

OPINION 6

**WILL BRITISH INDIANS
BACK RISHI SUNAK ?**

WORLD 8

**PALESTINIANS SURROUNDED BY
SEWAGE AND GARBAGE**

MONEY 10

**SENSEX BREACHES
79,000 LEVEL**

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BUMRAH 1000
TIMES BETTER THAN
ME: KAPIL DEV
12 SPORTS



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

CBI makes first arrest in NEET case

RAJESH KUMAR ■ NEW DELHI

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

under the banner of INDIA Bloc in its Parliament strategy meeting on Thursday evening decided to raise the NEET and NET paper leaks issue in both the Houses of Parliament on Friday. Continuing their protests on Thursday, members of NSUI (Congress's students' wing) barged into the NTA office in Okhla, raising slogans of "shut down NTA". After taking over the investigation, CBI made its first arrests in the NEET-UG paper leak case in Bihar, detaining two individuals from Patna, identified as Manish Kumar and Ashutosh. Both were produced before a special court in Patna which sent them to judicial custody. The CBI has registered six FIRs in the NEET paper leak case. Before the CBI arrests, the police had also taken at least nine person into custody in Bihar, Maharashtra and Delhi.

President Murmu slams Emergency

PNS ■ DELHI

In the backdrop of a spate of entrance and job related examinations paper leaks, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said the Government was fully committed to investigating the recent incidents and ensure that the guilty are punished.

Addressing the 18th Lok Sabha for the first time, Murmu said her Government was working to create an environment to enable youth of the country to dream big and realise their dreams. As she mentioned the steps taken by the Government on the education front, some Opposition members were heard shouting "NEET". Speaking about the recent general elections, Murmu said the whole world is talking about successful completion of India's Lok Sabha polls. "The world is witnessing that the people of India have elected a stable Government with clear majority for a third consecutive term," she told the joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament. In her first address to a joint sitting of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his third term, Murmu described the poll result as an endorsement of his Government's policies while ruing attempts to weaken people's faith in electoral process including EVMs, an apparent swipe at Opposition parties. It is like cutting the very branch on which "we all are sitting", she said. A day after Modi and Lok



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

Sabha Speaker Om Birla condemned the imposition of Emergency, Murmu too described in her speech the imposition of Emergency in 1975 as the "biggest and darkest chapter" of a direct attack on the Constitution and said the country triumphed over unconstitutional forces.

Opposition leaders, however, dismissed the President's address as a "script given by the Government" that was "full of lies" and also castigated the Government over the repeated mention of the 1975 Emergency. They said there is an "undeclared emergency" in the country and the Constitution is

being attacked under the Modi government. With the Opposition questioning the 'intentions' of the NDA Government as regards the Constitution making it a poll issue in the Lok Sabha polls, Murmu stressed the Government's unwavering faith in the Constitution and efforts to make it a part of "public consciousness". She slammed the Emergency as the "biggest and darkest chapter of direct attack" on the Constitution. In her 50-minute address, the President highlighted the government's measures in a range of sectors, from economy, defence and farming to the

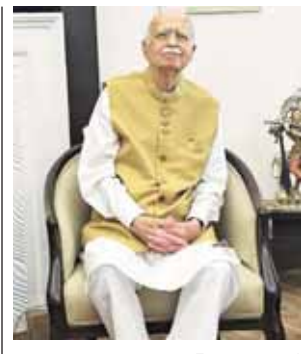
empowerment of different sections of society, and laid down its priorities in its third term, amid sporadic protests from opposition benches when she referred to issues such as paper leaks and matters related to the North East region. Though she touched upon some of the things promised in the BJP's manifesto like bullet trains and health insurance for senior citizens, there was no mention of a few of the major highlights of the party's promises such as the Uniform Civil Code and one-nation-one-election. "Many such reforms have taken place in the last 10 years which are greatly benefitting the nation

today. Even when these reforms were being taken up, they were opposed and attempts were made to spread negativity," she added.

On paper leaks, she said, "If due to any reason there is obstruction in examinations it is not appropriate. Sanctity and transparency are a must in government recruitments and examinations." There were incidents of paper leaks in some States earlier as well, the President said, stressing that there was need to rise above partisan politics and support the Government in taking strong steps at the national level. The President said Parliament has also made a strong law to check paper leaks and the Government is further working to reform the examination process.

Modi took to social media saying that President's address to both Houses of Parliament was comprehensive and presented a roadmap of progress and good governance. "It covered the strides India has been making and also the potential that lies ahead. Her address also mentioned some of the major challenges we have to collectively overcome to ensure a qualitative change in the lives of our citizens."

In an apparent message to opposition parties, who are numerically much stronger than the previous two Lok Sabha, Murmu pitched for healthy deliberations, saying opposition to policies and obstruction of parliamentary functioning are two different things.



File photo: PTI

LK Advani discharged from AIIMS

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Veteran BJP leader Lal Krishna Advani, who was admitted to the AIIMS here last night, was discharged on Thursday, a hospital official said.

The 96-year-old former deputy prime minister was evaluated by a team of doctors from different specialties including urology and geriatric medicine and is learnt to have undergone a minor procedure.

"Advani was admitted for old age-related issues and has been discharged," the AIIMS official said.

Advani was admitted to the old private ward of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) around 10.30 pm on Wednesday.

Demand for three Deputy CMs in Karnataka Govt takes new turn

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ BENGALURU/NEW DELHI

Amid growing demand to have three more Deputy Chief Ministers in Karnataka, Chandrashekhara Swami of Vishwa Vokkaligara Mahasamsthana Mutt has openly asked CM Siddaramaiah to step down and hand over the position to DK Shivakumar. Sources said the seer made this demand in the presence of both CM Siddaramaiah and DK Shivakumar during a public event, which was organised to mark the 515th birth anniversary of Bengaluru founder Kempe Gowda. In his address, Chandrashekhara Swami stated, "It is possible only if Siddaramaiah makes up his mind," requesting the present Chief Minister to consider the transition. "I urge Siddaramaiah to appoint DK Shivakumar as Chief Minister of the state. Despite others having held this position, DK Shivakumar has not yet served as Chief Minister. I believe it is within Siddaramaiah's power to make this decision, and I



Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah pays floral tribute during the 515th birth anniversary celebration of Bengaluru's founder Nadaprabhu Kempegowda, at Kanteerava Stadium, in Bengaluru PTI

request him to fulfill this request," he said. Echoing similar remarks, Channagiri Congress MLA Basavaraju V Shivaganga urged the party to make Shivakumar the chief minister "and then they can make a dozen people deputy CMs; there won't be any objections". "Party high command will decide regarding more DCMs, let them (ministers making the demand) be made DCMs if required, we have no objections... We

have seen Siddaramaiah as CM for five years (in the previous tenure) and in this tenure too we have seen him as CM for one-and-a-half years; all legislators have cooperated. It has been a practice in our party that the KPCC president becomes CM, but due to certain developments things changed this time," he said. When told that the CM post is not vacant, he said, "It is not vacant, similarly the DCM post is also not vacant. The post is occupied (by

Shivakumar)... Under Shivakumar's leadership as KPCC president, we have won nine Lok Sabha seats this time, from one last time. Making Shivakumar the chief minister will further benefit the party."

Reacting to Shivaganga's statement, Minister Rajanna said he is entitled to his opinion in a democracy, and ultimately it is the party that will decide if Shivakumar has to be made the chief minister. Earlier, reacting to the demand to have three more deputy chief ministers in Karnataka, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah had said the decision of the Congress high command is final. Some of the ministers have been pitching for DCM posts to be given to leaders from Veerashaiva-Lingayat, SC/ST and minority communities. Currently, DK Shivakumar from the Vokkaliga community is the only deputy chief minister in the Siddaramaiah cabinet. "Whatever the high command decides is final," Siddaramaiah told reporters in response to a question. A section within the Congress is said to be of the opinion that the statement

by ministers seeking three more DyCM posts was part of a plan by Siddaramaiah's camp to keep Shivakumar in check, amid talks that he might seek the chief minister's post after two-and-a-half years of this government's tenure. The alleged move apparently seeks to also counter Shivakumar's influence both in the government and party.

Cooperation Minister KN Rajanna, Housing Minister B Z Zameer Ahmed Khan, Public Works Minister Satish Jarkiholi and a few others — all considered close to Siddaramaiah — once again raised the pitch earlier this week for three more deputy CMs. The Congress had decided that Shivakumar will be "the only" deputy CM amid stiff competition between him and Siddaramaiah for the chief minister's post after the assembly election results in May last year. Seemingly expressing his displeasure over the ministers' demand, Shivakumar, who is also the state Congress chief, on Tuesday said the party would respond appropriately.

Rain over Northwest likely to intensify between June 28-30

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Rainfall is likely to intensify over the plains of Northwest India with heavy to very heavy rain likely to lash various regions including the national capital, Punjab and parts of Rajasthan from between June 28 and June 30 June, according to the India Meteorological Department (IMD).

This forecast comes as a welcome development promising relief from a rather long spell of intense heat that posed health risks to the people of all ages. The IMD announcement on Thursday said that heatwave conditions across the country have subsided.

Regionwise, the MET has forecast, fairly widespread to widespread light to moderate rainfall accompanied with thunderstorm and lightning very likely over Konkan and Goa, Madhya Maharashtra, Karnataka, Kerala &



Albert Hall Museum is reflected in the puddle after rain in Jaipur PTI

Mahe, Lakshadweep, Gujarat state, Madhya Pradesh, Vidarbha, Chhattisgarh while scattered to fairly widespread light to moderate rainfall over Coastal Andhra Pradesh and Yanam, Rayalaseema, Telangana, Marathwada and Tamil Nadu, Puducherry & Karaikal during next five days.

BONHOMIE



BSF personnel, along with villagers, offer 'chadar' at Baba Chamliyal shrine after the annual Indo-Pak fair organised on the two sides of the International Border (IB), in Samba district, on Thursday PTI

Free treatment for all above 70 under Ayushman

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Addressing a longstanding gap in healthcare for the elderly, President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday to Parliament on Thursday, spoke about the free health services provided by the Government and reiterated the BJP's poll promise of providing Ayushman Bharat coverage to everyone. "...the Government is going to take yet another decision in this area. Now all the elderly above 70 years of age will also be covered and get the benefit of free treatment under Ayushman Bharat Yojana," she

said. The Ayushman Bharat PMJAY is the largest publicly funded health insurance scheme in the world. It provides health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for hospitalisation for secondary and tertiary care. The expansion of the scheme to bring every Indian citizen aged 70 and above under the insurance cover will provide free treatment to those not covered under existing schemes like the Central Government Health Scheme and others. According to a study, there has been a significant gap in

healthcare coverage for the elderly with only 20 per cent of the people over the age of 60 years covered under health schemes such as CGHS, Employees State Insurance Scheme (ESIC), Rashtriya Swasthya Bima Yojna (RSBY), cooperative health insurance schemes, medical reimbursement from an employer or privately purchased health insurance. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had announced this during the manifesto's release in April before the Lok Sabha polls 2024, though the specific age bracket was not detailed in



the manifesto's fine print. It had also announced inclusion of all individuals from the transgender community besides senior citizens. The government's Ayushman Bharat health insurance scheme already provides coverage to 55 crores of the poorest people in the country, with the scheme being extended to the grassroots-level healthcare workers — the ASHA and Anganwadi workers — in the interim budget. Originally launched by Arun Jaitley, the then Finance

Minister, during the FY19 Union Budget, under the Ayushman Bharat scheme, hospitalisation costs, supports pre- and post-hospitalisation, medication, and more than 1,929 medical procedures including major surgeries and follow-up treatments are included. This initiative operates paperless and cashless at a vast network of public and private hospitals, ensuring broad and accessible coverage. Moreover, it covers the cost of follow-up care and treatment to ensure full recovery. President Murmu during her

address in Parliament also spoke of another key project of the government in the healthcare sector — Jan Aushadhi Kendras, a network of generic drug stores that offer medicine sometimes costing 50 per cent to 90 per cent less than the branded versions available in the market. After completing the goal of setting up 10,000 such stores across the country, the government increased the target to 25,000. "The opening of 25,000 Jan Aushadhi Kendras in the country is also progressing at a fast pace," President Murmu said.

Banks directed to expedite loans for government schemes

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

Following the directives of Deputy Commissioner Ananya Mittal, a meeting of the District Advisory Committee (DAC) and the District Level Review Committee (DLRC) of banks was held at the Collectorate Auditorium. The meeting, chaired by the Deputy Development Commissioner, focused on financial performance and the implementation of government schemes.

During the meeting, the Lead District Manager (LDM) presented the financial accounts for the fourth quarter of the fiscal year 2023-2024. It was reported that the annual deposit loan ratio of the banks reached 49.64%, slightly up from 49.05% the previous year. Notably, out of a total of 8,40,021 Pradhan



Mantri Jan Dhan Yojana accounts, 53,555 were opened with zero balance, and the Aadhaar seeding percentage stood at 88.49%.

The Deputy Development Commissioner emphasized the importance of adhering to government-centric schemes. Banks were instructed to

ensure the prompt disbursement of loans for approved applications, particularly in five key areas: improvement in agricultural loans within

the priority sector, increase in deposit credit, and successful implementation of the Mudra Yojana, PMEGP, and PMFME schemes. He also highlighted the need for successful operation of the ongoing CITIZENS CHOICE APY program, running from June 5 to July 31, 2024.

Bank officials were urged to expedite the processing of pending and approved loan applications, especially those related to government schemes. The Commissioner called for banks to be sensitive and ensure that eligible beneficiaries receive the benefits of these schemes. It was noted that some banks showed low performance in the priority sector, prompting a call for improvement. Additionally, with cooperation from the urban body, instructions were given to expedite loan distribution to

sidewalk vendors through camp mode initiatives.

Emphasizing the support for self-employed individuals in rural areas, banks were encouraged to provide financial assistance. Regarding loans for government schemes, banks were asked to offer clear information to applicants and ensure that any application rejections are justified. Furthermore, instructions were given to organize Financial Literacy Club camps for school children in rural areas and at Panchayat Bhawans.

The meeting was attended by DM GIC, District Animal Husbandry Officer Dr. Surendra Kumar, District Fisheries Officer Alka Panna, RBI Ranchi representative Roshan Kumar Ghirya, DDM NABARD, LDM, and all invited members and coordinators of various banks.

Satyam Kumar notified as DFO Medininagar

PNS : DALTONGANJ

A 2015 batch IFS officer Satyam Kumar has been notified by the state forest, environment and climate change department as DFO Medininagar.

Satyam Kumar is at present DFO Chaibasa. He is to take charge from Kumar Ashish who is deputy director south division of PTR and also incharge DFO Medininagar.

Satyam Kumar is to take charge here as DFO Medininagar when a very sensitive and critical issue of relocation of the residents of Kujuram village located in the core area of the tiger reserve Palamu, at Polpol is on.

56 householder of Kujuram are to be relocated. 23 have begun their resettlement at Polpol while 33 households are holding themselves back at Kujuram as these 33 are said to be in a state of indecision.

The relocation is voluntary and PTR is just facilitating it on the plea of the residents of Kujuram village.



Notified DFO Medininagar Satyam Kumar

Koebira MLA inaugurates Lamboi Bazaar Tand Akhara

PNS : KOLEBIRA

An Akhara inauguration program was organized in the Bazaar Tand of Lambai Panchayat under Jaldega block. In which a cultural dance and song competition was also organized. MLA Kalebira Assembly constituency inaugurated the Akhara and he was present in the programme as Chief Guest.

At the beginning of the program, all the guests were given a rousing welcome by the villagers present there, dancing and singing to the beats of drums and mandar.

The MLA said that the British policy of divide and rule is being implemented by BJP and BJP's ally Jharkhand Party which is Enos Ekka Family Party. "BJP and Jhapa have made it a conspiracy to destroy tribal identity by making the tribals fight among themselves. BJP and Jhapa say that those who have left their original religion and adopted other religions are not tribals. BJP and Jhapa say that those who have adopted other religions have forgotten

their language, culture, tradition. Such people should not be given the benefits of tribals by delisting them and should be removed from the tribal list. Since, if Christian tribals are delisted from the tribal list, then the area will no longer be a tribal-dominated area and the independent area will be out of the fifth list," he added.

"Since BJP and Jhapa formed the government together in 2005, they have been continuously accusing each other of dividing the tribals. Whereas these allegations are completely false, based on hatred and prejudice, it is a conspiracy to destroy the tribal community so that their rights to water, forest, land, minerals, property, reservation in jobs and reserved posts of public representatives can be snatched away and abolished," said Kongari.

The MLA said that BJP and Jhapa always try to ensure that no person from the tribal community represents the society. Enos Ekka always wants to keep the power with himself and his family, so that he can

always help in fulfilling the objectives sponsored by the BJP, he added.

"Keeping all these things in mind, today the people of the tribal community are here to give a clear message to the anti-tribal BJP and Jhapa that we tribals who believe in different religions, we are still keeping our culture and language alive," said Kongari.

In this program, many dance troupes presented their performances. For this, the MLA also distributed awards as an incentive. As prizes, Nagada, Mandar and traditional saree were given to all the members of all the participating teams.

In the program, District MLA representative cum Minority Congress District President, Ravel Lakra, Jaldega Block President, Sushil Jadia, MLA representative, Arjun Horo, State Secretary Minority Congress, Jamir Ahmed, Mukhiya Shishir Dang, Lambai Panchayat President, Shishir Lugun, Sosanti Topno, Samanti Samad, Padma Raja and others were present.

