the opposition in the House. Birla's reference to the Emergency, shortly after his election as Lok Sabha speaker, also saw a face-off between the government and the opposition in the first session of the lower house.



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

Indira Gandhi imposed dictatorship on such an India. The democratic values of India were crushed and freedom of expression was strangled," Birla said.

and there was restraint on the autonomy of judiciary," Birla said. The Speaker urged members to observe silence for a while and later adjourned the proceedings for the day.

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

Birla adjourned the House after reading out a resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency and flaying then prime minister Indira Gandhi for her attack on the Constitution, a large number of BJP-led NDA MPs assembled outside, carrying placards and raising slogans.

right to even discuss about the Constitution," he asked. Union ministers Arjun Ram Meghwal and Gajendra Singh Sekhawat also joined the protest.

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



PNS ■ NEW DELHI

ISRO Chairman Somanath said on Wednesday there is not enough internal demand for the satellite launch market in India but it can be created through more work on the application of satellite technology.

to create more internal demand. That implies internal demand is not enough. All of us are working towards that. The demand will come from the user side, from the communication segment, which, of course, includes big satellite builders."

Three new criminal laws to be rolled out from next week

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Union Home Ministry is gearing up to roll out the three new criminal laws from next week with 40 lakh grassroots level functionaries trained to ensure that people are aware about the legislations and the impact these will have on everyone, particularly women and children, official sources said Wednesday.

support teams and call centres for constant review and handholding of the states and Union territories for implementation of the new criminal laws. For capacity building, Bureau of Police Research and Development (BPR&D) has developed training modules and shared with all the stakeholders.

the positive impact it will have on the citizens particularly women and children, the ministries of women and child development, rural development and panchayati raj have undertaken dissemination of the new laws through webinars in which nearly 40 lakh grassroots level functionaries participated, the sources said.

Centre (NIC) has developed Applications, eSakshya, NyayShruti & eSumon Apps, for facilitating videography and photography of crime scenes, judicial hearings and delivery court summons electronically under the new criminal laws.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI



Congratulating Om Birla for being elected Speaker of the Lok Sabha for a second term, Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi and other Opposition MPs on Wednesday hoped they would be allowed to raise the voice of people in the House and incidents like the suspension of MPs will not be repeated.

significantly more voices of the Indian people than last time, Rahul Gandhi stressed that it is very important that the voice of opposition is allowed to be represented in the House.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Trinamool Congress (TMC) leader Abhishek Banerjee said on Wednesday the pro-tem speaker did not allow voting in the election for the Lok Sabha speaker even as several opposition MPs sought a division of votes, adding that it showed the government did not have the numbers.



in a rare move proposing its own candidate. Pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahatab made the announcement after the Opposition, which had forwarded the name of eight-term Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh as its candidate, did not press for votes to the motion.

Self-reliance in defence manufacturing gets boost

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Giving a boost to self-reliance in defence manufacturing, Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) on Wednesday here handed over the Medium Range-Microwave Obscurant Chaff Rocket (MR-MOCR) to the Indian Navy, Defence Ministry said.

seekers. The Phase-I trials of MR-MOCR were successfully conducted from Indian Navy ships, demonstrating the MOC cloud blooming and being persistent in space.

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

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In an effort to further enhance bilateral ties with Saudi Arabia, 76 trainees of King Fahad Naval Academy of the Royal Saudi Naval Forces (RSNF) joined the First Training Squadron, ITS of the Indian Navy at Southern Naval Command, Kochi on Monday, navy said here on Wednesday.

simulator based training during the harbour phase, whereas the sea phase focuses on practical exposure to nuances of life at sea.

Ex-Foreign Secretary Muchkund Dubey dies

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Former foreign secretary Muchkund Dubey died at a hospital here on Wednesday due to health complications. He was 90.

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

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

In response, Leader of Opposition in the state

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

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

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

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

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

Assam flood situation improves, nearly 1.5 lakh still affected



PTI ■ GUWAHATI

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

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

Nearly 1.50 lakh people were reeling under the deluge in Barpeta, Cachar, Darrang, Dhemaji, Goalpara, Kamrup and Karimganj. The number of affected people was 1.53 lakh on Tuesday.

