



OPINION 6
IC-814: LESSONS
BEYOND THE BINARY

WORLD 8
NETANYAHU DEMANDS CONTROL OF
GAZA'S BORDER WITH EGYPT

MONEY 10
FOREIGN INFLOWS LIFT
MARKETS HIGH

BHUBANESWAR, FRIDAY SEPTEMBER 6, 2024; PAGES 12 ₹4

Established 1864

the pioneer

www.dailypioneer.com

Published From
DELHI LUCKNOW BHOPAL BHUBANESWAR
RANCHI RAIPUR CHANDIGARH
DEHRADUN HYDERABAD VIJAYWADA

Late City Vol. 20 Issue 244
*Air Surcharge Extra if Applicable



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12 SPORTS

NO PANACEA FOR COMMONERS AT AIIMS, DELHI

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

2018: A four-month-old infant whose parents brought her to the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), Delhi, for urgent surgery for a hole in her heart was given a slot for the corrective surgery operation in 2023, resulting in a five-year wait.

Fast forward to June, 2024: A six-year-old from Begusarai, Bihar, has been left waiting for a heart operation at the premier health institute for the past six years due to "dates changed thrice."

Despite the best efforts of his father, Ankit Kumar, who had been running from pillar to post gathering funds and blood, it was a long wait for treatment. However, it was only after the issue was highlighted in the media and the NHRC took suo motu cognisance that the hospital formed a panel to investigate the delays.

These are likely some of the longest waiting periods for patients at AIIMS Delhi and have been reported as such.

Welcome to India's most prestigious medical institution, established as the country's foremost centre of medical excellence. The bustling scene outside the hospital, with relatives of the patients lying by the roadside waiting for their turn outside the emergency wards, is a telling example of the stark disparity in healthcare access in the country.



While this flagship hospital draws thousands daily, it also highlights a critical shortage of specialist doctors and medical facilities both at the hospital and in rural areas, where the majority of India's 1.4 billion people struggle with the challenge of reaching distant healthcare facilities.

On Thursday, *The Pioneer* visited AIIMS Delhi and spoke with the relatives of ailing patients, most of whom were suffering from serious conditions like blood cancer, some of them admitted in the emergency departments while a few were waiting for their turn. The hospital is visited by around 20,000 patients daily from across various states, particularly populous ones like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha, and even far-off States of North-East.

Take the case of 45-year-old Jagan Ram from Kanpur. He has been running from pillar to post to arrange blood for his ailing relative, Radha Gupta (24), who is suffering from blood cancer. "We came here yesterday. Radha has been in an emergency, and her blood counts have gone down. The doctors said they have arranged one unit of blood, and since she will need blood transfusions whenever it is low, we are now arranging donors."

Jagan Ram who lost his 18-year-old son to blood cancer a few years ago has a better understanding of the condition. "The doctors back home in Kanpur did not disclose the disease my son was suffering from. But now I have learned a lot about this health condition and what may come, I will ensure that this girl (Radha) does not meet the same fate."

People come here seeking advanced medical care, specialised treatment, and expert consultations that might not be available in their local hospitals. The reputation of AIIMS for its high-quality healthcare services, cutting-edge research, and a wide range of specialties contribute to its status as a go-to destination for many seeking comprehensive medical care.