Symposium on Emergency of 25 June 1975 held in Hazaribag



AVINASH ANJAN : HAZARIBAG

On Tuesday Lok Samiti and Jagriti jointly organized a symposium titled "Emergency 25 June 1975 - A Disgrace to Democracy" at NBJK premises in Hazaribagh. The event commenced with the garlanding of Loknayak Jaiprakash's photograph. Mr. Satish Girija, President of Jharkhand State Lok Samiti, welcomed participants, reflecting on the dark period from June 25, 1975, to March 21, 1977, when many were unjustly imprisoned and deprived of fundamental rights. He shared his personal experiences of arrest and imprisonment during the Emergency, emphasizing Lok Samiti's role in ensuring democratic vigilance. Prof. KP Sharma stressed the importance of mandatory voting, equitable property distribution, and laws to uphold

fundamental duties. Ganesh Citu highlighted the inadequacy of MNREGA wages and other grassroots level government employees' wages, calling for discussions on the past to improve the future. Journalist Umesh Pratap and former JP movement agitator Mr. Harish Srivastava called for systemic reforms and remembered the student protests against the Emergency. Sumitra Devi and Sharda Devi discussed women's rights and public issues. In his presidential address, Advocate Swaroop Chand Jain recounted his arrest and the widespread injustice during the Emergency, urging continuous opposition to such undemocratic actions. Other speakers included Adhin Mahato, Dr. Vishwanath Azad, Awadhesh Pandey, and Devsharan Suman.

PAS Bokaro students participate in Epic Language Quiz

R SHARMA : BOKARO

The Pentecostal Assembly School buzzed with excitement on June 27th as students from grades 6-8 engaged in a thrilling Language Quiz. Organized by the English Department, the competition featured four spirited teams—JOY, HOPE, FAITH, and PEACE—vying for the top position. The quiz included various rounds such as the Warm Up Session, Grammar Gauntlet, Vocabulary Volcano, Authors & Books, and the Rapid Fire round, which tested students' grammar, vocabulary, literary knowledge, and quick thinking. Each team displayed remarkable knowledge and teamwork, much to the delight of the audience. Principal Dr. Karuna Prasad expressed immense pride, noting that the event was about celebrating language



and fostering friendly competition. Ultimately, the spirit of sportsmanship triumphed, making the event memorable for all. Admin Head Daniel Prasad the man behind every show also congratulated the participants, adding, "The

dedication and enthusiasm shown by our students today is commendable. It's events like these that help in honing their skills and boosting their confidence. We look forward to organizing more such events in the future."

Complete target of new community forest lease: DC

VINOD PRASAD : LOHARDAGA

A meeting of development coordination and internal resources was held on Thursday under the chairmanship of Deputy Commissioner Dr. Waghmare Prasad Krishna in the meeting room of the Collectorate. In the meeting, all the concerned departments were reviewed. Instructions were given to identify land for the remaining pending scheme under Veeer Shaheed Poto Ho Sports Development Scheme. In the review of Abua Housing Scheme, the status of housing construction and the installment transferred to the beneficiary was reviewed. The targets and achievements achieved in Kisko and Peshawar under



were reviewed. Instructions were given to identify land for the remaining pending scheme under Veeer Shaheed Poto Ho Sports Development Scheme. In the review of Abua Housing Scheme, the status of housing construction and the installment transferred to the beneficiary was reviewed. The targets and achievements achieved in Kisko and Peshawar under

PM Janman Yojana were reviewed.

The ITDA Project Director was instructed to coordinate with the Divisional Forest Officer and complete the target of the new community forest lease in the next 15 days. Instructions were given to send proposals for SC and Backward Class women's hostels in the district. The Land Reforms Deputy

Collector was instructed to identify land for new Anganwadi buildings. Necessary instructions were given to the Land Acquisition Officer and concerned zonal officers regarding the widening of Lohardaga Bypass Road and Kudu-Ghaghra Road. The Land Reforms Deputy Collector was instructed to identify the land for the football stadium to be constructed by the City Council. Deputy Development Commissioner Dilip Pratap Singh Shekhawat, Additional Collector Jitendra Munda, ITDA Director Sushma Neelam Soreng, all district level officers, all block development officers, all zonal officers and others were present in the meeting.

Truecaller Partners with HDFC ERGO to Launch Fraud Insurance

Truecaller, the world's leading global communications platform, in collaboration with HDFC ERGO, India's leading general insurance Company, is proud to announce the launch of Fraud Insurance, an initiative aimed at providing enhanced protection to consumers against digital communication frauds in India. The Fraud Insurance product will provide coverage up to INR 10,000 to Android and iOS users across India.

SILENT AUCTION GENERATES FUNDS FOR TRIBAL SOCIETY



PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

In a remarkable demonstration of altruism and community engagement, the XLRI community has successfully raised over 2.1 lakh rupees through a Silent Auction organized by the CII Yi committee. This substantial amount is being donated to the Friends of Tribal Society, marking the third consecutive year of this philanthropic endeavor. President Rajesh Mittal and Abhishek Garg

were present to receive the cheque on behalf of the organization. The Silent Auction saw the entire XLRI community, including students (both juniors and seniors), committees, and faculty members, coming together to offer items such as dinners, tutoring sessions, guitar lessons, books, paintings, and more. These items were then bid on and purchased by XLRI students, embodying the spirit of giving. All proceeds from the auction are donated, with

neither the CII Yi committee nor the item offerers retaining any share.

"We are delighted and honored to present this amount to the Friends of Tribal Society, an organization that tirelessly works for the upliftment of tribal communities through education in remote areas," said the spokesperson from XLRI. "This donation is a way for XLRI students to give back to the community and truly work for the greater good."

Smriti Gupta, the Secretary of CII Yi at XLRI, expressed her gratitude, stating, "We extend our heartfelt thanks to the Dean Administration and the Associate Dean Student Affairs for their unwavering support in helping the committee with all their endeavors and making this event possible. Their guidance and encouragement have been instrumental in the success of this initiative."

2 good Samaritans honoured in Bokaro

PNS : BOKARO

In the presence of Deputy Commissioner Vijaya Jadhav, two Good Samaritans were honored during a meeting of the Road Safety Committee held in the office chamber of the District Collectorate. During the district road safety committee meeting, Deputy Commissioner Vijaya Jadhav recognized Bermo block resident Rohit Kumar and Chandrapura resident Kanhaiya Kumar. These two Good Samaritans were acknowledged for their prompt actions in transporting road accident victims to the hospital during the crucial golden hour. The commendation letters were jointly presented by District Transport Officer Vandana Shejwalkar, Sub-Divisional Officer Chas Om Prakash Gupta, and Sub-Divisional Officer Bermo Ashok Kumar. It is notable that the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways has initiated the Good Samaritan scheme. Under this scheme, Good Samaritans are rewarded and given commendation letters for providing immediate assistance to save lives in fatal accidents and ensuring the victims receive medical treatment within the golden hour by transporting them to the nearest hospital/CHC/trauma center.

The primary objective of this scheme is to inspire the general public to assist road accident victims in emergencies and motivate others to save innocent lives.



District Coordination Committee Meeting: Swift action on land transfer and infrastructure urged by district officials

PNS : JAMSHEDPUR

A meeting of the District Coordination Committee was held under the chairmanship of District Magistrate cum Deputy Commissioner Ananya Mittal at the Collectorate Auditorium. The primary focus of the meeting was to enhance coordination between various departments to expedite the implementation of development schemes and ensure their completion within the stipulated timelines.

The District Magistrate emphasized the need for swift resolution of land transfer issues related to infrastructure construction, highlighting the importance of prioritizing these issues to avoid delays. The officials were directed to ensure that all schemes are completed within the set timelines, with regular monitoring of progress through field visits.

In the review of rural development schemes, the District Magistrate stressed that every village and Panchayat should have ongo-



ing schemes, with at least five schemes operational in each Panchayat to boost employment opportunities. BDOs were tasked with daily monitoring of muster rolls and labor engagement. Detailed reviews were conducted on the progress of several key schemes, including the Birsra Hari Gram Yojana, Veeer Shaheed Poto Ho Yojana, Birsra Irrigation Well Enhancement Scheme, Abua Awas, and the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana Gramin. Women associated with Sakhi Mandals through

JSLPS were encouraged to increase their involvement in these schemes. The officials were instructed to expedite the implementation of approved schemes and ensure timely disbursement of funds to beneficiaries to facilitate the timely completion of projects.

The District Magistrate urged all officials to ensure that 100% of the funds from the 15th Finance Commission are utilized effectively. Employees were instructed to be present in Panchayat Bhawans during

scheduled times to inform villagers about various schemes and help them connect to these schemes. Any issues related to drinking water and electricity supply in government schools or Anganwadi centers were to be resolved promptly through coordination between Block Development Officers and the relevant departmental officers.

In the review of the cycle distribution program, all BDOs were directed to provide bicycles to all children enrolled in class 8 as soon as possible and submit a report to the Deputy Commissioner's office. Additionally, if any students faced issues in receiving scholarship amounts due to errors in their bank accounts, these should be resolved through coordination with the banks. Awareness about the Gurji Student Credit Card Scheme was to be raised among students, enabling them to take advantage of this scheme for higher education after class 12. Under the PM-ABHIM scheme, the construction of

building-less health sub-centers, primary health centers, and other health centers was discussed. The progress of the Panchayat level medicine shop scheme was also reviewed, with an emphasis on achieving a 100% target. Ensuring adequate availability of medicines in hospitals, the presence of doctors and staff, and maintaining cleanliness in hospital premises were also highlighted.

LRDC and COs of both subdivisions were directed to hold regular court sessions to expedite land-related cases and ensure timely execution of mutation applications. Any rejection of applications should be accompanied by valid reasons.

The meeting also included reviews of the Graveyard's Pucca Fencing Scheme, Sarna, Masna, Jaherthan and Hadgadi Development Scheme, Tribal Culture and Art Center, Forest Rights Act, and the Residential School Renovation Scheme. Instructions were given for the timely execution of applications sent to blocks for the

verification and payment of the second installment to selected beneficiaries of the CMEGP. A camp mode operation was suggested for adding beneficiaries and opening escrow accounts under the Chief Minister's Livestock Development Scheme, ensuring that 100% of beneficiaries receive livestock within ten days.

A committee was formed to strengthen the Panchayat Knowledge Centers, with directives given to BDOs to enhance infrastructure in Panchayat buildings, including opening accounts and purchasing necessary materials. Regarding forest rights leases, it was directed to approve as many community leases as possible to benefit groups collectively.

Deputy Development Commissioner Manish Kumar, PD IDTA Dipankar Chaudhary, Additional Deputy Commissioner Rohit Sinha, along with officials from all district-level departments, Sub-Divisional Officers, BDOs, COs, and technical department officials attended the meeting.

Govt to provide full support to investors in Health Sector: CM

CM lays foundation of Gautam Medical College and Hospital at RSCC

PNS : RANCHI
Strengthening the health care system of the state is the priority of the government. Efforts are continuously being made to improve the health structures in this direction. Chief Minister Champai Soren, while addressing the foundation stone laying ceremony of Gautam Medical College and Hospital at Ranchi Smart City Campus today, expressed the commitment of the state government to provide good medical facilities to the people of the state. He said that the opening of this medical college in the private sector is an important step in the

field of health system. This initiative will definitely give a new direction to the development of the state. The CM said that in view of the health related requirements in Jharkhand, there is a need to open more and more medical colleges and hospitals. Even today, there are very few medical colleges and hospitals in this state as compared to the standard level of the country. In such a situation, the state government is continuously making efforts for new medical colleges and hospitals here. I am confident that in the coming days, many medical colleges and hospitals will open here on private or PPP mode,



Chief Minister Champai Soren during the foundation stone laying ceremony of Gautam Medical College and Hospital at Ranchi Smart City Campus in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

which will benefit the people here. The CM said that investors, who are willing to invest here in any sector including health, will be

fully supported by the government. They should submit their proposal; the government will consider it with all seriousness. Investors will also be given incentives as per the government policy. He said that this step is being taken to accelerate the pace of development in the state. The CM said that even today people turn to other states and big cities for better treatment. Due to expensive treatment there, their financial condition is adversely affected. The government is trying to provide better and modern medical facilities to the people here in their own state. In this

direction, medical colleges and various hospitals are being upgraded. Along with providing the latest testing machines, availability of doctors is being ensured. The CM said that with the opening of new hospitals, people will not need to go out for treatment. The CM said that it is our commitment to provide good health facilities to the people from rural and remote areas of the state to cities. Health centers are being strengthened in this direction. The government is working for this, but private medical colleges and hospitals will also have to come forward for this. They should provide health facilities

in rural areas so that villagers do not have to go here and there for treatment. With everyone's cooperation, we will be successful in providing good health facilities to the people of the state. Additional Chief Secretary to Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Principal Secretary of Health, Medical Education and Family Welfare Department Ajay Kumar Singh, Secretary to the Chief Minister Arwa Rajkamal, Vice Chancellor of Ranchi University Dr. Ajit Kumar Singh, Chairman of Right Path Foundation Dr. Abhijeet Kumar were specially present in the foundation stone laying program.

CM fiat to complete drinking water projects in time

PNS : RANCHI
Chief Minister Champai Soren today conducted an in-depth review of the latest work progress of the Department of Drinking Water and Sanitation in the presence of officials in the Jharkhand Ministry. In the meeting, the CM directed the officials to complete all the small and big schemes taken under the Jal Jeevan Mission (Har Ghar Jal) Gramin within the stipulated time frame. The CM directed that all those houses where tap water has been supplied, review whether there is availability of water in the taps installed under the scheme or not. The CM said that it should be ensured that water reaches all the houses covered under Jal Jeevan Mission. He said that the Jal Jeevan Mission is an important scheme to provide tap water to every house. Our government is trying to solve the drinking water problem with full readiness. The CM directed the officials to complete all the water supply projects run by the government on time and pay special



Chief Minister Champai Soren holds a review meeting with the senior officials at Project building in Ranchi on Thursday. PNS

attention to the availability of accessible drinking water in the state and quality in connection works. The CM told the officials to work with special caution so that the operation and maintenance of rural water supply schemes is done in a better way. He said that the work progress of new tube wells approved at the Panchayat level should be accelerated. Repair work of defunct tube wells should also be done. The CM said that people should not face any problem of pure drinking water during the rainy season.

He directed the officials that in the past few days, such news has been received from various sources that in some districts of the state, villagers are bringing drinking water from water sources like Chuna, pond, well etc, in the areas where such news is being received, ensure the arrangement of pure drinking water by conducting an investigation there. Whatever complaints related to drinking water are being received by the department, resolve them at any cost. The CM directed the officials to complete all such multi-rural water supply schemes which have been targeted to be completed by the month of September-October 2024, by the month of July-August 2024 at all costs. The Chief Minister said that there are some mountains within the state from where the waterfall falls, water supply schemes can also be taken at those places. Identify such mountains and make an action plan. The CM directed the officials to link the toilet construction scheme being built under the Swachh Bharat

Mission (Rural) with the Abua Housing Scheme. He directed the officials that under the Swachh Bharat Mission, only Rs 12 thousand is given for the construction of toilets, the officers should also review whether a quality toilet can be built in this amount or not. The CM said that his government is committed to giving a better toilet to the beneficiaries of Abua Housing which can be used for a long time. While reviewing the biogas plant constructed under the Gobardhan Project, the CM directed the officials to widely publicize this scheme in rural areas. Inform the villagers about the benefits of the biogas plant. State Chief Secretary L. Khiangte, Additional Chief Secretary to the Chief Minister Avinash Kumar, Secretary of Tejal and Sanitation Department Rajesh Sharma, Secretary to the Chief Minister Arwa Rajkamal, Chief Engineer-in-Chief Brajnandan Kumar, Chief Engineer, Headquarters Shishir Kumar Soren and other senior officials were present in the meeting.

NEET PAPER LEAK - CBI TEAM SCRUTINIZES OASIS SCHOOL DOCUMENTS

PNS : RANCHI
In the NEET paper leak case, the CBI team on Thursday took Dr. Ehsan Ul Haq, the principal of Oasis School to school premises for further investigation. The CBI team scrutinized documents at school premises. Earlier on Wednesday, the CBI team reached the principal's residence and questioned him for about three hours. After this, the CBI team reached the school with the principal at around 12 o'clock. Here also the principal and the teachers and staff of the school involved in the conduct of the examination were questioned. During the interrogation that lasted till five in the evening, the team also inspected room number 18 of the school. After this, the employees of Blue Dart, the courier company that delivered the question paper, were brought to the school and questioned. After the investigation, the principal of the school and another person from the school were arrested by the CBI. After the arrest, both were brought to Charhi CCL Guest House and questioned overnight. Let us tell you that the half-burnt question paper



located at Kallu Chowk, Mandai Road, Hazaribagh. After this, the EOU team went to Hazaribagh and verified it. In the verification, prima facie tampering has been found in the packing trunk. Meanwhile, in another development the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) as part of its ongoing probe into the alleged irregularities in the NEET-UG exam, on Thursday arrested two individuals from Bihar's Patna, sources said. These are first arrests made by the federal probe agency in the NEET-UG alleged paper leak matter. According to the sources, the two accused allegedly provided safe space to the aspirants prior to the exam who were also aided to prepare for the exam.

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JMM leader, his son-in-law held in shootout case

PNS: RANCHI
In the case of the shootout that took place on the evening of June 26 in Doranda, Ranchi, the police have arrested JMM leader Azam Ahmed and his son-in-law Ali Khan. The police have also recovered weapons and live bullets from them. It is worth noting that the firing incident was carried out last night due to a dispute near the government well located in Manirola of Doranda police station area. However, there were no casualties in this incident. After the shootout, a police team was formed on the instructions of SSC Chandan Sinha. The formed team took action and arrested JMM leader Azam Ahmed and his son-in-law Ali Khan within 24 hours. There has been a dispute over land between Javed and Ali's factions for the last several years. People of both factions are claiming that the 20 decimal land is their land. The firing incident was carried out due to this land dispute. People present at the spot allege that Mo. Ali fired the shot, and Ranchi police have expelled him from the district. Apart from this, Arif, Shahbaz and others have been accused of firing the shot. Police are investigating the CCTV footage installed at the spot so that evidence can be found against those who fired the shot. Police say that a few days ago, there was a dispute between these groups in Mistri Mohalla in Doranda police station area. On that day too, there was an incident of firing and a child was shot.