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

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

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

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

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



Incessant rain causes extensive damage in Kerala

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

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

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

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



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

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ IMPHAL

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ KOLKATA

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

The two MLAs, Sayantika Bandyopadhyay and Rayat Hossain Sarkar were elected from Baranagar near Kolkata and Bhagwangola in Murshidabad district, respectively. Raj Bhavan has maintained that the oath-taking ceremony should occur before Bose at the Governor's House.

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

PTI ■ ITANAGAR

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

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

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

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

Students in Classes 11 and 12 will receive Rs 750 per month for 10 months each year, and Rs 15,000 will be given after they clear the Class 12 board exam, the release said.

The scheme will cover girls studying in government, aided and private schools. The 'Namo Saraswati Vigyan Sadhana Yojana' aims to encourage students to opt for the science stream and excel in it, said the release.

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

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



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

PTI ■ PANAJI

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

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

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



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

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

Chief Minister Pramod Sawant on Tuesday said no

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

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

HC refuses to interfere in hijab ban decision of Mumbai college

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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



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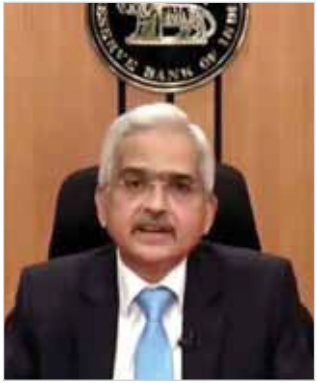
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PAPER WITH PASSION

Optimistic outlook

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

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



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

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

PICTALK



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

The dark days of India's Emergency



KUMAR CHELLAPPAN

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

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



of the Supreme Court who heard Indira Gandhi's appeal challenging the High Court verdict ruled that she could continue as Prime Minister though she was not permitted to her exercise her right to vote in Parliament. The decision of Justice Iyer was seen as an attempt by him to help Indira Gandhi come out of her predicament. Iyer was known for her servility to the then Prime Minister, having served as minister of home and jail in the first elected Communist government in Kerala under E M S Nambudiripattu. In his autobiography 'Wandering in Many Worlds' Iyer has disclosed how EMS was instrumental in getting him appointed as a judge in Kerala High Court. The Communist infiltration of the Indian judiciary and other constitutional establishments is nothing new. Immediately after the proclamation of the emergency, the Constitution was amended by both houses of Parliament to put the election of the Prime Minister and President of India beyond the powers of Courts with retrospective effect. This was the infamous 39th Amendment of the Constitution (which was later declared unconstitutional by the Supreme Court). What happened during the Emergency is known to most of the literate people. State Governments not friendly to



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SUBSTANCE OVER SPECTACLE

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

Vijaykumar H K | Raichur

THE MENACE OF DRUG ABUSE

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

Record crop but prices rising



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

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

SK Khosla | Chandigarh

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

Ganpathi Bhat | Akola

ROOF LEAKAGE AT RAM TEMPLE

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

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

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

Bidyut Kumar Chatterjee | Faridabad

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

India will be a true welfare state when it eliminates discrimination

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



AKSHAY JAIN

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



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

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

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

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



FIRST COLUMN

BENEFITS OF REMAINING IN SHELTER OF GOD

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



AJIT KUMAR BISHNOI

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

A young mother becomes a symbol of hope



SWAPNA MAJUMDAR

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



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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



KHUSHI PAHUJA

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

Sensex, Nifty settle at new all-time high levels

PTI ■ MUMBAI

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



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

Steel were among the laggards. "The domestic market hit a new peak, bolstered by a rally in large-cap stocks, where the valuation is relatively fair. In contrast, mid and smallcap stocks saw profit-taking due to valuation concerns. Currently, the financials & consumption stocks are catching up driven by improved balance sheets, a strong GDP growth forecast, and softening inflation. "Global market sentiments reflected similar trends, with a consensus on imminent rate cuts," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services. In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed 0.15 per cent while midcap index declined 0.29 per cent. Among the indices, telecommunication jumped