But for Mammu, a 20-year-old youth from Jaganpura Kauch, Jalon in Uttar Pradesh, it has been a restless day as he silently writes in pain on a stretcher in the open with the weather behaving nastily. His attendant said he's having thick blood problem. "The concerned doctor is not here. So we have been asked to wait outside," said 40-year-old Jagat Singh, attending to the patient. The medical report showed that Mammu's hemoglobin level has shot up to 25, contrary to the normal 14-15 hb. He might be suffering from a disorder that causes the body to produce too many red blood cells. Yet another relative of a patient with co-morbidity such as TB and diabetes outside the emergency ward said he is trying for a 'recommendation' so that his ward could get a bed. This hospital has its own reputation, with doctors dedicated to their profession. This is what makes patients flock to this hospital, he said matter-of-factly. Outside the hospital, one can see the adjacent streets are crowded with patients and their families from distant places, all seeking remedies for their or their loved ones' health issues. "We've been living on the footpath for the past two weeks and have been coming to the hospital for the last five years for my son's treatment," rued Ramwati from Rajasthan's Alwar district. Her son suffers from chronic asthma, a condition marked by inflammation that restricts airflow from the lungs. As securing a hospital bed is a significant challenge, they are doing everything they can to ensure the little boy receives the necessary treatment. In fact, this is the travail of almost every other patient and their relatives on the roadside. Conceding that the six new AIIMS like hospitals at underserved States in Bhubaneswar, Ranchi, Patna, Raipur, Bhopal, Jodhpur and Rishikesh have failed to ease the pressure on AIIMS Delhi, a senior official in the Union Health Ministry blamed faculty shortages, resource crunch, and infrastructural deficiencies. Besides these six States, more AIIMS like institutes are coming up in other States too. Public health specialists believe that this state of affairs is largely due to flawed health policies adopted by successive Governments. Anant Bhan, a researcher in global health, said merely naming an institute 'AIIMS' does not guarantee it will be held in the same esteem as the one in Delhi. "AIIMS Delhi has earned a reputation for quality and affordability, but the new centres face challenges that need to be overcome," he stressed.



SC reserves order on Arvind Kejriwal

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■ NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday reserved order on Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal's separate pleas seeking bail and challenging arrest by Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) in the excise policy "scam". After concluding arguments from both sides, a bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan said, "Thank you for the assistance. Judgment reserved."

Additional Solicitor General SV Raju represented the CBI and Senior Advocate Abhishek Singhvi appeared for the AAP chief. The apex court was hearing two separate petitions challenging his arrest by the CBI and the denial of bail in the corruption case filed by the agency.

The AAP convenor has challenged the August 5 order of the Delhi High Court dismissing his plea against his arrest by the agency. He has also filed a Special Leave Petition against the High Court's refusal to consider his bail plea. The CBI had arrested Kejriwal on June 26. Questioning the maintainability of Kejriwal's pleas seeking bail and challenging his arrest, the CBI told the Supreme Court that he should have first approached the trial court for bail in the corruption case linked to the alleged excise policy scam. "He has approached Delhi High Court directly without going to sessions court. Under Section 439 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC), both have concurrent jurisdiction. My preliminary objection is he must first go to trial court," ASJ Raju said.

"He has approached the Delhi High Court directly without going to sessions court. My preliminary objection is he must first go to trial court," Raju argued. The CBI did not issue a notice to Kejriwal under section 41A of the CrPC as he was already in judicial custody, he said. Raju said if the Supreme Court which grants bail to Kejriwal, it will demoralise the Delhi High Court, which had upheld his arrest. "Don't say that. Whatever order we pass, we will ensure nothing like that happens," the bench assured Raju.

REBEL TROUBLE FOR THE BJP IN HARYANA

RAJESH KUMAR/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI

A day after the BJP released its first list of 67 candidates for the October 5 Haryana Assembly elections, discontent among party leaders, including Ministers in the Nayab Saini Cabinet, flared up. Several leaders expressed their dissatisfaction, with several resigning from their posts on Thursday.

Among them were Haryana Energy Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala, Minister of State Bishamber Singh Balmiki, Ratia MLA Laxman Napa, former Ministers Karan Dev Kamboj, Kavita Jain, MP Savitri Jindal, MLA Lakshman Napa who had raised the banner of revolt. The rebel trouble for BJP started shortly after it came out with the first list of candidates as it left many sulking. Interestingly, the BJP has named former prison official Sunil Sangwan — who recommended parole for Dera Sacha Sauda chief and rape convict Ram Rahim six times — on its list of candidates for next month's Haryana Assembly election. Sangwan will contest the Dadri seat which former BJP leader Somveer Sangwan won as an Independent in 2019 that was after the party favoured wrestler Babita Phogat over him. Energy and Jail Minister Ranjit Singh Chautala (79), son of former Deputy Prime Minister Devi Lal said he took a