Outreach Programme organised by IT Department in City



PNS : RANCHI
The Income Tax Department (Intelligence & Criminal Investigation), Ranchi organised an outreach programme related to financial transaction statement at the Central Revenue Building, Ranchi, in which District Registrars and Deputy Registrars of Ranchi, Gumla, Lohardaga, Ramgarh and other districts were present along with officers and employees of other financial related reporting institutions. As a part of the outreach programme discussion for filing financial transaction statement and redressal of related problems and requesting the taxpayers to timely file accurate details of financial transaction statement as per Annual Information Return. The panelists included Jitan Ram, Deputy Income Tax Director (Intelligence and Criminal Investigation) Ranchi, k Pramanik Assistant Income Tax Director and Rajiv Kumar Income Tax Officer. Income Tax Officers informed the related financial reporting institutions that the cases of not filing SFT or filing wrong SFT are under investigation and notices are being issued to them. Income Tax Inspectors Rajiv Kumar, Prafulla Kujur, Senior Tax Assistant, Ravi Kumar, Tax Assistant, Ankita Rani and other staff members of Income Tax Department (Intelligence & Criminal Investigation), Ranchi were also present during the programme.

CID rescues woman patient kept hostage for 15 days in Hospital

PNS : RANCHI
A team of CID and Sadar police station reached Genetic Hospital in Ranchi on Thursday and freed a female patient, who was held hostage for 15 days. At the time of writing the news, the woman has been sent home. A woman from Khunti was held hostage for 15 days in Genetic Hospital in Ranchi. The woman's husband alleged that the hospital management was not allowing his wife to go home due to non-payment of the outstanding amount. She is not being discharged from the hospital. The woman was pregnant. On May 28, an auto driver took her to a private hospital instead of RIMS. After the delivery, the child was sent home but the woman remained in the hospital. The husband has said in his complaint that for 15 days, his wife was neither being treated nor was she being given food there. The woman's husband complained about this to CID DG Anurag Gupta. After that a team of CID and a team of Sadar police station reached the hospital and freed the woman from there. The woman has been sent home. At present the hospital management is being questioned in this matter. According to the news received, an FIR will be registered after this.

State residents get relief after light rainfall

PNS : RANCHI
The people of the State Capital got some relief from scorching heat when light rain brought the mercury down on Thursday evening. Monsoon is yet to enter many districts of Jharkhand. People of these districts are eagerly waiting for the monsoon. On Thursday, many districts including Lohardaga, Simdega, Gumla received good rains. However, rain was not seen in various areas of the Stat, people here are suffering from humid heat. Gumla received the highest rainfall of 92 mm. During the last 24 hours, Simdega, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Giridih, Dumka etc. districts also received good rains. However, there was no rain in the last 24 hours in Ranchi and surrounding areas. There was humid heat here on Wednesday. The Ranchi Weather Center had forecasted that there is a possibility of rain at some places on Thursday. "Whereas, from Friday the activity of monsoon will increase and rain has been predicted in many parts of the state including Ranchi. According to the Meteorological Department, during the last 24 hours, Simdega received 65.0 mm of rain, Netarhat Latehar 52.5 mm, Hazaribagh 52.2 mm, Dhanbad 45.8 mm, Giridih 35 mm, Nala Dumka 25.2 mm and East Singhbhum 35.4 mm of rain. Apart from this, Ramgarh, Bokaro, Godda and Garhwa received five to



ten mm of rain and some other places received scattered rain," it added. The Meteorological Department also informed that light to moderate rainfall may occur in various areas of the state even today. On June 28, heavy rain is expected in Gumla, Lohardaga, Latehar, Palamu, Chatra, Garhwa. Whereas on June 29, heavy rain is expected in Ranchi, Koderma, Ramgarh, Hazaribagh, Lohardaga, Latehar, Chatra, Palamu, Garhwa. In-Charge Ranchi Weather Center, Abhishek Anand said that the monsoon is still weak. "The southwest monsoon is expected to advance in three to four days. A turf is passing through Jharkhand and going towards Manipur. Its effect is expected. On June 27, light rain may occur at some places. On June 28 and June 29, rain may occur at many places. On June 30, all places in the State may receive rain. By June 28, winds may also blow at a speed of 30 to 40 km at many places. Heavy rain is expected in the Palamu area on June 30," he added.

PMLA court extends judicial custody of Soren till July 11

PNS : RANCHI
The special Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA) Court in Ranchi on Thursday extended the judicial custody of former Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren by fourteen days. Soren is lodged in Birsu Munda Central Jail in Ranchi on charges of money laundering through land scam. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) executive president and former Chief Minister Hemant Soren along with 11 other accused persons lodged in Jail in connection with money laundering scam were produced before the special court in Ranchi through video conferencing on Thursday following which, the court extend-

ed the judicial custody of all the accused persons for another 14 days. The Court asked these accused persons to be produced in court on July 11, till then they will be in jail. Apart from Hemant Soren, suspended revenue sub-inspector of Bargai zone Bhanu Pratap, JMM leader Antu Tirkey, Md. Saddam, Md. Afsar Ali, Vipin Singh, Priyaranjan Sahay, Irshad Akhtar, Shekhar Kushwaha, Md. Irshad, two employees of Kolkata's Registrar of Assurance Tapas Ghosh and Sanjit Kumar also appeared before the court through video conferencing arrested in connection with money laundering scam are in jail. ED had arrested Hemant Soren on January 31 after sever-

Plan to attack ED officials in Ranchi

The central government has responded to a question asked in Parliament related to the attack on ED officials and criminal conspiracy. In the reply, it has been told that Prem Prakash, lodged in Birsu Munda Central Jail in Ranchi, had conspired to attack the ED officials. He was arrested on 25 August 2022. Prem Prakash had planned to attack the ED investigating officer and implicate the officials in trivial cases. In fact, Ranchi MP (now Minister of State for Defense) Sanjay Seth had asked questions related to the

action of ED and Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) during Zero Hour in the Lok Sabha on 11 December 2023. The answer to the same has been sent by the then Minister of State for Finance Pankaj Chaudhary. The Finance Ministry has said in response that Prem Prakash had hatched a conspiracy on the strength of his high reach, including some officials, to influence the ongoing investigation against him. Investigations related to illegal mining and land scam are still going on against him.

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Online Counselling Notice for Admission 2024-25

Phase	Online registration & Counselling Fee	Choice Filling	Seat Allotment Date	Selecting (Freeze/Float/Withdraw) option	Date of Reporting in Allotted institution by the candidate
I	25-06-24 TO 27-06-24	25-06-24 TO 25-06-24	03-07-24	03-07-24 TO 04-07-24	04-07-24 TO 08-07-24
II	09-07-24 TO 10-07-24	09-07-24 TO 11-07-24	16-07-24	16-07-24 TO 17-07-24	17-07-24 TO 21-07-24
III	25-06-24 TO 27-06-24	25-06-24 TO 25-06-24	03-07-24	03-07-24 TO 04-07-24	04-07-24 TO 08-07-24

Schedule For Second Year Admissions (Lateral Entry) B.Tech & B.Pharma

Note:
1- Admission to 1st year of pharmacy courses will start soon.
2- Online Counseling will be based on Freeze/Float/Withdraw option. For more Information visit the University Website www.uktech.ac.in or Scan the QR

Please Scan for Registration

Adv No - 1022 UTUI/Counselling-2024/24-25 Dated 26.06.2024 Registrar

Rahul takes umbrage at Speaker's Emergency reference

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi met Speaker Om Birla on Thursday and voiced his displeasure over the reference to Emergency made by the chair, saying it was "clearly political" and could have been avoided. It was a courtesy call during which Gandhi also raised the issue of Emergency being invoked by the Speaker in the House, Congress General Secretary KC Venugopal told reporters after the meeting in the Parliament House.

"It was a courtesy call. The Speaker declared Rahul Gandhi as the Leader of Opposition and after that, he along with other INDIA bloc partner leaders met the Speaker," he said. Asked whether Rahul discussed the issue of Emergency being raised in the House, Venugopal said, "We discussed so many things about Parliament functioning. Of course, this issue also came up."



"Rahul ji, as Leader of Opposition, informed the Speaker about this issue and said it could have been avoided from the Speaker's reference. That is clearly a political reference, it could have been avoided," the Congress leader said.

Separately, Venugopal also wrote to Birla, expressing the party's displeasure over the bringing of the resolution on the Emergency as his first task after assuming office. "I am writing this in the context of a very grave matter

impacting the very credibility of the institution of Parliament. Yesterday, that is 26 June 2024, at the time of offering felicitations on your election as Speaker Lok Sabha, there was a general camaraderie in the House as such occasions generate," he said in his letter to the Speaker.

"However, what followed thereafter, which is a reference from the Chair after your acceptance speech, in regard to the declaration of Emergency half a century ago, is deeply shocking. Making such a political reference from the Chair is unprecedented in the annals of the history of Parliament. This coming from the Chair as one of the 'first duties' of a newly elected Speaker assumes even graver proportions.

"I, on behalf of the Indian National Congress, express our profound concern and anguish over this travesty of Parliamentary traditions," Venugopal said in his letter to the Speaker. Soon after his election as Lok

Sabha Speaker, Birla had on Wednesday set off a firestorm by reading out a resolution condemning the imposition of Emergency as an attack on the Constitution by then prime minister Indira Gandhi, an act that triggered vociferous protests by Congress member in the House.

Birla recalled that it was on June 26, 1975, that the country woke up to the cruel realities of Emergency when the Congress government jailed opposition leaders, imposed many restrictions on the media and also curbed the autonomy of the judiciary.

Rahul Gandhi's meeting with the Speaker was the first after he assumed charge as the Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha.

He was accompanied by Samajwadi Party's Dharmendra Yadav and Dimple Yadav, DMK's Kanimozhi, NCP's (SP) Supriya Sule, RJD's Misa Bharti and TMC's Kalyan Banerjee, RSP's NK Premachandran and some others.

Row after SP MP seeks removal of Sengol from LS

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Samajwadi Party (SP) MP RK Chaudhary has triggered a controversy after he demanded that the sacred 'Sengol' - a historic sceptre with a deep Tamil Nadu connection - be replaced with the Constitution in the Lok Sabha, prompting reactions from the Opposition and BJP leaders.

In a letter to pro-tem Speaker Bhartruhari Mahtab, Chaudhary called Sengol an "anachronistic symbol of monarchy" in a democratic India. Explaining his reasoning, Chaudhary stated, "Sengol means 'Raj Dand'. It also means 'Raja ka Danda'. After ending the princely order, the country became independent. Will the country be run by 'Raja ka danda' or the Constitution? I demand that Sengol be removed from Parliament to save the Constitution."

The BJP, meanwhile, has hit back at the Opposition over its 'sengol' offensive. "The Samajwadi Party earlier attacked and abused Ramcharitmanas and now Sengol, which is part of Indian culture and particularly Tamil culture. The DMK must clarify if they support this insult of 'sengol', a senior BJP functionary was reported as saying. Tamil Nadu BJP chief K



Annamalai questioned whether this was the INDIA bloc's collective stance on the issue and said that DMK's comments on the same are awaited. He said that the Sengol was in fact banished by former Prime Minister Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru and reinstated to its rightful place by PM Narendra Modi. "We wish to educate the ill-informed Samajwadi Party MP that Sengol is a symbol of righteousness, which was banished by Pandit Nehru and is restored to its rightful place today by PM Narendra Modi," he wrote on X (formerly Twitter). The Tamil Nadu BJP chief further mentioned that the Sengol was reinstated in the New Parliament building in the presence and with the blessings of the Adheenams from Tamil Nadu. BJP spokesperson Shehzad Poonawalla questioned, "If it was a symbol of monarchy, then why did the first Prime Minister Nehru accept it? Was he accepting that symbol and monarchy?" LJP (Ram Vilas) MP Chirag Paswan also responded, asserting that Congress and

Congress-led governments have always tried to misrepresent historical symbols. "These people cannot do positive politics... They only engage in politics of division," he said. Amid the controversy, SP chief Akhilesh Yadav explained that Chaudhary was highlighting that Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not bow before the Sengol after taking his oath in the Lok Sabha. He suggested that the PM, having bowed before the Sengol during its installation, might have forgotten to do so when taking the oath. Senior Congress leader and MP B Manickam Tagore echoed the Samajwadi Party MP on the 'sengol' row. RJD MP Manoj Jha and Lalu Prasad Yadav's daughter Misa Bharti also supported SP's MP on Sengol controversy. The war of words between the Opposition and the BJP over Sengol, is not new. At the time when it was installed in the new parliament building, it had already turned into a bone of contention between the ruling side and a large section of the Opposition. The Opposition's 'sengol' strategy unfolds alongside the INDIA bloc's focus on the Constitution to challenge the third Narendra Modi government. Throughout this session, the Constitution has been prominently displayed at Opposition meetings.

Govt to strengthen IITs, NITs, IIMs, AIIMS, says President

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday said the government is aiming to strengthen institutions like IITs, NITs, IIMs and AIIMS and increase their numbers as per requirement. In her address to the joint sitting of Parliament, Murmu said that earlier students who studied in Indian languages faced an unfair situation but with the implementation of the new National Education Policy (NEP), the injustice has been removed.

"In the past 10 years, 7 new IITs, 16 IITs, 7 IIMs, 15 new AIIMS, 315 medical colleges and 390 universities have been established. It is the endeavour of the government to further strengthen these institutions and increase their numbers as per requirement," Murmu said. The president said the government is working towards establishing a digital university as well.

"Programmes like Atal Tinkering Labs, Start-up India and Stand-up India have helped improve the capacity of youth of the country. It is due to these efforts that today India has become the third largest start-up ecosystem in the world," she added. Murmu noted that the government is creating an enabling environment for the youth of this country to dream big and realise those dreams.

"Earlier, the students who studied in Indian languages faced an unfair situation. With the implementation of the new National Education Policy, my government has been able to remove this injustice. Now students can take up engineering courses in Indian languages," she said.



Murmu cited self-attestation of certificates and abolishing interviews for certain categories of government job recruitment as key good governance initiatives of the government.

"In the last 10 years, every such obstacle which caused trouble to our youth has been removed. In the past the youth had to run from pillar to post in order to get their certificates attested. Now their self-attestation is sufficient. Interviews for recruitment into Group-C and Group-D posts of the central government have been abolished," Murmu said.

"Whether it is competitive examinations or government recruitment there should be no reason for any hindrance. This process requires complete transparency and probity," Murmu said.

She said the Lok Sabha poll has been an election of trust in policy, intention, dedication and decisions. Murmu said it has been an election of "trust in a strong and decisive government", "trust in good governance, stability and continuity" and "trust in honesty and hard work" among others.

"It is a stamp of approval for my government's mission of service and good governance undertaken in the past 10 years. It is a mandate that the work of making India a developed nation continues uninterrupted and India attains its goals," the president said.

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She said it is the continuous endeavour of the government to provide right opportunities to the youth of the country to demonstrate their talent.

"Whether it is competitive examinations or government recruitment there should be no reason for any hindrance. This process requires complete transparency and probity," Murmu said.

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Four per cent Indians lacked access to urban centres in 2020: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

In 2020, only four per cent of India's population lacked access to an urban centre — a densely populated built-up area — and three per cent could access only towns within an hour of travel, according to a study published in the journal Nature Cities. The research, led by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, Italy, looked at over 30,000 urban centres around the world and, based on the number of people accessing them, classified them as one of four — town, small city, intermediate city or large city.

While a town had about 20,000 people living there, accessing basic facilities, such as groceries and primary education, a large city housed more than a million people and offered the most diversified facilities, including an airport, according to the research.

Even with half the world's population living outside the urban centres, the authors found "substantial interconnectivity" as 92 per cent were able to access them in under an hour of travel, which could be seen as 'commuting distance'. Of the 92 per cent, 55 per cent were found to live in or near a town or a small city, while 37 per cent were found to live in or near an intermediate or a large city.

Further, in 2020, 41 per cent of the 7.8 billion world population could access multiple tiers (such as a town and a small city) within an hour's travel, while 57 per cent and 64 per cent (five billion) were able to



reach multiple tiers by travelling for two and three hours, respectively. However, many locations close to a town or a small city can also access a higher tier within an hour's travel and, therefore, the authors summed up that two-thirds of the people around the world (five billion) live within an hour's travel from either an intermediate or a large city providing more specialised services. They added that "large cities are less relevant than smaller ones in regard to engaging populations outside their urban core". The study represented the "first systematic worldwide delineation of city-regions across multiple urban tiers," according to lead author Andrea Cattaneo, Senior Economist at FAO.

"This unprecedented dataset (spanning across 213 countries and territories) offers a powerful tool for understanding how societies are organised around urban centres, unlocking new insights for sustainable development strategies," Cattaneo said.

In a warmer world and with commuting on the rise, such studies are increasingly imperative for assuring energy-efficient and equitable transportation, as well as effective natural resource management," the lead author said.

Six new Rajya Sabha members take oath

PNS ■ NEW DELHI

Six newly-elected MPs from Bihar, Jharkhand and Madhya Pradesh took oath as members of Rajya Sabha on Thursday. Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar welcomed the new members. The first among those who took oath was Congress MP Akhilesh Prasad Singh (Bihar), followed by Sarfaraz Ahmad of JMM and Pradip Kumar Varma of the BJP (both Jharkhand).

BJP leaders Banshilal Gurjar, Maya Naroliya and Balyogi Umeshnath also took oath as members of the Upper House. They represent Madhya Pradesh. All BJP members and the lone Congress members took oath in Hindi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Leader of the House J P Nadda and Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge were present in the House during the oath-taking.