2.30 per cent, energy (1.45 per cent), teck (0.78 per cent), bankex (0.58 per cent) and services (0.46 per cent). Commodities, consumer discretionary, IT and auto were among the laggards. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled with gains. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended mostly higher on Tuesday. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.80 per cent to USD 85.69 a barrel. Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) bought equities worth Rs 1,175.91 crore on Tuesday, according to exchange data. The BSE benchmark jumped 712.44 points or 0.92 per cent to settle at 78,053.52 on Tuesday.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Commerce Ministry has asked development commissioners of SEZs to consider requests of developers of these special economic zones for installation of solar power panels under the existing SEZ guidelines for power generation, transmission and distribution norms. In a communication to the Development Commissioners (DCs) of all special economic zones (SEZs), the Department of Commerce said that various requests have been received from EPCEs (Export Promotion Council for EOUs and SEZs) as well as SEZ developers for installation of solar power panels as capital goods in these zones for solar power generation for captive use. "The matter has been examined in consultation with DGEP, CBIC. Accordingly, the DCs are requested to consider such requests from developers/co-developers" under the power guidelines issued on February 16, 2016 by the department, the

communication said. The Directorate General of Export Promotion (DGEP) is an extended arm of Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC). Under those guidelines, a power plant, including non-conventional energy power plant, to be set up by developer/co-developer in an SEZ as part of an infrastructure facility will be in the non-processing area of the SEZ only. It will be entitled to fiscal benefits only for its initial setting up and no fiscal benefit would be admissible for its operation and maintenance. Such a power plant can supply power to DTA (domestic tariff area) after meeting the power requirement of the SEZ subject to payment of customs duty. SEZs are key export hubs which contributed over one-third of the country's total outbound shipments in the last fiscal. These zones are enclosures that are treated as foreign territories for trade and customs duties, with restrictions on duty-free sales outside these zones in the domestic market.



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

Juniper Green Energy secures renewable PPAs in Gujarat, Rajasthan

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Juniper Green Energy on Wednesday said it has signed two separate power purchase agreements for renewable energy projects in Gujarat and Rajasthan. It has secured an agreement with Gujarat Urja Vikas Nigam Limited (GUVNL) under wind phase VI for a standalone 90 MW wind project in Gujarat, the company said in a statement. The project is expected to generate nearly 293 million units (MUs) of electricity annually, offsetting approximately 2,66,002 tonne of Co2 emissions. The electricity generated is estimated to electrify

56,539 households in Gujarat. The company has signed another PPA (Power Purchase Agreement) with the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) under hybrid tranche VII for the development of a 150 MW wind-solar hybrid power project in Gujarat and Rajasthan. The project is aimed to generate about 477 MU of electricity annually, offsetting 445,796 tonne of Co2 emissions each year and support the electrification of around 95,079 households. Naresh Mansukhani, CEO, Juniper Green Energy, said, "Partnering with SECI and GUVNL on these projects embodies our forward-



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

FHRAI seeks infra status for hotels, convention centres

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India has asked the government to grant infrastructure status for hotels across all categories and convention centres built at a project cost of Rs 10 crore and above to give a fillip to budget segment in the hotel industry. In its pre-budget recommendation, the Federation of Hotel and Restaurant Associations of India (FHRAI) also sought GST rationalisation proposing a 12 per cent GST rate across all hotels. "Granting infrastructure status to hotels and convention centres across all cities is crucial for attracting investments and accelerating growth in the hospitality sector," FHRAI President Pradeep Shetty said in a statement. FHRAI said one of the key requests put forward by the hospitality federation to the Finance Ministry was to "grant infrastructure status for hotels across all categories and convention centres built at a project cost of Rs 10 crore and above to give fillip to the budget segment in the hotel industry."