decision after a meeting with his supporters and will now enter the fray as an Independent. Ranjit Chautala called a meeting of his supporters after the party ignored his candidature from Rania segment in Sirsa district. "I had good relations with them (BJP). They gave me the Lok Sabha ticket (from Hisar, which he fought unsuccessfully). But don't know on whose advice they have acted. I will say anyone who has given them this advice has caused damage to the party," Chautala said. "I am Chaudhary Devi Lal's son. I have some stature... I have decided to contest as an Independent," he said, while adding he has resigned as a Minister and quit the BJP. Chautala was hoping to contest from Rania seat but the BJP fielded Shishpal Kamboj instead.

Dhaka issues warning of discomfort with Delhi, if Sheikh Hasina speaks

PTI ■ DHAKA

Muhammad Yunus, the head of Bangladesh's interim Government, has said former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina making political remarks from India is an "unfriendly gesture", asserting that she must remain silent to prevent the discomfort to both countries until Dhaka requests her extradition. "If India wants to keep her until the time Bangladesh (Government) wants her back, the condition would be that she has to keep quiet," he said. In an interview with PTI at his official residence in Dhaka, Yunus, who was appointed the country's Chief Adviser after Hasina's ouster, stressed that while Bangladesh values strong ties with India, New Delhi must move "beyond the narrative that portrays every other political party except Awami League as Islamist and that the country will turn into Afghanistan without Sheikh Hasina." "No one is comfortable with her stance there in India because we want her back to



try her. She is there in India and at times she is talking, which is problematic. Had she been quiet, we would have forgotten it; people would have also forgotten it as she would have been in her own world. But sitting in India, she is speaking and giving instructions. No one likes it," he said. "It is not good for us or for India. There is discomfort regarding it," he told PTI. Yunus was apparently referring to Hasina's statement on August 13 in which she demanded "justice", saying those involved in recent "terror acts", killings and

vandalism must be investigated, identified and punished. This has been the only statement made by Hasina after she fled. It was posted on her US-based son Sajeb Wazed Joy's X handle. Following unprecedented anti-Government protests that peaked on August 5, Hasina resigned as Prime Minister and fled to India. Her presence in India for nearly four weeks has fuelled speculation in Bangladesh. When asked whether Bangladesh has communicated its stance to India, Yunus said it has been conveyed verbally and quite firmly that she should keep quiet. "Everyone understands it. We have said quite firmly that she should keep quiet. This is an unfriendly gesture towards us; she has been given shelter there and she is campaigning from there. It is not that she has gone there on a normal course. She has fled following a people's uprising and public anger," he said. Yunus stated that the interim Government is committed to ensuring justice for the people of Bangladesh against the atrocities, and justice requires that she be brought back to the country. "Yes, she has to be brought back or else the people of Bangladesh won't be at peace. The kind of atrocities she has committed, she has to be tried in front of everyone here," he emphasised. Discussing the future of the India-Bangladesh relationship, Yunus expressed a desire for good ties with India but insisted that New Delhi must abandon the narrative that only Hasina's leadership ensures the country's stability.

Heated debate in Assembly over Ravenshaw name

Opposition demands CM to clarify govt's stance

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Assembly on Thursday witnessed a heated debate over Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's suggestion to rename the 156-year-old Ravenshaw University as the name hurts Odia pride.

Opposition BJD members demanded that Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi clarify the government's stance on the issue.

BJD member Byomakesh Ray said the Ravenshaw University is not just an institution but a significant part of Odisha's history.

He mentioned that Thomas Edward Ravenshaw, who had taken

charge as Commissioner of Orissa just before the 1866 great famine, promoted the Odia language and higher education in the State. Ravenshaw advocated for Odia to be taught in schools instead of Bengali and this was supported by renowned Odia literary figures like Fakir Mohan Senapati and Gouri Shankar Ray.

On the other hand, BJP member Tankadhar Tripathi said the people of Odisha have welcomed the Union Minister's proposal. He questioned why an institution should be named after a British official and suggested that the university, instead, be named after an Odia stalwart.