On the day Nadda was appointed leader of the upper House, the first day of the 264th session of the Upper House. "Shri Jagat Prakash Nadda has been appointed as the Leader of the House in the Council of States," Chairman Jagdeep Dhankhar announced, amid thumping of desks. BJP had earlier decided to appoint Nadda as the leader of the



House and the same was conveyed to the Rajya Sabha. Later Modi introduced his Council of Ministers in the Rajya Sabha, amid clapping and thumping of desks.

The prime minister had introduced his Council of Ministers in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday after the election of the speaker.

Nadda, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge and Congress leader Sonia Gandhi were among those present in the House. Thursday was the first day of the 264th session of the Rajya Sabha. The House met after President Droupadi Murmu addressed a joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament.

The President's address was also tabled in the Rajya Sabha. The House will pass a Motion of Thanks on the President's address after a discussion.

NDA open to having Deputy Speaker in LS, say sources

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is open to the idea of having a Deputy Speaker in the Lok Sabha, sources said on Thursday, stressing that a call on the matter will be taken later.

They said the NDA has not rejected the Opposition's claim on the post but criticised its insistence that its nominee should be given the position, saying such a precondition could not be considered during the speaker's election.

There was no Deputy Speaker during the previous Lok Sabha.

It may be noted the Government's efforts to reach a consensus on Om Birla's choice as the speaker fell through as the opposition INDIA Bloc insisted that it should be promised the position of his deputy as per "convention".

The NDA's brains trust had said that the opposition's demand can be considered when the election for the deputy speaker takes place but it should not impose any precondition.

Desi firms met 70 per cent defence needs last year, says President Murmu

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

Nearly 70 per cent of the total procurement of defence forces was sourced from domestic firms last year, President Droupadi Murmu said on Thursday, outlining the government's focus to boost production of critical military hardware within India.

In an address to a joint sitting of Parliament, Murmu said modernisation of the armed forces is essential for a strong India and that reforms in the military should be a continuous process to ensure that it maintains "supremacy" during wars.

Listing steps to boost domestic defence production, she said the reforms undertaken in the sector have resulted in India now manufacturing defence equipment worth more than Rs one lakh crore.

The president said the BrahMos missile deal with the Philippines has strengthened India's standing in the defence export sector.

"Modernisation of our armed forces is essential for a strong India. Reforms in our armed



forces should be a continuous process so that our forces maintain their supremacy during wars," she said. "Guided by this, my Government has introduced many reforms in the defence sector in the last 10 years. Reforms like CDS (Chief of Defence Staff) have given new strength to our defence forces," she said.

Murmu also highlighted the government's focus on boosting domestic defence industries and how it is working on developing two defence corridors - one in Uttar Pradesh and the other in Tamil Nadu.

"It is a matter of joy for all of us that last year nearly 70 per cent of the total procurement of the defence forces has been sourced from Indian manufacturers only," she said.

"Our defence forces have decided not to import over 500 defence items.

All these arms and defence related equipment are being procured only from Indian companies," Murmu noted. The president also talked about India's rising defence exports. "In the last decade, our defence exports have increased more than 18 times to the level of Rs 21,000 crore," she said.

"The BrahMos Missile defence deal with the Philippines has strengthened India's standing in defence export sector," Murmu said.

Two weeks back, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said the government will work assiduously to increase the defence exports to Rs 50,000 crore by 2028-29 from current Rs

21,083 crore. Under a 2022 deal, India is supplying three batteries of the missiles, their launchers and related equipment to the Philippines.

In April, India delivered the first batch of the missile to the Philippines.

The president mentioned various steps initiated by the government to make the defence sector self-reliant.

"The defence sector has greatly benefited from the reforms in ordnance factories. More than 40 ordnance factories have been restructured into seven defence sector enterprises, resulting in improvement of their capacity and efficiency," she said.

"It is due to such reforms that India is now manufacturing defence equipment worth more than Rs one lakh crore," she added.

The value of defence production in 2022-23 crossed the figure of Rs one lakh crore for the first time, according to the defence ministry.

The president said the government has always given priority to the needs of the personnel in the armed forces.

Loneliness raises risk of stroke among older adults

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Chronic loneliness isn't just tied to cardiovascular risks anymore; a new research shows it significantly increases stroke risk in older adults-up to 56 per cent higher for those chronically lonely. This highlights the urgent need for targeted interventions to tackle this growing public health issue, particularly in India too where the prevalence of loneliness among elderly has been found to be as high as 13.4 per cent, as per a survey. The present study by Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, published in eClinicalMedicine emphasises the importance of addressing loneliness to improve long-term health outcomes and prevent serious conditions like stroke.

"Loneliness is increasingly considered a major public health issue. Our findings further highlight why that is," said lead author Yenee Soh, research associate in the Department of Social and Behavioral Sciences.

"Especially when experienced chronically, our study suggests the loneliness may play an important role in stroke incidence,

which is already one of the leading causes of long-term disability and mortality worldwide. This study is one of the first to examine the association between loneliness changes and stroke risk over time. Using 2006-2018 data from the Health and Retirement Study (HRS), the researchers assessed the association between changes in loneliness and stroke incidence over time. During 2006-2008, 12,161 participants—all adults ages 50 and above who never had a stroke—responded to questions on the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale, from which the researchers created summary loneliness scores. Four years later (2010-2012), 8,936 participants who remained in the study responded to the same questions again. The researchers then placed the participants into one of four



groups according to their loneliness scores across the two time points: "consistently low" (those who scored low on the loneliness scale at both baseline and follow-up); "remitting" (those who scored high at baseline and low at follow-up); "recent onset" (those who scored low at baseline and high at follow-up); and "consistently high" (those who scored high at both baseline and follow-up). Among the participants whose loneliness was measured at baseline only, 1,237 strokes occurred during the follow-up period (2006-2018). Among the participants who provided two assessments of loneliness over time, 601 strokes occurred during the follow-up period (2010-2018).

"If we fail to address their feelings of loneliness, on a micro and macro scale, there could be profound health consequences," said Soh. Dr. Jyoti Kapoor, Founder-Director and Senior Psychiatrist, Manasthali who is not related with this study too expressed concern that loneliness has significant effects on the brain, influencing various aspects of cognitive and emotional functioning. Acute loneliness can change the neurochemistry of the brain, turning off the dopamine neurons and causing some degeneration in the brain. Chronic loneliness often leads to elevated levels of stress, which in turn raises cortisol levels in the body. Persistently high cortisol can result in high blood pressure, a major risk factor for stroke, she added. The inflammation associated with chronic stress and the impaired immune response due to loneliness further exacerbates the risk of stroke, she added.

JR Gupta, from the Senior Citizens Council of Delhi, highlighted the alarming findings of the study, emphasizing how loneliness profoundly impacts health, particularly among older adults. He stressed the urgent need for increased attention and support for this critical public health issue, especially for those in their later years.

Dushyant rules out alliance with BJP in Haryana

PTI ■ CHANDIGARH

Jannayak Janta Party leader Dushyant Chautala on Thursday said his party is ready to support the Congress in the Rajya Sabha election and ruled out any alliance with the ruling BJP in Haryana before or after the next Assembly polls.

The JJP's four-and-a-half-year alliance with the BJP came to an end after the saffron party replaced Manohar Lal Khattar with Nayab Singh Saini as chief minister in March.

In the recently held general elections, JJP fielded candidates in all 10 Lok Sabha seats in Haryana but drew a blank. Congress' Rajya Sabha MP Deependar Singh Hooda won the Rohtak Lok Sabha seat, leading to a seat in the Upper House of Parliament becoming vacant.

At his first news conference here after the announcement of Lok Sabha results, Chautala, the former Haryana deputy chief minister, was asked how much of a benefit or loss his party had because of its earlier tie-up with the BJP.

The recent Lok Sabha results have shown that "what BJP had to face, we too had to face that", Chautala said and admitted that his JJP also bore the brunt of farmers' anger. Dushyant Chautala, the son of



JJP chief Ajay Singh Chautala, said the party will in the next few weeks seek feedback from its workers and based on that would decide on entering into an alliance with any party other than the BJP for the Assembly polls slated to be held in the next few months. Ruling out any truck with BJP, he said, "I can make it clear there is no point of going with the BJP in future. Even after elections, we will not have any truck with BJP", he said. Dushyant Chautala claimed that the JJP's loss in the Lok Sabha polls was "because of our alliance with the BJP".

About a Rajya Sabha seat from Haryana falling vacant following Deependar Hooda's election to the Lok Sabha, the JJP leader said his party is

ready to support the Congress for the Upper House polls, provided they field a prominent personality or an eminent sportsperson as a candidate.

The Congress is the main opposition in Haryana but leader of opposition Bhpinder Singh Hooda has remarked that other outfits should join hands and field a candidate as the grand old party does not have the required numbers to put up its candidate, Chautala said. He said, "If the Congress really wants to take on the BJP, they should not look at win or loss. If they put up any candidate which is acceptable, we will support them. The candidate can be any prominent personality or

eminent person, including from the sports field and he can be joint candidate of the opposition."

But if the Congress actually does not want to put up its candidate when polls are held for the Rajya Sabha seat, it would indicate that "there is match-fixing between Congress and BJP", Chautala said.

"If our party had around 30 MLAs like the Congress, we would have definitely fielded our candidate without thinking about winning or losing."

About the Assembly polls in the state, Chautala said the JJP will hold meetings with party workers from July 5 to seek feedback and to rebuild the organisation. "The focus is to

make our organisation ready for the assembly poll," he said. In reply to a question, Chautala alleged both the BJP and the Congress were working to weaken regional parties.

Hitting out at the Nayab Singh Saini-led BJP government in Haryana on the law-and-order front, the JJP leader demanded the state should have "a full-time home minister".

To another question, Chautala reiterated that the Saini government has been in the "minority" after three Independents withdrew their support last month.

"As against the Assembly's effective strength of 86, BJP has the support of 43, but the majority mark is 44," he said, adding the JJP has written to the Haryana Governor, urging him to hold a floor test.

Chautala also said that party leaders will meet the Assembly Speaker and seek the disqualification of two JJP MLAs.

The JJP recently moved a petition before the Haryana Assembly Speaker, seeking the disqualification of two party MLAs — Ramniwas Surjakhara and Jogi Ram Sihag — under the anti-defection law for allegedly indulging in anti-party activities.

Dibrugarh grapples with flash floods after heavy rain

PTI ■ DIBRUGARH



Dibrugarh town has been grappling with flash floods, with most streets waterlogged after heavy rains on Thursday morning. Mancotta Road, one of the busiest stretches in this Upper Assam town, is now submerged in knee-deep water. For decades, Dibrugarh, located on the banks of the Brahmaputra, has faced persistent flash flooding and waterlogging due to an unplanned drainage system, residents alleged.

"Every year, waterlogging occurs mainly because of poor drainage system. Although the department concerned constructs roads in every ward, they refrain from digging up drains adjacent to these roads," said Parimal Banik, a resident of Dibrugarh.

An official, speaking on condition of anonymity, pointed out that encroachments near the Dibrugarh Town Protection (DTP) drain prevents

rainwater from flowing out of the town, resulting in waterlogging in several areas.

"We need a scientific drainage system that can flush out water from the town. Dibrugarh is one of the oldest towns in Assam and is worst hit during the rainy season," said Ismail Ahmed, a retired professor. Meanwhile, the flood situation in Assam continues to improve, although almost

1.4 lakh people are still affected across seven districts as of Wednesday evening. Cachar is the worst hit, with nearly 75,000 people affected, followed by Karimganj with more than 56,500 people and Dhemaji with almost 3,800 people reeling under floodwaters. So far, 41 people have lost their lives in the state in this year's floods, landslides, and storms.

Nine candidates in fray for bypoll in MP's Amarwara Assembly seat

PTI ■ BHOPAL

Nine candidates will fight for the Amarwara (ST) assembly seat in Madhya Pradesh, where a bypoll was necessitated after the Congress leader representing the constituency crossed over to the BJP and resigned, an official said on Thursday.

After the last date for withdrawal of nominations on Wednesday, nine candidates remained in the fray for the bye election, which will be held on July 10, the state's Chief Electoral Officer Anupam Rajan said. Seven candidates withdrew from the contest on Wednesday, he said.

The main contest here is between the former Congress MLA-turned-BJP leader Kamlesh Shah and



the grand old party's Dheeran Shah Invati, sources said. In a major setback to the Congress ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, Shah, a three-time party MLA from Amarwara seat under Chhindwara Lok Sabha constituency and a confidante of former chief

minister Kamal Nath, had resigned on March 29 and joined the ruling BJP soon after.

Shah later resigned from the membership of the state assembly, paving the way for the bypoll on Amarwara seat.

In the November 2023 assembly elections, Shah, on a Congress ticket, had BJP's Monika Manmohan Shah Batti by a margin of 25,086 votes from Amarwara. After 1972, the BJP won from the Amarwara seat twice in 1990 and 2008, while the Congress won nine times. Tribal outfit Gondwana Gantantra Party (GGP) bagged this seat once in 2003.

The bypoll will be held on July 10 and votes will be counted on July 13, the official said.

Section of people creating disturbances in Assam: Himanta

PTI ■ NALBARI

Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma on Thursday accused a section of people of creating disturbances in the state following the recent Lok Sabha election results, directing police to handle such forces firmly.

"We have observed that certain people are trying to disrupt peace in the state through serious criminal activities," Sarma told reporters after a cabinet meeting here.

The CM highlighted five incidents, including recent rape cases in Mazbat, Dhekiajuli, and Dudhnoi, along with mob violence in Barpeta and Kokrajhar villages. "While such crimes had significantly reduced over the past three years, there has been a troubling spike in incidents over the

last month," he remarked. "During the last three years, such crimes had declined remarkably, but in the last one month, there has been a series of incidents and this is a matter of concern," he said. Sarma claimed that a "pattern has emerged with a certain section indulging in these crimes. Police have been directed to take stern action against the perpetrators of such crimes".

"We are concerned about the rise in such incidents. We will find an appropriate solution to it," he added.

He said his cabinet colleagues have visited the affected areas and stressed the need for analysis into the emergence of these criminal elements.

Sarma had earlier said the Lok Sabha results in Nagaon and Dhubri, both minority dominated constituencies and won by the Congress,

indicate a weak social fabric and if there is no resistance to this, it will prove to be dangerous for Assamese society.

Regarding the change of the investigation officer (IO) in the Assam Public Service Commission (APSC) cash-for-jobs scam, Sarma said the special court has given the order and we have to abide by it. "I have, however, asked for an examination of the judgment as the court has the right to summon those considered to be accused by them instead of shifting the onus to the IO," he added.

The court, in a recent order, had directed the additional director general of CID, who is heading the Special Investigation Team, to engage a new investigating officer to conduct further investigation into the case and submit the report within three months.

Two women Naxalites with cumulative bounty of ₹16 lakh surrender in Gadchiroli

PTI ■ GADCHIROLI

Two women Naxalites carrying a cumulative reward of Rs 16 lakh on their heads surrendered in Maharashtra's Gadchiroli district on Thursday, an official said.

A release from the office of the superintendent of police identified them as Bali alias Rambatti alias Zarina Narote (28) and Shashikala alias Chandrakala alias Manisha Uike (29), both platoon party committee members of the proscribed Communist Party of India (Maoist) company number 10.

The surrender of these two women, with rewards of Rs 8 lakh each on their heads, comes within a week of DKSZCM (Dandkaranya Special Zonal Committee Member) Giridhar, who was the district's top Naxalite, and

his wife Sangheetta Usendi laying down arms.

"A total of 21 cases are registered against Narote, comprising 10 related to encounters, one each of arson and abduction and nine related to other offences. Uike has eight cases against her name, of which six are related to encounters," the official said. As part of the surrender-cum-rehabilitation policy of the state government in force since 2005, the two will get Rs 5 lakh each, adding that authorities will take all efforts to help those who will shun violence, join the mainstream and embrace democracy, he said.

Due to intensified anti-Maoist efforts of the police, 19 hardcore Naxalites have surrendered in Gadchiroli since 2022, police said. The action against Left Wing Extremism is being carried out.

J'khand Govt blacklists cable car operator, two years after Trikut tragedy

PTI ■ RANCHI

The Jharkhand government has blacklisted Damodar Ropeways and Infra Ltd (DRIL), the cable car operator at Trikut Hills in Deoghar district, for five years and slapped a fine of over Rs 9 crore on it, a senior official said on Thursday.

A major cable car accident at Trikut Hills in April 2022 had claimed three lives, while over 60 people were rescued after being stranded mid-air for about 46 hours in joint operations by NDRF, Army, Air Force and administration. The 766-metre Trikut ropeway is India's highest vertical ropeway, according to the state's tourism department.

An enquiry committee was set up by the Department of Tourism to probe into the reasons behind the accident. There were allegations of negligence on the part of DRIL leading to the accident. The company, however, denied the charge.

"The Jharkhand Tourism Development Corporation (JTDC) board has taken a decision to blacklist DRIL for five years. It has also imposed a penalty of over Rs 9 crore on it," Tourism Secretary Manoj Kumar told PTI.

JTDC managing director has issued a letter to the company to deposit Rs 9.11 crore, failing which a civil damage suit will be filed against DRIL, he said.

DRIL Managing Director Aditya Chamaria said the action was "unfortunate" and



against natural justice and claimed they were not given a chance of hearing either by the enquiry committee or by the JTDC.

"We are moving the court against that order. The allegations of negligence are totally false. We are running 14 ropeways all over India. ...It (DRIL) holds 30-40 per cent market share of the ropeway industry. Even the enquiry committee mentioned in its report that it is the rarest of the rare category of defect. On the basis of the rarest category of defect, how can you blacklist a firm? It is a harsh decision," Chamaria told PTI.