Besides, the federation requested a 12 per cent GST rate across all hotels and also demanded the delinking of restaurant tariffs from room tariffs as the current system of GST shifting to different slabs in the same hotel creates compliance issues and confusion among the public. "Although there is no evasion and avoidance of tax, but the said confusion has become a bone of contention for the hotels across the country due to notices and demands from the GST department," FHRAI said. Shetty said, "We are confident in the ministry's commitment to implementing GST rationalisation for the hospitality sector." The federation said in its pre-budget recommendations, it highlighted the significance of efforts under the 'Incredible India' campaign and recommended the enhancement of the budget for tourism branding and also requested specific measures to promote MICE (Meetings, Incentives, Conferences, and Exhibitions) tourism in the country.

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

PTI ■ WASHINGTON

The US transport security body has sought a unique "one-stop agreement" with India to end the rescreening of passengers, asserting that the "really powerful" concept will raise global aviation security standards. Addressing the India US Aviation Summit here on Tuesday, David Pekoske, Administrator of the US Transportation Security Administration (USTSA) said that the one-stop security concept is "very reachable" between the countries. "I think very tangible and very reachable between India and the United States is one-stop security," he said. "It's a concept that expedites the flow of passengers and baggage to their destinations by eliminating the duplication of security controls at transfer points," Pekoske said. He said in the case of a one-stop agreement, passengers who reach an airport in another country and have a connecting domestic flight would not need to be rescreened and their checked bags would go from aircraft to aircraft.

Terming it a "really powerful" concept, Pekoske said it raises global aviation security standards. "Flights inbound to the United States are more secure. If there's a reverse agreement between the United States and India where US screening satisfies Indian requirements, that means that flights to India would also be more secure. It does require the regular exchange of information," he said. "It requires improvements to security processes to maintain the agreement. It yields a reduction in security costs through better allocation of resources, reduces flight connection times and missed connections, and improves the passenger experience," he said. Pekoske said the two countries should consider signing a memorandum of agreement to share sensitive security information. "We have a category of classification of information that is not classified in the true sense of classified material, but it is sensitive enough that it needs additional protections," he said. He said that whenever there is



a sharing of sensitive security information -- which is critical to a growing partnership -- there is a need to have a memorandum of agreement which covers the aspects of that sharing arrangement. He noted that both the TSA and India's transportation security posture were born of cruel tragedy. For India, it was the bombing of Air India 'Kanishka' Flight 182 in 1985, while for the TSA, it was the 9-11 attacks in 2001. "These tragic events were paradigm shifts in how we both thought about transportation security that continues today," he said. Meanwhile, addressing the

summit, US Federal Aviation Administrator Michael Whitaker said that India and the United States need to work together on issues like aviation safety. Asserting that safety is a team sport, he said that sharing data between the two countries can allow better identification and mitigation of risks in the sector. "Our (US and India's) national systems of aviation are inextricably linked into a single global network," he said, adding that the two countries have adjoining air spaces, integrated supply chains, and international services that connect their economies and people.

"We need to work together on issues like safety, we need to share ideas and share innovations, especially in how to safely incorporate some of these new technologies into our airspace," he said. Noting that the two countries have different systems that will take different approaches to solving challenges, he said, "We can and should work together to share best practices and learn from one another." "We all have an interest in increasing safety within our respective countries, but we must work together to increase the level of safety in the global aviation system," he added. "This means sharing data. Sharing information allows us to better identify and mitigate risks before those risks become accidents and even before they become failures to the safety layers in our system," he added. "When I started in aviation, accidents were unfortunately not uncommon. They were almost annual events, and safety regulators learned from those accidents and made the system safer," he said. "For the past couple of

decades, we've moved beyond that model, and accidents are now extremely rare, and they are simply unacceptable as an outcome," Whitaker said. "Our challenge is to bring safety to the next level, and that means we need to proactively analyse data and find those risks of failure and mitigate those risks before they happen," he said. Asserting that all the job categories in the aviation sector are highly sought after, he said that "for regulators, it means new questions about how we oversee those operations." "We have to find a safe yet nimble way to regulate these new entrants who are operating at the speed of a startup while we are operating at the speed of government, he said. He added that there is a need to figure out how to close the gap, identify these risks and leverage technology to incorporate them safely into the air-space. "In the US, we've seen the public perception of safety and risk in the system evolve over time. As more people have access to aviation, the expectation grows that the system will be completely safe," he asserted.