BJD member Sarada Jena argued that changing the name of the university would not alter the educational system and accused some el-

ements of trying to create unnecessary tension in the peaceful city of Cuttack.

Irashis Acharya of the BJP said that Ravenshaw had once described the Odias as lazy and that more than 3 million people died in the 1866 famine due to an inaccurate report Ravenshaw had given on Odisha's food grain stocks.

Congress member Sofia Firdous warned against creating a situation that could hurt people's sentiments and claimed that such narrow-mindedness is driving investors away from the State.

She highlighted that the Ravenshaw University is a notable educational institution with a legacy of great intellectual alumni. She reiterated that the Chief Minister should address the issue in the House to clear any confusion.

Govt to take action against corrupt officials

Says CM in Assembly

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The State Government is all set to take action against erring and corrupt officials.

Making a statement in the State Assembly on Thursday, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi said that disciplinary proceedings are pending against at least 176 engineers and officials. This is under active consideration of the government.

Majhi stated that action is pending under the Odisha Civil Services (Classification, Control and Appeal) Rules 1962.

Similarly, answering a question from Salipur BJD MLA Prashant Behera, Steel and Mines Minister Bibhuti Bhushan Jena stated that disciplinary proceedings are pending against 32 in-service mining officials. Out of them, one is a Joint Mining Director and seven are Deputy Mining Directors, 13 Mining Officers, five senior Mining Inspectors and six junior Mining Inspectors.



Putin seeks Modi's intervention in Ukraine

PNS/AGENCIES ■ NEW DELHI/MOSCOW

Days after Prime Minister Narendra Modi urged Russia and Ukraine to talk to each other to end the ongoing conflict and said India is ready to play an "active role," President Vladimir Putin on Thursday named India among the three countries he is constantly in touch over the issue. He also said these countries are sincerely making efforts to resolve it. Modi made these assertions during his talks with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during his historic visit there on August 23. He conveyed to Zelenskyy that both Ukraine and Russia should sit together without wasting time to end the ongoing war and that India was ready to play an "active role" to restore peace in the region.

Saheed Madho Singh Haath Kharcha scheme

To be launched to curb tribal students' dropout rates

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

The Odisha Government would start a Saheed Madho Singh Haath Kharcha scheme from this year to curb dropout rates among tribal students in the State, informed Parliamentary Affairs Minister Mukesh Mahaling in the State Assembly on Thursday.

A decision in this regard has already been taken by the State Cabinet, he said.

"An annual grant of Rs 5,000 will be provided to every ST student in the State having passed Class-VIII/X and taking admission in Class-IX/XI under the scheme. The scheme would benefit three lakh tribal students," said Mahaling.

"A total of Rs 156 crore has been allocated for the scheme, which will be implemented in a bid to curb the dropout rate

among the tribal students in the State," he added.

Notably, the dropout rate in Odisha's secondary and higher secondary education is among the highest in India. This has been a matter of concern for the State Government so much so that it has come up with the Madho Singh Haath Kharcha Scheme, a first-of-its-kind plan to provide monetary incentives for tribal students to encourage them to stay focused on their education and pursue higher studies.

In city Youth held for posing as Union Min's nephew

Duped lakhs from people

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

A youth was detained by police in Bhubaneswar on Thursday for allegedly duping people of lakhs of rupees by posing as a nephew of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan. The accused was identified as Rahul Sahu.

According to sources, some victims duped by him became



suspicious when they found that he had blocked their phone numbers and nabbed him from a hotel at Master Canteen here on Wednesday night. He was later handed over to the Capital police.

Rahul, who claims to be a resident of Talcher, allegedly

collected lakhs of rupees from several people by assuring jobs, transfers and ownership of petrol pumps and gas agencies.

He gained the victims' confidence by posting photographs with the Union Minister and the Odisha Chief Minister and Deputy Chief Ministers on his social media accounts.

Police also seized his phone, some fake appointment letters and transfer orders.