He claimed that there is no basis for a Rs 9 crore penalty that includes Rs 5 crore repair and maintenance charges.

A government report mentions that on April 10, 2022 the passenger Ropeway at Trikut Hill, Near Deoghar (Jharkhand) stopped while in operation leaving 59 passengers stranded mid-air on the Ropeway.

Mizoram Govt to buy four agri products to help farmers

PTI ■ AIZAWL

Mizoram's Zoram People's Movement (ZPM) government has decided to purchase four agricultural items produced by local farmers to economically uplift the farming community.

Agriculture Minister PC Vanlalruata said that the government will buy ginger, turmeric, chilli and broomsticks from the local farmers.

Buying these items from the farmers was a poll promise of the ZPM which came to power in the northeastern state in December last year. Vanlalruata said that the government will fix a support price for each crop besides taking steps to arrange markets so that they can sell

their products at a rate higher than the support price. The minister said that focus is being made on market linkage and the process is expected to be completed within three years.

After three years, farmers are expected to have direct contact with buyers, which will reduce the government's involvement in the process. He said that a database will be developed on farmers and the quantity of crops they expect to produce a year. According to an assessment, over 10 lakh quintals of ginger are expected to be produced by farmers across the state next year, Vanlalruata said. He said that the government will float tender through local agricultural societies to find buyers for the purchase of crops especially ginger.

The government will also make agreements with large companies so that they buy ginger from Mizoram farmers since the tender or auction system will not be sufficient to sell all the produce in the state. Processing plants will be set up for sorting, grading and drying ginger, besides making paste of the root and ale, a beverage. Vanlalruata also urged farmers to form Multipurpose Primary Agriculture Credit Societies in their villages. The ZPM leader said that all processes of buying and selling agricultural products will be executed through local agriculture societies.

The ZPM swept the state assembly polls in December last year, dethroning the incumbent Mizo National Front.

Heavy rain lashes Kerala, orange and yellow alerts sounded across multiple districts

PTI ■ THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Heavy rains lashed many parts of Kerala on Wednesday night, prompting authorities to urge people to take utmost care while travelling through hilly and inundated areas.

An orange alert has been issued by the India Meteorological Department (IMD) in seven districts, and a yellow alert in the remaining districts in the state for Thursday.

An orange alert means very heavy rain of 11 cm to 20 cm and a yellow alert means heavy rainfall between 6 cm and 11 cm.

Heavy rain with maximum surface wind speed up to 40 Kmph (in gusts) is very likely to occur in many places at Kannur, and Kasaragod districts, the Kerala State



Disaster Management Authority said on Thursday. Relief camps have been opened in Pathanamthitta and Alappuzha districts to accommodate people affected by the floods.

Authorities have declared holidays for all educational institutions, including professional colleges, in Pathanamthitta, Idukki, Wayanad, Ernakulam, Kottayam, and Alappuzha districts, and educational institutions in the Iriti taluk of Kannur district on Thursday.

In Kasargod, two young men had a miraculous escape this morning when their car was swept away while crossing a river via a bridge inundated by floodwaters.

While heavy rains continue in the state, widespread damage has been reported in the lower areas of Kottayam district due to the wind that accompanied the rain.

In the Kumarakom area, billboards, sheet roofs of houses and institutions, and water tanks fell on the ground.

Civil services aspirant turns burglar; held

PTI ■ DURG

A 28-year-old man, who aspired to get a government job but failed to clear any civil services exams despite multiple attempts, tried to extort Rs 10 lakh from a couple after he happened to shoot their intimate video at their place in Durg district of Chhattisgarh, police said.

The accused, Vinay Kumar Sahu, had gone to the couple's house early last month with the intention of burglary, but instead of stealing anything, he recorded the couple's intimate moments using his mobile phone and demanded money from them for not making their video public, they said.

The accused was arrested on June 25 based on the complaint lodged by the couple, residents of Ahiwara village located in the Nandini police station area. Sub Divisional Officer of Police (Dhamdha) Sanjay Pundhir said.

"On June 17, the male victim complained to the police that he received a video clip on their WhatsApp from an unknown number that showed him and his wife in an intimate moment. The man also told the police that some unidentified person called him and demanded Rs 10 lakh for not releasing the clip on social media," he said. A joint team of Nandini police and Anti-Crime and Cyber Unit



(ACCU) was constituted to probe the matter. Police zeroed in on the accused based on technical evidence and CCTV footage, and arrested him, he said. "During his interrogation, Sahu told the police that he had burgled the couple's house twice earlier and he had sneaked in again on May 5 with the same intention. But instead of stealing something, he allegedly recorded the intimate moments of the couple on his phone.

A few days later, he sent the video to the couple and started blackmailing them by demanding Rs 10 lakh for not making it viral," the official said. Three mobile phones and

as many SIM cards were recovered from the possession of the accused, he said. Sahu is a resident of Ahiwara. After completing his bachelors in engineering, he was preparing for civil services.

He tried to secure a government job and appeared for various exams, including state Public Service Commission, but failed to clear it every time, Pundhir said. To meet his needs, Sahu started stealing mobile phones and other articles in his own locality, he added. The accused was booked under section 384 (punishment for extortion) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC), the SDOP said, adding that further probe is underway.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

Steady leadership

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

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



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

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

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

PICTALK



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

Will British Indians back Rishi Sunak?

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



VIVEK SHUKLA

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

Hinduja, Lakshmi Mittal, and Swaraj Paul are some prominent Indian-origin individuals who feature in the list of Britain's richest people. Rishi Sunak and his wife Akshata Murthy, daughter of Infosys founder N.R. Narayan Murthy, were ranked 245th in the Sunday Times list of Britain's wealthiest individuals released in May. Historically, Indian immigrants in Britain have leaned towards the Labour Party. It was during the Labour government that India gained independence from British rule. However, recent surveys suggest a growing inclination towards the Conservative Party, the main rival to the Labour Party.

Vinod Chavan, a writer residing in London since the 1970s, believes that Hindu voters in Britain may vote en masse for the Conservative Party in the upcoming elections. This news could be a relief for Sunak and his Conservative Party. It's important to understand that when we talk about Indians in Britain, we also include those who have settled in the country from East Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and other places. Sunak's family settled in Britain from Kenya in the 1960s, although his ancestors originally hailed from Punjab. There is also a belief that a large number of Indian residents in Britain became supporters of the Conservative Party after



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



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

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

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

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

India's assertive foreign policy and global aspirations

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

Prime Minister Modi's foreign policy initiatives have consistently underscored India's assertiveness and strategic clarity from his first term in 2014 to his current third term in 2024. This period has seen India take decisive actions such as the Balakot Airstrike in 2019 and the banning of TikTok, aimed at countering China and safeguarding national interests. These measures have not been welcomed by neighboring states like China and Pakistan, particularly in light of incidents such as the Galwan clash in 2020, which resulted in the loss of Indian soldiers and prompted a bolstering of border security and a significant increase in the defense budget from approximately Rs 4,73,378 crores in 2020 to Rs 6,21,540 crores presently.



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

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



PUSHKAR PRIYADARSHI

OM BIRLA RE-ELECTED AS LS SPEAKER

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

Abhijit Roy | Jamshedpur

AFGHANISTAN REACH SEMIFINALS!

Madam — Giant Australia is out of the T20 World Cup 2024 semifinals, while Afghanistan has secured a place, demonstrating the unpredictable nature of cricket and sports. No one can foresee the winner or loser; sometimes, luck plays a significant role. If Bangladesh had won, Australia might have advanced to the semifinals. We often hear quotes like 'well-coordinated team effort', 'try and try again, you will win at last', 'rise from the ashes like a phoenix' and 'focus on the issue and proceed in an organized and scientific manner'. Today, we witnessed these principles in action by Afghanistan's well-coordinated

Dynamic Opposition in Parliament



The swearing-in ceremony for Members of Parliament at the 18th Lok Sabha was noteworthy, with the opposition members prominently holding mini copies of the Constitution while taking their oaths. Leaders like Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh Yadav, Dimple Yadav, Avadesh Prasad, and Rakibul Hussain were seen holding these mini constitutions as they swore in as elected MPs. This gesture underscores the opposition's commitment to active governance and to reminding the government of its constitutional responsibilities.

By swearing with the Constitution in hand, the opposition members are enhancing their personal commitment to the nation. Their duty is now twofold: to fulfill their roles as MPs and to safeguard constitutional values, reminding the government of its duties. Time will tell who upholds these values. Meanwhile, it is encouraging to see a dynamic opposition in the Indian Parliament to provide a robust counterbalance to those in power. Kirti Wadhawan | Kanpur

PVS Sreelekha | Secundrabad

SEDENTARY LIFESTYLE

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

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

Bhagwan Thadani | Mumbai

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FIRST COLUMN

TOWARDS BETTER TIES WITH BANGLADESH

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



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

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

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

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



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

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

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

Macron's calls for snap polls to thwart ultra right

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



NILANTHA ILANGAMUWA

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

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

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



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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

India-Arab green strategic partnership: Pioneering sustainable development

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

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

Historical and Cultural Context: India's historical ties with Arab countries stretch back centuries, rooted in cultural exchanges, ancient trade routes, and shared values. Today, this relationship goes beyond cultural affinity to encompass strategic economic partnerships and mutual geopolitical interests. The



PADMALOCHAN DASH

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

Objectives and Strategic Imperatives: At its core, the partnership seeks to harness the strengths of both India and Arab countries in advancing green technologies, renewable energy solutions, water man-

agement practices, and climate resilience strategies. India, as a rising global player in renewable energy deployment and innovation, offers practical solutions to the challenges faced:

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

Water Security and Management: Water scarcity poses a critical challenge for both regions, exacerbated by

climate change and rapid urbanisation. India contributes practical solutions through its expertise in sustainable water management practices. Initiatives like community-driven water conservation and wastewater treatment can be adapted and shared with Arab countries facing similar challenges.

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

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

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

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

Technological Innovation: Collaboration in research and development (R&D) is crucial for advancing green technologies. India's vibrant start-up ecosystem and research institutions contribute to innovations in areas such as green hydrogen production and bat-

tery storage technologies. Joint innovation hubs and technology parks facilitate technology transfer and accelerate the adoption of sustainable innovations. Despite its potential, the Green Strategic Partnership faces several challenges:

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

Technological and Financial Barriers: Scaling up renewable energy projects and adopting advanced environmental tech-

nologies demand substantial investments and technological advancements.

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

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

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

Calm returns in Bolivia after apparent coup attempt

AP ■ LA PAZ

Calm returned to Bolivia's capital on Thursday after troops led by a top general stormed the presidential palace, then quickly retreated, tumultuous scenes that threatened to pitch the long-troubled South American democracy into chaos. The nation of 12 million watched in shock and bewilderment Wednesday as Bolivian military forces appeared to turn on the government of President Luis Arce, seizing control of the capital's main square with armoured personnel carriers, crashing a tank into the palace and unleashing tear gas on protesters who flooded the streets. The country's army chief, Gen. Juan Jose Zuniga, addressed a scrum of TV reporters from the palace, vowing to "restore democracy," replace the cabinet, and free political prisoners. But

as opposition leaders condemned the apparent coup attempt, it became clear that the coup had no meaningful political support. Arce refused to relent and named a new army commander, who immediately ordered troops to stand down, ending the rebellion after just three chaotic and head-snapping hours. Hundreds of Arce's supporters rushed the square outside the palace, waving Bolivian flags, singing the national anthem and cheering. "Here we are, firm, in the presidential palace, to confront any coup attempt," Arce said after facing down Gen. Zuniga, calling on Bolivians to mobilize in defense of democracy. Authorities swiftly arrested Zuniga as his soldiers retreated from central La Paz, crushing the apparent coup attempt and defusing the latest crisis in a

country wracked by a bitter political rivalry and economic crisis. "Their goal was to overturn the democratically elected authority," Government Minister Eduardo del Castillo told journalists in announcing the arrests of Zuniga along with an alleged co-conspirator, former navy Vice Adm. Juan Arnez Salvador. The short-lived rebellion followed months of mounting tensions between Arce and his one-time ally, former President Evo Morales. Bolivia's first Indigenous president, Morales remains a global leftist icon and towering figure in national politics years after mass protests that prompted him to resign and flee in 2019 — an ouster his supporters view as a coup. Since returning from exile, Morales has staged a dramatic political comeback. Threatening

to challenge Arce in 2025 primaries, Morales has sparked an unprecedented rift in their ruling socialist party. The feud has paralysed efforts to resolve a spiralling economic crisis, with the country's foreign currency reserves diminishing, its natural gas exports plummeting and its currency peg collapsing. As police in riot gear set up blockades outside the presidential palace, Bolivians — though no stranger to political conflict in a country that has witnessed some 190 coups by one count — thronged ATMs, formed long lines outside gas stations and emptied shelves in grocery stores and pharmacies. Flanked by the newly appointed military chiefs late Wednesday, Defence Minister Edmundo Novillo sought to reassure the rattled public and shed light on what had happened.

Police clash with protesters in Kenya as military patrols streets

AP ■ NAIROBI

Kenyan police on Thursday clashed with protesters in Nairobi before planned protests against a contentious finance bill, despite the president's decision not to sign it after the plans sparked deadly chaos in the capital and saw protesters storming and burning part of the parliament building. Protesters who said last week that they would march to the State House on Thursday say they still don't trust President William Ruto, who has said the tax hikes would be withdrawn and budget cuts would be made. Police have hurled tear gas canisters at groups of protesters attempting to congregate within the central business district. The military has been patrolling the city despite a Wednesday court order that suspended their deployment to support police during the protests. Deputy President Rigathi Gachagua on Wednesday urged the young protesters to call off planned protests and give dialogue a chance. The leaderless movement began online with young people demanding

that legislators reject the proposed tax hikes. It later morphed into calls for the president's resignation after the bill was passed. On Tuesday, thousands of protesters stormed Kenya's parliament, burning parts of the building and sending lawmakers fleeing. Police opened fire and at least 22 people were reportedly killed in the chaos. Activists were divided about the agenda of Thursday's protests. One protester, Boniface Mwangi, urged others to peacefully march to parliament road where protesters were killed to pay their respects. "Invasion of the State House isn't a solution," he wrote on X. But Francis Githo, one of the many activists mobilizing for the protests online, insisted that young people should march to the State House. Activists and others warned that the stakes were higher than in past protests, because Ruto vowed on Tuesday to quash unrest "at whatever cost". Analyst Javah Bigambo told The Associated Press that the discontent is partly because Kenyans don't trust the president to implement the austerity measures he

announced on Wednesday. "Kenyans still have a problem with the economy and wastage in government," he said. Bigambo said Ruto's U-turn should be a "lesson on humility" as his initial reaction on Tuesday was "not stately and full of emotions" further agitating protesters. He said the government should win back the populace by opening dialogue channels and ensuring a consultative budgeting process. Businesspeople in Nairobi were standing guard outside their shops on Thursday to prevent looting and vandalism, which took place during Tuesday's protests. Major roads leading to key government buildings, including parliament, have been blocked. Outside Nairobi, protests have been reported in Mombasa, Kisumu, Migori and other major towns. US Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Wednesday spoke with Ruto, thanking him for taking steps to reduce tensions. "The Secretary underscored the importance of security forces demonstrating restraint and refraining from violence and encouraged prompt investigations into allegations of human rights abuses," a statement read.

Lawyer accuses Prince Harry of destroying documents

London (AP): An attorney for the publisher of The Sun tabloid Thursday accused Prince Harry of engaging in "shocking" and "extraordinary" obfuscation by destroying evidence it was seeking in his lawsuit claiming that the newspaper violated his privacy by unlawfully snooping on him. Attorney Anthony Hudson said at High Court that the Duke of Sussex had deliberately destroyed text messages with the ghostwriter who penned his bestselling memoir, "Spare." A lawyer for Harry said News Group Newspapers was engaging in a "classic fishing expedition" by seeking documents they should have sought much sooner for a trial scheduled in January. "NGN's tactical and sly approach to disclosure wholly undermines the deliberately sensational assertion that the claimant (Harry) has not properly carried out the disclosure exercise," his attorney, David Sherborne, said in court papers. "This is untrue. In fact, the claimant has already made clear that he has conducted extensive searches, going above and beyond his obligations." Hudson said Harry had created an "obstacle course" to getting documents it was seeking from his former lawyer and staff when Harry was a working member of the royal family. "If the claimant wanted his documents from his former solicitors or from the royal household ... he would have got them," Hudson said. The hearing is the latest in Harry's battles against Britain's biggest tabloids over alleged phone hacking and hiring private investigators to use unlawful measures to dig up dirt on him. Harry is one of dozens of claimants, which had included actor Hugh Grant, alleging that between 1994 and 2016, News Group journalists violated their privacy through widespread unlawful activity that included intercepting voice-mails, tapping phones, bugging cars and using deception to access confidential information.