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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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



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

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

PTI ■ JAMSHEDPUR

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



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

diversity targets, and employee-friendly policies conceptualised and executed from the apex level," he added. The official admitted that the initial planning stage was challenging due to inadequate knowledge about the transgender community. "However, we made a detailed plan and implemented it without any difficulty. To date, we have not received any complaint from either side of the employees since the first batch of transgender individuals was inducted following proper training in 2019," the official said.

On the productivity of these employees compared to the general workforce, he said transgender individuals perform better in some areas. Jaya Singh Panda, Chief Diversity Officer at Tata Steel, said, "We believe in nurturing a workplace where every person, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity, feels valued, respected, and empowered. Diversity is one of our greatest strengths, and continuing this practice is key to long-term success and innovation." Speaking on condition of anonymity, a transgender employee at the company's Jamshedpur plant said, "We feel very safe inside the company as coworkers are friendly, supportive, and cooperative. The company has also developed infrastructure including separate toilets for us." Another trans-female employee from Noamundi lamented that her parents never used to care about whether she ate or came home on time.

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

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

India's engineering major Megha Engineering & Infrastructure Ltd (MEIL) is happy to announce that it has emerged the lowest bidder for the Engineering, Procurement, and Construction (EPC) contract by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) under the Department of Atomic Energy. It is the highest value tender ever rolled out by the NPCIL. This prestigious project involves the construction of two 700 MW electrical reactors at Kaiga in Karnataka and represents a significant milestone in India's journey towards clean and reliable nuclear energy. The project marks a ground breaking moment with the introduction of the Quality Cum Cost-Based Selection (QCBS) methodology. This rigorous process ensures a meticulous

evaluation of technical expertise and cost-effectiveness for all proposals. The tendering process began in May 2023, with the technical bid opening in October 2023. The highly competitive bidding process saw participation from prominent industry leaders -- BHEL, L&T, and MEIL. MEIL emerged as the lowest bidder, demonstrating its exceptional technical capabilities and cost-efficiency by submitting the lowest bid of Rs.12,799.92 crores. "This contract represents the most significant project for MEIL and our strategic entry into the nuclear energy sector," said Ch Subbaiah, Director, MEIL. "MEIL's unwavering commitment to excellence and innovation has been recognised through this landmark achievement. The company is excited to contribute to India's self-reliance in clean energy solutions."

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

PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)

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



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

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



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

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

England coach Southgate targeted after 0-0 draw with Slovenia

AP ■ COLOGNE (GERMANY)

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

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



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

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

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



AP ■ NEW PORT

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

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

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

AP ■ EAST RUTHERFORD (USA)

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

Claudio Bravo, where Argentina's Giovanni Lo Celso and Chile's Nicolás Fernández were wrestling. Lo Celso kicked the ball off Bravo and it rebounded to Chile's Igor Lichnovsky, who tried to poke it wide. Lautaro Martínez, who entered in the 73rd, calmly one-timed that rebound into the roof of the net on Argentina's 21st shot. Players stood and waited for three minutes while the goal, Martínez's 26th for the national team, was confirmed in a video review. "We deserved the win. It was not an easy match," Argentina coach Lionel Scaloni said. "We managed to win at the moment least expected." Argentina leads Group A with six points, followed by Canada with three, and Chile and Peru with one each. The Albiceleste finish the first round against Peru at Miami Gardens,



Florida, on Saturday, when Canada meets Chile in Orlando, Florida. Playing a day after his 37th birthday, Messi frequently flaunted his talent to spin around and slalom through defenders before an adoring sellout crowd of 81,106 at MetLife Stadium, site of the 2026 World Cup final. Argentina dominated 22-3 in shots and 11-0 in corner kicks.