Over 1,100 deaths in last 5 yrs Odisha records highest casualties due to lightning



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha has recorded the highest number of deaths caused by lightning strikes in India over the last five years, informed Revenue and Disaster Management Minister Suresh Pujari in the State Assembly on Thursday.

According to Pujari, a total of 1,103 people have lost their valuable lives due to lightning strike incidents in the State during this period. Districts like Sundargarh, Keonjhar and Baleswar have reported more lightning strike deaths than other districts.

As per reports, Odisha is witnessing more lightning strike deaths as it is a minerals-rich State. The minerals are good conductors of electricity.

"No technology has been

developed so far to find out where lightning strikes will take place. Districts like Jharsuguda and Balangir have witnessed as many as 72 and 55 lightning strikes, respectively. Government is providing compensation amount of Rs 4 lakh for a death related to a lightning strike," said Pujari.

"While the government has allocated Rs 2,300 crore to the Disaster Management Department, Rs 200 crore has been kept as compensation amount. The government is deliberating to give compensation to the Odias who will die outside the State due to lightning strikes," he added. Notably, a large State like Uttar Pradesh has reported only 542 deaths due to lightning strikes in the last five years.

Kelucharan Award Fest commences with Ghazal

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

In its 30th year of celebration, the Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra (GKCM) Award Festival, organised by Srjan, commenced with a soulful Ghazal recital by Chandan Dass at the Rabindra Mandap here on Thursday.

The seven-day cultural extravaganza scheduled till September 11 would feature a well-curated line-up of artists including celebrated musicians Kalaimamani, Dr OS Arun, Pt. Rakesh Chaurasia, Ojas Adhiya and Ambi and Bindu Subramanian and renowned dancers Guru Vaibhav Arekar and Guru Ashimbandhu Bhattacharjee and Guru Ratikant Mohapatra's very own Srjan ensemble.

The award ceremony on the

final day will see stalwart artists Guru Kumkum Lal, Guru Lakshmikanta Palit, Guru Dhaneswar Swain and Uttam Mohanty receive the Shalimar's Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Award 2024 and Dr Pompi Paul, Rajnita Mehra, Avijit Das and Rohita Pradhan receive the Shalimar's Guru Kelucharan Mohapatra Yuva Prativa Samman 2024.

The inaugural evening had guests including Suresh Pujari, Minister of Revenue; Prof Tej Partap, Vice-Chancellor, Sri Sri University; and Ashok Kumar Tripathy, former Member, Board of Revenue.

Srjan awaits yet another evening of cultural immersion with a Bharatanatyam performance by reputed exponent Guru Vaibhav Arekar and the Sankhya Dance Company from Mumbai.

Attack on UTP in Jharpada jail Victim questions impartiality of investigation

Demands judicial or police probe

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Under-trial prisoner (UTP) Soumyakant Mohanty, who was injured after dreaded criminal Hyder's son and his aides assaulted him for lodging a complaint against various illegal activities in the Jharpada Special Jail before the District Legal Services Authority (DLSA), raised questions over the probe into the incident on Thursday.

Releasing an audio from the jail, Soumyakant alleged that the assaulters are again threatening him. He further alleged that the investigation was not carried out by the Jail DIG in an impartial manner. He demanded either a judicial or a police investigation into the incident.



"In the presence of the jailor and under his provocation, gangster Hyder's son Muna and his associates tried to kill me. I have not yet been informed anything about the inquiry into the incident and the steps taken in this connection" said Soumyakant.

"I am being kept in the lockup for 24 hours. However, the inmates who attacked me are roaming free. They are abusing me. I don't under-

stand why a victim is being kept in the lockup for 24 hours and the accused are roaming freely. No action has been taken in this regard despite informing the authorities. I am not at all satisfied with the investigation process. Senior jail officials are trying to suppress the incident. There should be an independent inquiry," he said.

"The incident happened here due to the selling of ganja. I

was attacked as I said to stop all these things. The DIG is the classmate of the (Jail) Superintendent. After denying my three statements, he received my fourth statement. He is only accepting my statement of the day on which I was attacked. He is not accepting my past statements as it may create problems for his classmate. I want to appeal to the human rights panel. I want Odisha Police to conduct an independent inquiry into the incident. I have also complete faith in the judiciary," he added.