UK PM Sunak tries to override betting scandal in election campaign

PTI ■ LONDON



British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said he is "furious" about the scandal engulfing some of his Conservative Party candidates betting on the date of the general election, to be held on July 4, as the campaign entered its final week on Thursday. In the last televised debate before the polls on Wednesday night, Britain's first Prime Minister of Indian heritage went head-to-head with Labour's Keir Starmer and was clearly in attack mode as he challenged the Opposition leader eyeing his job over target issues such as taxes. "Mark my words," the 44-year-old prime minister said, pointing at Starmer, "your taxes are going up if he is in charge." Immigration was also high on the agenda, with both leaders trading blows over a lack of clear policy to tackle soaring illegal migrant figures, with Sunak cautioning voters to not "surrender" the country's borders to

Labour. While the overall media verdict was in his favour as he managed to hold firm during a large share of the fiery contest, the betting scandal continued to dominate the arguments. "You have to lead from the front on issues like this. When one of my team was alleged to have been involved and investigated by the Gambling Commission, they were suspended within minutes, because I knew it made it really important to be swift," said Starmer, with reference to the suspension of a Labour candidate who is

under investigation by the gambling watchdog for betting against himself winning. "The Prime Minister delayed and delayed and delayed until eventually he was bullied into taking action," the 61-year-old Starmer said. Sunak, who told the audience that he was "furious" and "frustrated" over the allegations, has also had to suspend two of his Tory candidates who are under investigation following an internal inquiry. "It was important to me that given the seriousness and the sensitivity of the matters at hand that they were dealt with properly, and that's what I've done," he stressed. It came as four protesters were arrested on suspicion of trespassing on the grounds of Sunak's constituency home in North Yorkshire, while he was away on the campaign trail. North Yorkshire Police said it had arrested the men "within one minute of them entering the grounds" of Sunak's home near

Northallerton. "The prime minister thanks the police for their swift response to keep him and his family safe. As this is a live police investigation, further queries should be directed to the relevant police force," a Downing Street spokesperson said. The arrests are connected to a protest by campaigners from Youth Demand. It describes itself as a group of young people who want "the Tories and the Labour Party to commit to a two-way arms embargo on Israel, and to stop all new oil and gas licences". In the final week of the election campaign, both leaders will try and focus on some of the key swing constituencies starting with the Midlands region of England. Labour has held a firm 20-point lead in all pre-poll surveys over the incumbent Tories throughout the campaign, making this a tough election for the governing party which has been in office for 14 years.

Ship attacked in Red Sea by Houthi rebels in latest maritime assault

AP ■ DUBAI



A ship traveling through the Red Sea on Thursday reported being hit in an attack likely carried out by Yemen's Houthi rebels, a private security firm said, the latest in the campaign targeting shipping over the Israel-Hamas war. The ship issued a radio call off the coast of the rebel-held port city of Hodeida, saying it had been struck, the private security firm Ambrey said. A warship in the area was responding to the attack, Ambrey added. It wasn't clear if anyone was hurt or if the ship was damaged in the assault on the vessel. Neither the British nor US militaries immediately reported the attack. The Houthis did not immediately claim the attack. However, it can take hours or even days for them to acknowledge their assaults. The rebels have targeted more than 60 vessels by firing missiles and drones in their campaign that has killed

a total of four sailors. They seized one vessel and sunk two since November. A US-led airstrike campaign has targeted the Houthis since January, with a series of strikes on May 30 killing at least 16 people and wounding 42 others, the rebels say. The Houthis maintain that their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the United States or Britain. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the Israel-Hamas war — including those bound for Iran. Late on Tuesday, Houthi military spokesman Brig Gen Yahya Saree claimed an attack Monday on the Liberian-flagged, Greek-managed container ship MSC Sarah V. Late on Wednesday, the Houthis claimed that they used a new hypersonic ballistic missile in the assault, which targeted a ship farther away than nearly all of the previous assaults they've launched in the Gulf of Aden.

Rise in hate speech against minorities in India raises concern: Blinken

Washington (PTI):



There has been a "concerning increase" in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, and demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities in India, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has said. In his remarks at the release of the annual State Department report on international religious freedom, Blinken said on Wednesday that at the same time, people around the world are also working hard to protect religious freedom. The report stated that senior US officials continued to raise concerns about religious freedom issues with their Indian counterparts in 2023. "In India, we see a concerning increase in anti-conversion laws, hate speech, demolitions of homes and places of worship for members of minority faith communities. At the same time, people around the world are also working hard to protect religious

freedom," the secretary of state said. Ten of 28 states have laws restricting religious conversions for all faiths. Some of these states also impose penalties specifically against forced religious conversions for the purpose of marriage, the 2023 Report on International Religious Freedom stated for India. During the year, some members of religious minority groups challenged the government's ability and willingness to protect them from violence, investigate crimes against mem-

bers of religious minority groups, and protect their freedom of religion or belief, it stated. India has previously rejected the US state department's annual human rights report on the country, saying they continue to be based on "misinformation and flawed understanding." "Motivated and biased commentary by some US officials only serves to undermine further the credibility of these reports," the Ministry of External Affairs said last year. "We value our partnership with the US, and will continue to have frank exchanges on issues of concern to us," it said. In this year's report, the US state department said that Christians and Muslims were arrested under laws banning forced religious conversions, which religious groups said in some cases were used to harass and imprison members of religious minority groups on false and fabricated charges or for lawful religious practices.

US sanctions Boeing over 737 Max 9 investigation information sharing

AP ■ NEW YORK

Boeing is being sanctioned by US investigators for sharing information about a federal investigation of a door plug blowout that left a gaping hole in a Boeing 737 Max 9. The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) said Thursday that Boeing "blatantly violated" the agency's investigative regulations as well as a signed agreement by providing non-public investigative information to the media and speculating about possible causes of the January 5 door plug blowout on a Boeing passenger jet in Portland, Oregon. During the incident, a panel that plugged a space left for an extra emergency door blew off an Alaska Airlines Max 9. Pilots were able to land safely, and there were no injuries. The NTSB said that on Tuesday

during a media briefing, a Boeing executive provided non-public investigative information to the media about the Alaska Airlines incident that the agency had not verified or authorized for release. The NTSB said that Boeing portrayed the NTSB's investigation as a search to find the individual responsible for the door plug work, but the agency said it's focused on the probable cause of the accident, not placing blame on any individual or assessing liability. Boeing did not immediately respond to a request for comment early Thursday. Shares of The Boeing Co, based in Arlington, Virginia, were flat before the opening bell. The NTSB said that given its recent actions, Boeing won't have access to investigative information the agency pro-

duces about the Alaska Airlines incident, but it will keep its party status to the investigation. The NTSB is unable to fine Boeing, as it doesn't have enforcement authority. While the agency could have stripped away Boeing's party status, the NTSB may have considered it more important to keep Boeing as a party to the investigation because of its employees' expertise. The NTSB said that it may subpoena any relevant records it requires during the course of the investigation. It also will subpoena Boeing to appear at an investigative hearing in Washington DC on August 6 and 7. The agency said that, unlike other parties, Boeing won't be able to ask questions of other participants. The NTSB said that it will coordinate with the

Department of Justice's Fraud Division, giving them information about Boeing's recent unauthorized investigative information releases related to the 737 Max 9 door plug investigation. In May the Justice Department told a federal judge that Boeing had violated a settlement that allowed the company to avoid criminal prosecution after two deadly crashes involving its 737 Max aircraft. After Max jets crashed in 2018 in Indonesia and 2019 in Ethiopia, killing 346 people, the FAA and other regulators grounded the aircraft worldwide for more than a year and a half. It is now up to the Justice Department to decide whether to file charges against Boeing. Prosecutors will tell the court no later than July 7 how they plan to proceed, the department said in May.

Stella Assange thanks lawmakers for WikiLeaks founder's freedom

AP ■ MELBOURNE



Stella Assange thanked the spectrum of lawmakers who campaigned for her husband, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, to be freed during her visit Thursday to Australia's Parliament House, where political leaders differed over how welcome the convicted felon was in his homeland. "Julian is overjoyed and so grateful to the Australian people, to the members of Parliament and to the government and also the opposition who came together to voice the need for his release," Stella Assange said. Assange has made no public comment since he arrived in Australia on Wednesday after pleading guilty to obtaining and publishing U.S. military secrets in a deal with U.S. Justice Department prosecutors that ended his 14-year legal battle for freedom.

The Bring Julian Assange Home Parliamentary Group began with a few federal lawmakers in 2019 and expanded to 47 — one of five of the total in Canberra — as a consensus grew that the prosecution over WikiLeaks' release of almost half a million documents relating to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010 had taken too long. His lawyers now want to swing that public and

political support behind a campaign to have Assange's conviction pardoned. "President (Joe) Biden or any subsequent president absolutely can and, in my mind, should issue a pardon to Julian Assange," lawyer Barry Pollack said. But while Australian lawmakers largely agreed that the time had come for Assange to be brought home, they disagreed on whether he deserved the same level of support as Australians recently released from arbitrary detention in China, Iran and Myanmar thanks to government intervention. Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has been credited with the diplomatic coup that enabled Assange to be released from a London prison to travel to Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific where he pleaded guilty to a single charge under the Espionage Act.

Sanjana Thakur's short story wins UK Commonwealth Prize

London (PTI): Sanjana Thakur, a 26-year-old writer from Mumbai, beat competition from over 7,359 entrants worldwide to be named the winner of the GBP 5,000 Commonwealth Short Story Prize 2024 in London on Thursday. Sanjana's story entitled 'Aishwarya Rai' takes its name from the famed Bollywood actress to reimagine and reverse the traditional adoption story. The literary magazine 'Granta' has published all the regional winning stories of the 2024 Commonwealth Short Story Prize. "I cannot express how wholly honoured I am to be the recipient of this incredible prize. I hope I continue writing stories that people want to read," said Thakur. "For my strange story — about mothers and daughters, about bodies, beauty standards, and Bombay street food — to find such a global audi-

ence is thrilling. Thank you, thank you, thank you," she said. "I've spent 10 out of 26 years living in countries not my own. India, where I'm from, is simultaneously strange and familiar, accepting and rejecting. Writing stories is a way for me to accept that Mumbai is a city I will long for even when I am in it; it is a way to remake 'place' in my mind," she added. Her story revolves around a young woman, Avni, who chooses between possible mothers housed in a local shelter. The first mother is too clean; the second, who looks like the real-life Aishwarya Rai, is too pretty. In her small Mumbai apartment with tooth-thin walls and a too-small balcony, Avni watches laundry turn round in her machine, dreams of stepping into white limousines, and tries out different mothers from the shelter. One of them must be just right, she thinks.

Palestinians surrounded by sewage and garbage

Deir Al-Balah (AP): Children in sandals trudge through water contaminated with sewage and scale growing mounds of garbage in Gaza's crowded tent camps for displaced families. People relieve themselves in burlap-covered pits, with nowhere nearby to wash their hands. In the stifling summer heat, Palestinians say the odour and filth surrounding them is just another inescapable reality of war — like pangs of hunger or sounds of bombing. The territory's ability to dispose of garbage, treat sewage and deliver clean water has been virtually decimated by eight brutal months of war between Israel and Hamas. This has made grim living conditions worse and raised health risks for hundreds of thousands of people deprived of adequate shelter, food and medicine, aid groups say.

Hepatitis A cases are on the rise, and doctors fear that as warmer weather arrives, an outbreak of cholera is increasingly likely without dramatic changes to living conditions. The UN, aid groups and local officials are scrambling to build latrines, repair water lines and bring desalination plants back online. COGAT, the Israeli military body coordinating humanitarian aid efforts, said it's engaging in efforts to improve the "hygiene situation." But relief can't come soon enough. "Flies are in our food," said Adel Dalloul, a 21-year-old whose family settled in a beach tent camp near the central Gaza city of Nuseirat. They wound up there after fleeing the southern city of Rafah, where they landed after leaving their northern Gaza home. "If you try to sleep, flies, insects and cockroaches are all over you."

Over a million Palestinians had been living in hastily assembled tent camps in Rafah before Israel invaded in May. Since fleeing Rafah, many have taken shelter in even more crowded and unsanitary areas across southern and central Gaza that doctors describe as breeding grounds for disease — especially as temperatures regularly reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius). "The stench in Gaza is enough to make you kind of immediately nauseous," said Sam Rose, a director at the UN agency for Palestinian refugees. Anwar al-Hurkani, who lives with his family in a tent camp in the central Gazan city of Deir al-Balah, said he can't sleep for fear of scorpions and rodents. He doesn't let his children leave their tent, he said, worrying they'll get sick from pollution and mosquitoes.

Zelenskyy urges EU leaders to fulfill arms commitments

AP ■ BRUSSELS

Ukraine's president called on Thursday to make good on their pledges to provide military equipment to his war-ravaged country, just days after the bloc launched membership talks with his government.

"We have to work on next steps," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told reporters in Brussels as he arrived to attend a summit of EU leaders. He said he and the leaders would discuss "the urgent things -- air defense, that is one."

Zelenskyy thanked countries that have promised equipment, weapons and ammunition, but underlined that "we need them urgently on the battlefield." Russian forces are seeking to press their advantage in troop numbers and weaponry before Ukraine's armed forces are bulked up by promised new Western military aid, some of which is trickling to the front line, analysts say.



The EU launched membership talks with Ukraine on Tuesday, a decade after Russian troops seized the Crimean Peninsula to deter the country from moving closer to the West, part of a chain of events that set the two neighbors on the path to war.

"We waited for this, a long period of time," Zelenskyy said, thanking the EU for its approval. The leaders are expected to sign a document of security commitments to Ukraine, which in

essence encapsulates what the 27-nation bloc has been doing for the country in terms of financial, military and other assistance since Russian forces invaded in February 2022. Several countries already have similar agreements with Ukraine, offering a long-term commitment to help Kyiv, including once its war with Russia is over. Zelenskyy and US President Joe Biden signed one such pact earlier this month which will run for the next decade.

Court denies Imran's appeal to suspend sentence in illegal marriage case

PTI ■ ISLAMABAD

A Pakistani court on Thursday rejected the appeals of Imran Khan and his spouse Bushra Bibi to suspend their sentences in the illegal marriage case, in a major setback to the former prime minister who has been in jail since August last year.

On February 3, Khan, 71, and Bushra, 49, were sentenced to seven years in prison and a fine of Rs 5,00,000 each by a trial court for contracting the marriage during iddat, a mandatory period for a woman in Islam to wait before a second marriage after the death of her husband or divorce.

The case was filed by Bushra's ex-husband, Khawar Maneka, against the couple in November 2023, alleging that they married without Bushra observing the mandatory waiting period of iddat. He asked the court to declare the marriage null and void.



Additional District and Sessions Judge Afzal Majoka had reserved the verdict on the conclusion of the process on Tuesday after conducting the hearing.

On Thursday, as he announced the verdict to a packed courtroom, and rejected the pleas filed by the couple, it dashed hopes of their release from the Adiala Jail at Rawalpindi where they have been imprisoned.

While Khan is slapped with several cases, his wife Bushra is facing a couple of cases. Reacting to the verdict, National Assembly opposition leader Omar Ayub said Khan's party would challenge the order in the Islamabad High Court. Speaking to the media, he reiterated that there would be no talks with the government until all Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) leaders and workers are

released. Khan's party termed the development "absolutely ridiculous". In a post on its official X account, the PTI said the case was "unprecedentedly despicable in both our country's as well as Islamic history", and had been "globally condemned and brought immense embarrassment to Pakistan".

"Every single individual responsible for fabricating and carrying this case will go down in the dirtiest, darkest alleys of history," it asserted.

Earlier, the former first couple had challenged the conviction before the district and sessions judge (ADSJ) Shahrukh Arjumand, who recused himself at a time when the hearing had been concluded and the court was supposed to announce the verdict.

The case was last week transferred to ADSJ Majoka and the Islamabad High Court ordered the sessions court to decide in 10 days.

'Foolproof arrangements for Chinese citizens security'

New York/Islamabad (PTI): Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi on Thursday said Pakistan is "proud" of its friendship with all-weather ally China, as he asserted that "foolproof arrangements" have been made for the security of Chinese nationals working on major infrastructure projects in some restive provinces.

Naqvi made the remarks during a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Qi Yanjun at the office of China's mission to the United Nations in New York, Geo News reported. Both ministers are currently here to attend a United Nations conference. "Foolproof arrangements have been made for the security of Chinese citizens," Naqvi said as he briefed Qi about the progress on the investigation of the Dasu terror attack involving Chinese nationals in Pakistan. On March 26, a vehicle-borne suicide bomber targeted the convoy of Chinese engineers in the remote Besham area of Pakistan's restive Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province when they were being driven to a construction site of the Dasu Hydroelectric power station in Kohistan district of the same province.

Five Chinese nationals and their Pakistani driver were killed in the attack. "We are all proud of our friendship with China," Naqvi was quoted as saying in the report.

Following the briefing, the Chinese minister expressed satisfaction over the case's ongoing probe and said that Pakistani institutions handled the case in a "diligent and professional manner," according to the report. "Pakistan and China are all-weather friends. Pak-China friendship is stronger than steel," he said.

The two ministers also discussed bilateral ties and security issues in the region. During the meeting, the two ministers spoke about cooperation on training and capacity building of Pakistan's law enforcement agencies through modern equipment and technology. Qi appreciated the establishment of the Special Protection Unit (SPU) in Islamabad, particularly aimed at protecting Chinese citizens in the country. He also assured "full cooperation" in SPU training and other matters, the report said.

China's former defence minister expelled from Communist Party

PTI ■ BEIJING

China's ruling Communist Party headed by President Xi Jinping on Thursday expelled the former defence minister Gen. Li Shangfu for alleged corruption and launched prosecution proceedings against him, months after he was dramatically sacked from the post.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) leadership on Thursday decided to expel Li, 66, for serious violation of Party discipline and the law, the state-run Xinhua news agency reported.

Li, who headed the People's Liberation Army's all-important Rocket (Missile) Force and was personally picked up for the top defence post by Xi himself, went missing last year, sparking speculation that he was being investigated for corruption and indiscipline. Li, who also formerly served as a State Councillor, the top post in the party and as a member of the Central Military Commission (CMC), the over-



all high command of the PLA headed by Xi, was deprived of his qualification as a delegate to the 20th CPC National Congress, according to a meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee. Li is among dozens of top PLA Generals either sacked or punished for corruption since Xi, 71, assumed power in 2012.

The CMC's disciplinary and supervisory agency launched an investigation against Li on August 31, 2023.

According to the investigation records, Li seriously violated political and organisational

discipline. He sought improper benefits in personnel arrangements for himself and others, took advantage of his posts to seek benefits for others, and accepted a huge amount of money and valuables in return, the Xinhua report said. He is suspected of the crime of taking bribes. He was also found to have offered money to others to seek undue benefits, constituting the suspected crime of offering bribes. The investigation also found clues of Li's other violations, it said.