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

Canada beat Peru 1-0 at Copa America

AP ■ KANSAS CITY (USA)

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

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



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

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

INDIA LOOK TO BEAT KNOCKOUT STAGE NERVES

PTI ■ GEORGETOWN (GUYANA)

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

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

EYE REVENGE AGAINST ENGLAND IN T20WC SEMIS



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

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



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

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

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

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

PTI ■ GROS ISLET (ST LUCIA)

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



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

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

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

PTI ■ TAROUBA (TRINIDAD)

Asserting that their best is yet to come, South Africa coach Rob Walter said the team is not bogged down by near misses of the past and will "take confidence" from its performance in crunch moments on way to the ongoing T20 World Cup semifinals. In the first semifinal of the tournament here on Thursday, perennial dark horses South Africa will take on an Afghanistan team that has caused a flutter with its heroics in the tournament, the highlight of which has been the sensational win over heavyweights Australia. In the press-match press conference, Walter was asked if this could be South Africa's time after having battled their way past tricky opponents in testing conditions over the last few weeks. "Definitely it's always great to dream

and I think everyone in South Africa dreams of the time when a trophy gets lifted. No doubt that will happen. Whether it's going to be this week, that remains to be seen. "We're just going to try and play the best game of cricket that we can. And we still haven't played our best game yet," Walter told reporters. South Africa's success in prevailing in tricky situations, their Achilles Heel in the past, bodes well for the side chasing a maiden World Cup title triumph. "From the closeness point of view, yeah, we've managed to get over the line in quite a number of close games in the lead up to the semifinal, which for a team has been great for us. "We've potentially missed out on a few of those moments in the past, and this time around we managed to get over the line. So, we certainly take confidence out of that. "We still want to play our best

cricket in the key moments of the game tomorrow." Right from the 1992 World Cup, their first since readmission into international cricket after the apartheid ban, South Africa have either choked in those big semifinals of ICC tournaments or luck deserted them. Needless to say, the subject was broached during the interaction. "Look, I said, the near misses in the past, they belong to the people who missed them. To be honest, this team is a different team. We own whatever is ours to own. And so, our nearest reflection point is this tournament where we've managed to get over the line. So that's what we think about." Walter made no effort to play down the pressure and excitement of playing in a World Cup semifinal. "It's never just another game. I think that sort of rhetoric around semifinals is always untrue, or



people trying to play down the occasion. Certainly, we don't do that. It is a semifinal of a World Cup, and we appreciate that and we're looking forward to it." Instead, he played down the luck

trump luck, that's for sure. So, I'd like to think that." He lavished praise on Afghanistan's incredible run to the semifinals, the war-ravaged nation's first in a World Cup. "We're seeing Afghanistan in a T20 semifinal. It's awesome for the game of cricket. I love the way they play the game and the way they support it." How well does he know the Afghanistan team? Walter said, it's not difficult to study teams in modern cricket, with plenty of technology at its disposal. "Look, I mean, a number of their players play in a number of the leagues around the world. In this day and age, there's not too many players where there's no footage or no information about. "So, from an Afghanistan player point of view, we do have that sort of information. We've also got an entire World Cup, which they've also played seven games in.

"So, from that point of view, we've had the opportunity to watch games of cricket as near as last night and then also in the different leagues that the guys have played and played together. So, we're comfortable with our knowledge in it." Walter is wary of the threats Afghanistan could pose in the semifinal. "I think you, yeah, you would have seen it all in the last two days. I think they are a well-rounded team. Gone are the days where there is an area of the team that is not strong. They wouldn't be in a semi-final if that was the case. "You're talking about some world-class spinners. Everyone knows about the world-class spinners led by Rashid Khan. I mean, he's a top-class T20 spinner anywhere in the world. So, we know about that. But as I said, it's not a one-man show anymore. That's for the sake." Walter said.

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