As a high-ranking official of the CPC and the military, Li betrayed the Party's original aspiration and its principles, the report said, adding that his actions failed the trust of the Party Central Committee and the CMC while severely contaminating the political environment of the equipment sector in the military and the ethics of relevant industries.

His disciplinary and law violations brought enormous damage to the Party's cause, the development of national

defence and the armed forces, and the image of senior officials, it said.

Li is a Chinese aerospace engineer and headed China's powerful missile force, officially called Rocket Force as the General of the PLA before he was elevated as minister. His sacking followed a major shakeup in the PLA Rocket (missile) Force in which its commander, Li Yuchao, and political commissar, Xu Zhongbo, were replaced without any official explanation. Both their summary dismissals sent shockwaves among the Chinese officialdom besides raising questions over the process of selection of officials for key jobs by Xi.

Li was appointed as Defence Minister even though he was sanctioned by the US in 2018 for the purchase of Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighter jets and S-400 surface-to-air missiles by China's Equipment Development Department (EDD) in violation of Washington's sanctions on Moscow.

Le Pen questions President's role as army chief ahead of election

AP ■ NICE

With just three days to go until France's landmark legislative election, the country's far-right leader on Thursday raised the question of who would be in charge of the military if her party takes over the government after the two-round balloting.

The early elections are plunging France into uncharted territory, and political scientists are scrambling to interpret how exactly President Emmanuel Macron and a prime minister who is hostile to most of his policies will share power if Marine Le Pen's National Rally wins the majority in the National Assembly, France's lower house of parliament.

Le Pen has repeatedly said that Jordan Bardella, her protégée and her party's star leader, will lead France's next government if their party wins. She suggested in an interview that Bardella, 28, will also take over at least some decisions on France's defence and its armed forces. Macron has three years

to serve out his final term as president.

Serving as a commander-in-chief of the armed forces "is an honorary title for the president since it's the prime minister who actually pulls the strings," Le Pen said in an interview with Le Télégramme newspaper published Thursday.

The French Constitution states that "the President of the Republic is the head of the armed forces" and that the head of state also "chairs the councils and higher committees of national defence." However, the Constitution also states that "the prime minister is responsible for national defence."

Constitutional experts say the exact role of prime minister in foreign policy and defence appears to be subject to interpretation.

France has nuclear weapons and its troops and military personnel have been deployed in many conflict zones around the world. The last time France had a prime minister and a president from different par-

ties, they broadly agreed on strategic matters of defence and foreign policy. But this time the power sharing concept known in France as "cohabitation" could be very different given the animosity between the far-right and the far-left politicians. Both blocs appear to deeply resent the business-friendly, centrist president.

On the issue of the country's military command, political historian Jean Garrigues said that "the president is the head of the armed forces, (but) it's the prime minister who has the armed forces at his disposal."

In practice, he said this means that "if the president decided to send troops on the ground to Ukraine ... the prime minister would be able to block this decision." In March, Macron warned Western powers against showing any signs of weakness to Russia and said Ukraine's allies shouldn't rule out sending Western troops into Ukraine to help the country against Russia's aggression.

China urges global scientists to study lunar samples, cites obstacle with US

AP ■ BANGKOK

China's space officials said Thursday they welcomed scientists from around the world to apply to study the lunar rock samples that the Chang'e 6 probe brought back to Earth in a historic mission, but noted there were limits to that cooperation, specifically with the United States. Officials said at a televised news conference in Beijing meant to introduce the missions' achievements that any cooperation with the U.S. would be hinged on removing an American law that bans direct bilateral cooperation with NASA.

"The source of the obstacle in US-China aerospace cooperation is still in the Wolf Amendment," said Bian Zhigang, vice chair of the China National Space Administration. "If the U.S. truly wants to hope to began regular aerospace cooperation, I think they should take the appropriate measures to remove the obstacle."

The Wolf Amendment was enacted in 2011 and prevents direct U.S.-Chinese bilateral cooperation except in cases where the FBI can certify that there is no national security risk to sharing information with the Chinese side in the course of

work. Still, China could cooperate with scientists of other countries. It worked with the European Space Agency, France, Italy and Pakistan in the Chang'e 6 mission.

"China welcomes scientists from all countries to apply according to the processes and share in the benefits," said Liu Yunfeng, director of the international cooperation office of the China National Space Administration. Meanwhile, little information about the global first achieved Tuesday was announced. Chinese officials declined to reveal how many samples they actually gathered or any preliminary findings.

"I'm afraid this matter will not be revealed until tomorrow, so I hope everyone can wait patiently for another day," Chang'e 6 chief designer Hu Hao said at the news conference.

On Monday, Chinese scientists said that they anticipate the returned samples will include 2.5 million-year-old volcanic rock and other material that scientists hope will answer questions about geographic differences on the moon's two sides. The mission had aimed to gather two kilograms (more than four pounds) of material.

The near side of the moon is

what is seen from Earth, and the far side faces outer space. The far side is also known to have mountains and impact craters and is much more difficult to reach.

The probe's journey to the far side of the moon was historic in that it was the first time a probe had successfully taken off and brought back samples from the far side directly. Previous samples thought to be from the far side of the moon are from meteorites found on Earth.

The probe had landed in the moon's South Pole-Aitken Basin, an impact crater created more than 4 billion years ago. The samples scientists are expecting will likely come from different layers of the basin, which will bear traces of the different geological events across its long chronology, such as when the moon was younger and had an active inside that could produce volcanic rock.

Officials did announce some future plans, with a planned Chang'e 7 probe to explore resources on the moon's South Pole. Further down the line, they have planned Tianwen-3 for around 2030 to carry out a Mars sample return mission and a Tianwen-4 Jupiter exploration mission.

Rajapaksa to meet Chinese Premier

Colombo (PTI): Former Sri Lankan president Mahinda Rajapaksa on Thursday left on an official visit to Beijing where he will meet Premier Li Qiang and Foreign Minister Wang Yi to discuss the island nation's debt restructuring agreement with China. China is Sri Lanka's largest bilateral lender owning 52 per cent of the USD 40 billion external debt when Sri Lanka announced its sovereign default in 2022.

Ranil Wickremesinghe on Wednesday announced that debt restructuring agreements were finalised with bilateral lenders, including India and China, in Paris, describing the development as a "significant milestone" that will bolster international trust in the cash-strapped island nation. The debt restructuring deal entails allowing time till 2043 to repay USD 4.2 billion of Chinese loans - the bulk of which was drawn during the Rajapaksa presidency 2005-15.

On Thursday, Daily Mirror quoted sources to report that 78-year-old patriarch of the Rajapaksa dynasty's visit was on an invitation by Foreign Minister Wang to attend the

commemorative events in Beijing marking the 70th anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. The event would be attended by Chinese President Xi Jinping and other leading Communist Party of China (CPC) members. China will hold the Conference Marking the 70th Anniversary of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence Friday in Beijing, a foreign ministry spokesperson said on Tuesday.

"On the sidelines of the events, Rajapaksa will hold discussions with Premier Li and Minister Yi on areas of mutual interest and also development projects which will benefit Sri Lanka," the news portal said. Rajapaksa will also discuss Sri Lanka's debt restructuring agreement and express his gratitude for the assistance given by China and the Exim Bank of China, it said.

Rajapaksa had steered a massive infrastructure drive by building a port and an airport and a southern highway with Chinese commercial loans. Sri Lanka was facing criticism of falling under a Chinese debt trap under Rajapaksa's presidency.

'Women's rights to be discussed at meeting attended by Taliban'

United Nations (AP): The UN political chief who will chair the first meeting between Afghanistan's Taliban rulers and envoys from about 25 countries answered sharp criticism that Afghan women have been excluded, saying Wednesday that women's rights will be raised at every session.

Undersecretary-General Rosemary DiCarlo stressed to a small group of reporters that the two-day meeting starting Sunday is an initial engagement aimed at initiating a step-by-step process with the goal of seeing the Taliban "at peace with itself and its neighbours and adhering to international law," the UN Charter, and human rights.

This is the third UN meeting with Afghan envoys in Qatar's capital, Doha, but the first that the Taliban are attending. They weren't invited to the first and refused to attend the second.

Other attendees include envoys from the European Union, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, the United States, Russia, China and several of Afghanistan's neighbours, DiCarlo said.

The Taliban seized power in Afghanistan in 2021 as United

States and NATO forces withdrew following two decades of war. No country officially recognises them as Afghanistan's government, and the UN has said that recognition is almost impossible while bans on female education and employment remain in place and women can't go out without a male guardian.

When DiCarlo met with senior Taliban officials in Kabul in May, she said she made clear that the international community is concerned about four things: the lack of an inclusive government, the denial of human rights espe-

cially for women and girls, and the need to combat terrorism and the narcotics trade.

"The issue of inclusive governance, women's rights, human rights will large, will be a part of every single session," she said. "This is important, and we will hear it again and again, I'm sure from quite a number of us."

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International criticized the United Nations for not having Afghan women and civil society representatives at the table with the Taliban. DiCarlo described the meeting as a process.

List of threatened species grows by 1,000

Abuja (Nigeria) (AP): Over 45,000 species are now threatened with extinction — 1,000 more than last year — according to an international conservation organization that blames pressures from climate change, invasive species and human activity such as illicit trade and infrastructural expansion.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) released its latest Red List of Threatened Species on Thursday. Now in its 60th year, the list sounds the alarm about animals and plants at risk of extinction, but it also highlights conservation suc-



cess stories such as the Iberian lynx.

The list now includes 1,63,040 species, an increase of about 6,000 from last year. Copiapoa

cacti, native to Chile's Atacama coastal desert, the Bornean elephant and the Gran Canaria giant lizard are among the threatened species, IUCN revealed.

Copiapoa cacti have long been coveted as decorative plants, driving an illegal trade that has been amplified by social media where enthusiasts and traders showcase and sell the cacti.

A staggering 82 per cent of the species is now at risk of extinction, a significant jump from 55 per cent in 2013, the report said.

IUCN said that the decline is due to the surge in demand for the Chilean cacti in Europe and Asia

as ornamental species. The smugglers and poachers facilitating the trade, the organization said, have gained increased accessibility to the plants' habitat due to roads and housing expansion in the Atacama area.

"It is easy to distinguish if copiapoa cacti have been poached or grown in a greenhouse," said Pablo Guerrero, a member of the IUCN's group on the plants. "Poached copiapoa have a grey tone and are coated in a dusty-looking bloom that protects the plants in one of the driest deserts on Earth, whereas cultivated plants appear greener."

The 2024 update also highlights the Asian elephant in Borneo as an endangered species. It is estimated that only about 1,000 Bornean elephants remain in the wild, according to IUCN analysis. The population has decreased over the past 75 years primarily due to extensive logging of Borneo's forests, destroying much of the elephants' habitat. Conflicts with humans, habitat loss due to agriculture and timber plantations, mining and infrastructure development, poaching, exposure to agrochemicals, and vehicle collisions also threaten the species, the IUCN said.

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Admission to M.Tech. and M. Sc. Programmes for the Academic Year 2024-25

National Institute of Technology Kurukshetra invites online applications through Google Form for admissions in M.Tech (Left over seats of CCMT-2024, Self-Financed, Sponsored) and M.Sc. (Left over regular and Self-Financed seats of CCMN-2024) for the Academic Year 2024-25.

The Last date for submission of online applications is **25th July 2024**. Application submitted without fee, incomplete or late will not be considered.

For more information kindly visit the Institute website: www.nitkkr.ac.in under Admissions 2024.

Registrar I/c

Baba Farid University of Health Sciences,
Faridkot
(Admission Branch)

Admission Notice
MDS Courses under NEET PG-2024.

Online Registration/applications are invited through University website from eligible candidates on the basis of NEET-MDS-2024 for admission to MDS courses in Govt./ Private Colleges, Private Universities and Minority Institute in the State of Punjab w.e.f 01-07-2024 to 05-07-2024 upto 12:00 Noon. Last date for deposition of Registration fee through online payment gateway is 05-07-2024. Counseling will be conducted as per schedule published in prospectus/University website.

For Prospectus/Schedule/Fee/ details & updates visit us at www.bfuh.ac.in.

Note: Any notification/amendment by Govt. of Punjab/ Govt. of India/DCI/MCC regarding PG admissions, Session 2024, shall be applicable.

Registrar

00/12/262/2023/35039 Dated CHD - 6/27/2024

Sensex breaches 79,000 level, Nifty 24,000 peak for 1st time

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark Sensex breached the historic 79,000 mark while Nifty scaled the 24,000 peak for the first time on Thursday as buying in blue-chip stocks like Infosys, Reliance and TCS helped markets extend gains to the fourth straight day and close at lifetime high levels. The 30-share BSE Sensex jumped 568.93 points or 0.72 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 79,243.18 amid the expiry of monthly contracts in the derivatives segment. During the day, it zoomed 721.78 points or 0.91 per cent to hit the new lifetime peak of 79,396.03. The Nifty ended at a fresh record high of 24,044.50, rising 175.70 points or 0.74 per cent. Intra-day, it soared 218.65 points or 0.91 per cent to hit the all-time peak of 24,087.45. Among the 30 Sensex companies, UltraTech Cement jumped over 5 per cent after the country's leading cement maker said it will acquire a 23 per cent stake in its Chennai-based rival India Cements Ltd, in a deal estimated to be around Rs 1,885 crore. Gains in Infosys, TCS and Reliance Industries drove the benchmark indices to record-high levels. "The benchmark indices exhibited bullish momentum, buoyed by



expected revival in the IT sector and consolidation in the cement industry. However, the broader market remained sideways due to valuation concerns and FII selling owing to rising US bond yields. Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said, "NTPC, JSW Steel, Tata Motors, Bharti Airtel, Power Grid, Kotak Mahindra Bank and Tech Mahindra were also among the major gainers. Larsen & Toubro, Sun Pharma, Nestle, HDFC Bank and Maruti were among the laggard. "The markets traded

rallied 1.65 per cent, while teck (1.59 per cent), utilities (1.29 per cent), telecommunication (1.18 per cent), commodities (0.82 per cent) and auto (0.70 per cent) also advanced. Financial Services, industrials, realty and capital goods were the laggards. The Nifty hit the 23,000 mark on May 24 this year. The BSE Sensex had breached the 78,000 level on June 25. Analysts said most sectors recorded gains, with IT and energy among the top gainers. Broader indices showed mixed results as midcap index closed in the green while smallcap index lost over half a per cent. In Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai and Hong Kong settled lower. European markets were trading on a mixed note. US markets ended in positive territory on Wednesday. Foreign institutional investors (FIIs) offloaded equities worth Rs 3,535.43 crore on Wednesday, according to exchange data. Global oil benchmark Brent crude climbed 0.84 per cent to USD 85.97 a barrel. The BSE benchmark climbed 620.73 points or 0.80 per cent to settle at a new closing peak of 78,674.25 on Wednesday. The Nifty went up by 147.50 points or 0.62 per cent to settle at a record closing peak of 23,868.80.

GST suppliers giving post sale discount have to take undertaking from clients: CBIC

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Suppliers giving post-sale discounts through credit notes under GST will have to ensure that the client gives an undertaking or a CA certificate stating that the ITC availed on the discount value has been reversed, the CBIC has said. Currently, there is no mechanism to track whether the Input Tax Credit (ITC) on such discounts has been reversed or not. Till the time a functionality is made available on the common portal to enable the suppliers as well as the tax officers to verify the reversal, the supplier may procure a certificate from the recipient of the supply, issued by the Chartered Accountant (CA) or the Cost Accountant (CMA), certifying that the recipient has made the required proportionate reversal of ITC at his end in respect of such credit note issued by the supplier. In cases, where the amount of tax (CGST+SGST +IGST and including compensation cess, if any) involved in the discount given by the supplier to a recipient through tax credit notes in a financial year does not exceed Rs 5 lakh, then instead of CA/CMA certificate, then the supplier will have to get an undertaking from the said recipient. Moore Singhi Executive Director Rajat Mohan said the



circular has a retrospective effect, impacting all demands on this issue since 2017. Taxpayers engaged in litigation on this point can leverage this clarification for relief. "Going forward, this will significantly benefit the industry by clarifying the process for issuing credit notes. The circular mandates obtaining CA/CMA certifications or self-certifications for smaller transactions, which increases the documentation burden and necessitates updates to accounting systems. This circular demands meticulous compliance but promises long-term benefits in terms of predictable and streamlined GST operations," Mohan said. EY Tax Partner Saurabh Agarwal said these documents, with a unique ID number, serve as proof for audits and ensure consistent application

of GST rules on post-sale discounts. This would help in resolving the disputes between the tax department and the businesses. In a separate circular, Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) clarified that ITC is available to insurance companies in respect of motor vehicle repair expenses incurred by them in case of reimbursement mode of claim settlement. "In cases where the garage issues two separate invoices in respect of the repair services, one to the insurance company in respect of approved claim cost and second to the customer for the amount of repair service in excess of the approved claim cost, input tax credit may be available to the insurance company on the said invoice issued to the insurance company subject to reimbursement of said amount by insurance company to the customer," it said. However, if the invoice for the full amount for repair services is issued to the insurance company while the insurance company makes reimbursement to the insured only for the approved claim cost, then, the input tax credit may be available to the insurance company only to the extent of reimbursement of the approved claim cost to the insured, and not on the full invoice value.

Rupee rises 13 paise to close at 83.44 against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee appreciated 13 paise to settle at 83.44 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, supported by a positive trend in equity markets and favourable domestic macroeconomic profile. Forex traders said the strength of the American currency in the overseas market and US dollar demand from oil marketing companies capped sharp gains for the local unit. At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.56 and hit the intraday high of 83.43 against the greenback during the session. It finally settled at 83.44 (provisional) against the dollar, registering a gain of 13 paise from its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee depreciated 14 paise against the US dollar and settled at 83.57. The Indian rupee appreciated on bond-related foreign inflows ahead of their inclusion in the JP Morgan debt index, said Anuj Choudhary - Research Analyst at Sharekhan by BNP Paribas. Domestic markets touched fresh record highs with the Nifty breaching the 24,000-mark for the first time, supporting the domestic currency.

Budget to accelerate pace of reforms, take many historic steps: President

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
The first budget of the newly-formed NDA government next month will take "many historic steps" as well as accelerate the pace of economic reforms and lay a roadmap for "far-reaching policies" and "futuristic vision" of the government to make India the world's third largest economy, President Droupadi Murmu said on Thursday. In her first address to the joint sitting of Parliament since the constitution of the 18th Lok Sabha, she outlined the economic vision of the NDA government as well as highlighted achievements in the past decade under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A stable government with clear majority is "a mandate that the work of making India a developed nation continues uninterrupted and India attains its goals," she said. The new government under Modi is to present a full Budget for the fiscal year

2024-25 (April 2024 to March 2025) next month which is likely to lay down priorities in matters of taxation and policy as well as reform agenda for the near term. "This budget will be an effective document of the government's far-reaching policies and futuristic vision," she said. "Along with major economic and social decisions, many historic steps will also be seen in this budget," she said without elaborating. "The pace of reforms will be further accelerated in tune with the aspirations of people of India for rapid development," she said. With the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) retaining power for a third consecutive term, analysts are expecting broad policy continuity, with the government continuing to prioritise infrastructure capex, improvements to the business environment, and gradual fiscal consolidation.

The President said the resolve to 'reform, perform and transform' has made India the fastest growing economy in the world and the nation has risen to become the 5th largest economy from being the 11th ranked economy. From 2021 to 2024, India has grown at an average rate of 8 per cent annually. "India has achieved this growth amidst the global pandemic and despite ongoing conflicts in different parts of the world. This has been made possible due to reforms and major decisions undertaken in the national interest in the last 10 years," she said, adding India alone is contributing 15 per cent of the global growth. Now, the government is striving to make India the 3rd largest economy in the world, she said. "Achieving this goal will also strengthen the foundation of a developed India." "During the phase of unstable governments in the country

that lasted several decades, many governments, even if willing, were neither able to bring reforms nor take critical decisions. The people of India have now changed this situation by their decisive mandate. "Many such reforms have taken place in the last 10 years, which are greatly benefiting the nation today. Even when these reforms were being taken up, they were opposed and attempts were made to spread negativity. But all these reforms have stood the test of time," she said. Highlighting the reforms, she said to save India's banking sector from collapsing, the government brought banking reforms and made laws like Insolvency and Bankruptcy Code which have made the country's banking sector one of the strongest banking sectors in the world. "Our public sector banks are robust and profitable today. Profits of public sector banks



have crossed Rs 1.4 lakh crore in 2023-24, which is 35 per cent higher than last year. The strength of our banks enables them to expand their credit base and contribute to the economic development of the nation. The NPAs of public sector banks are also continuously decreasing," she said. While SBI is earning record profits and LIC is stronger

than ever, GST collections for the first time ever crossed Rs 2 lakh crore in April. Giving sneak preview to priorities of the government, Murmu said the government is giving equal importance to all the three pillars of the economy - manufacturing, services and agriculture. Production-linked incentive (PLI) schemes and ease of doing business have

contributed to increasing investments and employment opportunities on a large scale. "Along with the traditional sectors, sunrise sectors are also being promoted in mission mode. Be it semiconductor or solar, be it electric vehicles or electronic goods, be it green hydrogen or batteries, be it aircraft carriers or fighter jets, India is expanding in all these sectors," she said. The government is also making continuous efforts to reduce the cost of logistics. It is also strengthening the services sector. Simultaneously, investments in green industries are being increased, leading to an increase in 'green jobs'. Stating that India is emerging as a leader in every sector from IT to tourism and from health to wellness, she said this is creating a large number of new opportunities for employment and self-employment.

The President said in the last 10 years, the government has placed great emphasis on every aspect of the rural economy. Agro-based industries, dairy and fishery-based industries are being expanded in villages. Cooperatives have been accorded priority. "A major problem of small farmers is related to storage. Therefore, my government has commenced work on a scheme to create the world's largest storage capacity in the cooperative sector," she said. Under PM-Kisan Samman Nidhi, more than Rs 3,20,000 crore have been disbursed to farmers. Policies, she said, were focused on making India more self-reliant and increasing farmers' income through increased exports. The President said the government believes that there should be healthy competition among the states to attract investors from all over the world.

25% of new hires are married women; nearly 70% of workforce are women: Foxconn

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Apple iPhone maker Foxconn has informed the government that 25 per cent of its new hires are married women and its safety protocol, which requires all employees to avoid wearing metal irrespective of gender or religion, is not discriminatory, sources said. In an informal note shared with the government after reports suggested it is not hiring married women, Foxconn stated that such stipulations are not part of its policy and these claims may have been made by those individuals who were not hired, sources said. They added that such media reports malign the fast-growing Indian manufacturing sector. Meanwhile, the Ministry of Labour and Employment on Wednesday has sought a detailed report from the Tamil Nadu labour department on the issue of married women not being allowed to work at the Foxconn India Apple iPhone Plant, as reported by the media. "Foxconn had clarified that 25 per cent of the latest hires are married women. This would mean nearly one-third of the total women are married. This ratio compares favourably to any factory in this sector currently



operating in India," one of the sources said. The Foxconn factory currently has about 70 per cent women and 30 per cent men and the Tamil Nadu plant is the largest factory for women employment in the country with the total employment having touched 45,000 workers during peak periods, they said. The company has also informed that the discussion around Hindu married women being discriminated against for wearing metals (ornaments and jewelry) is "entirely slanted" and wearing metal in such factories is a safety issue, a fact well recognised by both the industry and the government. Any person wearing metals - man or woman - regardless of their status (single or

married) and their religion (Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh etc.) are required to remove metals while working in the factory," the source said quoting the company's informal note. For safety reasons, no one wearing metal is allowed to work on the shop floor and this is a prevalent practice in several industries. According to sources, the company has stated that the media report is based on anecdotal comments by 5-10 people or potential job seekers. These comments likely came from candidates who did not get the job or no longer work at Foxconn. No immediate comments were received from Foxconn in response to an email query sent to the company on the matter.

Infosys' CEO Parekh settles insider trading case with Sebi; pays ₹25 lakh

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
IT giant Infosys' MD and CEO Salil Parekh has settled with markets regulator Sebi a case pertaining to alleged violation of insider trading norms after paying Rs 25 lakh. He allegedly failed to put in place "adequate and effective systems" of internal control to ensure compliance for preventing insider trading, according to an order passed by the Securities and Exchange Board of India (Sebi). The case emerged from Sebi's investigation between June 29,

2020, and September 27, 2021, in the matter of alleged insider trading in the scrip of Infosys. The regulator probe found that certain information which was Unpublished Price Sensitive Information (UPSIS) had not been considered as such by Infosys. The latest ruling came after Parekh proposed to Sebi to settle the alleged violations "without admitting or denying the findings of fact" through a settlement order. "In view of the acceptance of the settlement terms and receipt of settlement amount by Sebi, the specified

proceedings initiated against the applicant (Parekh) vide Show Cause Notice dated August 3, 2023, are disposed of in terms of ... The settlement Regulations," Sebi said in its order passed on Wednesday. The case relates to a partnership announcement between Infosys and US-based asset manager Vanguard in July 2020. Under the deal, Infosys was required to provide a cloud-based record keeping platform to Vanguard. The partnership, between Infosys and Vanguard,

considered as an expansion move for the IT firm, fell under the ambit of Unpublished Price Sensitive Information (UPSIS) requiring compliance with insider trading norms. However, the information had not been considered as such by Infosys. Under the insider trading rules, the CEO and MD of a listed company is responsible for putting in place an adequate and effective system of internal control to ensure compliance for preventing insider trading. In its order, Sebi noted that Salil Parekh was the CEO and

MD of Infosys at the time of the announcement of the strategic partnership between Infosys and Vanguard and Sebi's investigation concluded that by not complying with the rule, Parekh allegedly violated insider trading rules. In September 2021, the Sebi passed an interim order in September 2021 against two entities for prima facie violation of the provisions of insider trading rules in the context of alleged insider trading in the scrip of Infosys. Following this, a confirmatory order was passed in December 2021.

Project to develop Film City in Noida speeds up

PNS ■ NEW DELHI
The project to develop Noida International Film City, led by filmmaker Boney Kapoor's Bayview Projects LLP in collaboration with Bhutani Group, on Thursday advanced significantly. After winning the bid with a promising 18 per cent revenue share offer to the Uttar Pradesh Government, Kapoor and his team have signed a concession agreement with the Yamuna Expressway Industrial



Development Authority (YEIDA). This agreement allows them to proceed with the development of the Film City on a sprawling 1,000-acre site near Noida. The signing ceremony,

attended by Kapoor, Ashish Bhutani, and senior YEIDA officials including CEO Arun Vir Singh, marks a crucial milestone. The initial phase of development will cover 230 acres, focusing on creating world-class infrastructure for the film and media industry. The project, estimated to cost Rs 1,510 crore, emphasizes a strategic blend of commercial and industrial zones within the Film City to foster economic growth and cultural development in the region.

Video commerce offerings gain traction, Indians spent over 2 mn hours video shopping: Flipkart

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Homegrown e-commerce platform Flipkart on Thursday said video as a format is rapidly gaining adoption and Indian customers have spent over 2 million hours on its video commerce offerings in the past one year. India is one of the top consumers of internet data, and with Indian consumers becoming increasingly tech-savvy and digitally inclined, video commerce in the

country promises great potential. According to Flipkart Indians have spent over 2 million hours on its video commerce offerings, from June 2023 to May 2024. Tier 2 and tier 3 regions comprised 65 per cent of overall video commerce engagement, mostly in categories like fashion, beauty, personal care, home decor and furnishing. The maximum viewership clocked on a single live commerce video was 1.4 million, it added.



HIL will help identify talent for national team: VR Raghunath

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
D ragflick icon VR Raghunath said the upcoming Hockey India League will play a vital role in unearthing players who have the potential to contribute to the national team in future. Making a return after seven years, the tournament, featuring eight men's and six women's teams, will be held across December 2024 and February 2025. "The league will play a major role in identifying the talent for the national team. Players like Manpreet Singh and

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

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

Chennaiyin FC rope in Lalrinliana Hnamte for three years



PTI ■ CHENNAI
Chennaiyin FC on Thursday drafted in talented central midfielder Lalrinliana Hnamte on a three-year contract ahead of the ISL 2024-25 season. The 21-year-old has thus become the third midfielder to join the Marina Machans after Lukas Brambilla and Jitendra Singh ahead of the upcoming season. The Mizoram-born Hnamte is one of the brightest talents of Indian football. He made his Indian Super League (ISL) debut at the age of 18 for East Bengal in 2021. Welcoming Hnamte to the club, head coach Owen Coyle said: "With the ability he possesses we haven't seen as much of Hnamte as we should've in the league. He's a fantastic young boy who will offer something different to our midfield options." Before joining Chennaiyin, Hnamte was part of Mohun Bagan Super Giant for three seasons. He won the Durand Cup (2023), the ISL title (2023) and the League Shield (2024) with them. "I'm very excited and grateful to be part of this amazing club and I can't wait to play in front of the fans. I will give absolutely everything I have to help this team win," said Hnamte. Hnamte has made 43 appearances in the ISL, spending more than 1300 minutes on the field. In the last season, he recorded an impressive passing accuracy of 83 percent in 13 matches.



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

PTI ■ PANCHKULA (HARYANA)
A huge posse of more than 30 dope control officers (DCO) from the NADA have descended here for sample collection from the athletes taking part at the National Inter-State Championships, the final Olympics qualifying event, and they have been instructed to do target testing also. Usually, dope samples of the medal winners are also collected at big events like the national championships, and the unprecedented number of DCOs present at the Tau Devi Lal Stadium is expected to lead to a large sample size. The DCOs have mostly come from New Delhi where the National Anti-Doping Agency head office is located. "I can't tell much, but we have a big team here because it's the most important domestic event of the year as it's the final Olympics qualifying event in athletics," one of the officers, who can't be named for obvious reasons, told PTI on Thursday. "We are also doing target selection of athletes for collection of samples. That much I can tell." Even athletes who finished third or below at the heat races in the morning session of the opening day on Thursday were seen being asked by the DCOs to sign the receipt of notification form and agreement to undergo the test. The NADA team landed here on Wednesday, a day before the start of the championships. A source also said there was out-of-competition collection of samples, which would mean that it was done on Wednesday. The officers refused to divulge the exact or the possible sample size. Meanwhile, 100m national record holder Manikanta Hoblidhar of Karnataka made a shock exit in the preliminary round after finishing fifth in his heat race with a time of 11.10 seconds. His national record stands at 10.23s. Gold medal contenders Gurindervir Singh of Punjab, Amlan Borghain of Assam and Animesh Kujur of Odisha won their respective heats easily to make it to the semifinals. In the women's 100m, Assam's Hima Das, who is yet to attain full fitness after an injury, finished sixth in her heat with an unimpressive time of 12.69 seconds. The men's and women's 400m races saw a depleted field as some of the top runners pulled out to concentrate in the mixed 4x400m relay race in which India is hoping for a last minute qualification for the Paris Olympics. The initial entry list had the likes of Jyothika Sri Dandi, Subha Venkatesan and MR Poovamma among women and Muhammed Anas Yahya and Amoj Jacob but they did not run the individual quarter-mile event. But still, Kiran Pahal of Haryana stole the limelight in the women's 400m preliminary round with the fastest time of 52.33 seconds. In men's high jump, national record holder Tejaswani Shankar and Sarvesh Kushare made the finals after finishing first and second in the qualifying round with identical heights of 2.10m.

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



AP ■ GELSENKIRCHEN (GERMANY)
A pre-game chat with Cristiano Ronaldo inspired Khvicha Kvaratskhelia and Georgia to one of the biggest upsets in European Championship history, beating Portugal 2-0 and advancing to the last 16. Georgia's No. 7 has admired Ronaldo for years and had spoken before the game of how much he wanted his hero's shirt. He got it, along with a goal and a slice of soccer history, on a frustrating night for Ronaldo and Portugal. "Before the match there was a meeting and he wished me success and it was so much for me because I would never imagine that he would come to me and say something to me," Kvaratskhelia said in translated comments. "I realized that I could do and we could do so many things today because it gave me inspiration." For Napoli forward Kvaratskhelia, the win even surpasses his club's historic Italian title last year. "This is the best day in my life because it was more difficult to do it with the Georgian team than with Napoli," he said. A banner at the Georgian fans' end of the stadium said "Believe," and they did. The Georgians needed a win to reach the knockout stage at Euro 2024 and got their opening goal after only 93 seconds. Georges Mikautadze intercepted a poor pass and set up Kvaratskhelia to score with a low shot. António Silva gave away the ball before the first goal and gave away a penalty for the

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

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

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



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

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

unhappy with the result, but there are no questions for the players." There was nearly a different ending when Ukraine substitute Ruslan Malinovskyi tried to score directly from corner late in the match. Belgium goalkeeper Koen Casteels managed to save the effort at the near post. The third-ranked Belgians had another scare when Georgiy Sudakov ran into the box but shot right at Casteels. Belgium, which lost to Slovakia in its opening game, struggled to get its offense going again with Romelu Lukaku failing to make the

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

Fueled by feeling insulted, Romania draws 1-1 with Slovakia to send both into Euro 2024 round of 16



AP ■ FRANKFURT
Romania coach Edward Iordanescu ruffled insulted by that pre-game chatter he called "shameful" of possibly contriving a low-key draw against Slovakia to send both teams into the European Championship knockout round. It did indeed end 1-1 on Wednesday and Romania finished atop of Group E - ahead of favored Belgium - but not in the way those pundits throwing shade had predicted. And Iordanescu let them know about it after a high-energy game played in severe weather which had wild mood

earlier in the week. "They should have waited to see and then judge us. So this was shameful." "They throw this garbage to us, not just the team but to our fans. We showed we have character," the Romanian coach said, in the only answer in English of his news conference. The quirk of the 24-team Euros format is that Groups E and F playing on the final day of the group stage have an advantage. They know the result they need to be assured of being among the four best third-place teams who must advance to the last-16 bracket. At the start of play Wednesday, all four teams were on three points before

Romania and Slovakia drew in Frankfurt at the same time as Belgium was held 0-0 by Ukraine, which was eliminated. Romania topped the group on the tiebreaker of more goals scored than Belgium, and both had a better goal difference than third-place Slovakia. "Nobody could say my team didn't play to win for the 90 minutes," Slovakia coach Francesco Calzona said. Both Iordanescu and Calzona were right to feel vindicated one day after questions at pre-game news conferences about the option of a contrive a low-energy draw to get the point both needed.

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

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



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

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

Gukesh beats Deac Bogdan-Danielin Superbet Classic chess

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



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

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

SOUTH AFRICA BANISH AFGHANISTAN, ENTER MAIDEN T20 WC FINAL

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

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



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



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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

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



South Africa's last outing in the format was earlier this year in February when they were trounced by Australia by an innings and 284 runs in Perth.

After this fixture against India, South Africa's next Test assignment will be against England in December. "Getting the opportunity to

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

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

Sri Lanka head coach Chris Silverwood steps down

PTI ■ COLOMBO

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

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

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

PTI ■ LEICESTER

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



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

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



Bumrah is 1000 times better than me: Kapil Dev

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

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

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

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

PTI ■ CHENNAI

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

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

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



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

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

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

SQUADS:

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