Additional Director General (Prisons) Amitabh Thakur said that an investigation was being carried out into all the allegations by Soumyakant.

As per reports, Jail DIG Anasuya Jena has submitted the investigation report to the Prisons ADG.

OSEFD team meets S&ME Secy



PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

On the occasion of the Teachers Day on Thursday, Odisha Special Educators Federation for Divyang Association (OSEFD) State joint Secretary Ayushman Chaudhary, IT Cell coordinator Biswabijayee Dash and member Abhishek Acharya met the School and Mass Education Department's new Secretary Shalini Pandit.

There was a discussion on the issue of continuous de-

crease in the number of students with disabilities from mainstream schools, the recruitment of trained special educator aspirants in mainstream schools as per the order of the Supreme Court and the right of children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009 and Right of Person with Disabilities Act 2016.

The Secretary gave an assurance to implement the measures seriously and wished the leadership of OSEFD on the Teachers' Day.

Cuttack Bali Yatra to kick off from Nov 15

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The historic Bali Yatra in Cuttack will kick off on the banks of Mahanadi river from November 15 this year, informed district Collector Dattatraya Bhausaheb Shinde after the district administration conducted the first preparatory meeting for the mega trade fair on Thursday.

The duration of the festival, organised to celebrate the glorious maritime history of Odisha, would be discussed in the next meeting, the Collector said.

Like every year, the annual festival will be organised at



Gadagadia Ghat on the banks of Mahanadi in the evening hours. In the presence of senior officials, the district administration discussed important events in the first preparatory meet for the trade fair.

The meeting emphasised

vehicle parking, traffic control and equal convenience for the visitors and traders at the festival.

"Efforts are on for smooth allotment of stalls to all the traders coming to set up tents at Bali Yatra. So, we are plan-

ning to open a single-window system. The administration is also making plans to ease traffic congestion that will be caused due to the huge rush," Collector Shinde informed.

He said that a more spacious place would be allocated for vehicle parking and police personnel and volunteers would be deployed to check on vehicular movements to avoid traffic woes.

"A green corridor will also be set up for ambulances, emergency vehicles and VIP guests. The number of washrooms will be increased this time," the Collector informed.

'Deploy adequate police force in campus'

Ravenshaw authorities urge DCP amid renaming row

PNS ■ CUTTACK

The Ravenshaw University on Thursday sought the intervention of DCP, Cuttack due to a rise in protests following the controversy surrounding the alleged name change of the 156-year-old educational institution.

In a letter to the DCP, the university's Registrar highlighted the tense situation and requested urgent police deployment to ensure the safety of students, staffs and families in the campus.

"Ravenshaw University campus is witnessing some protesting campaigns organised mostly by outsiders (non-students) from 01.09.2024. As a result, the campus is tensed and the situation is getting aggravated day by day," the letter read.



The Registrar added, "Please note that there are 3,000 boarders (boys and girls) staying in different hostels. The families of both teaching and non-teaching staffs are also residing inside the campus. It is felt that this tense situation is becoming untenable and needs immediate action for bringing normalcy in the campus."

"To restore academic peace and tranquility inside the campus, deployment of police personnel is highly essential round the clock. So, it is requested to kindly take necessary steps to deploy adequate number of police personnel inside the campus as well as at the entry points so as to maintain law and order situation in the university," the Registrar wrote to the DCP.

For both govt, pvt sectors

Let there be uniform socially-inclusive job policy

The marginalised section is still reeling under unequal access to public employment though Article 16 says about equality of opportunity in matters of public employment.

An independent social audit of any workplace can give us a clear picture about the status of social diversity in workplaces. Data on organised sector employment show that the people suffering with socio-religious disabilities in India have very less access to organised sector employment, especially in the private sector.

While the reserve posts in Government offices in direct appointments and promotions for SC/ST/OBC have not been filled up proportionately as per their quota, non-availability of suitable candidate, vacancy and backlog vacancies still continue to block the appointments.

These sections of people have been denied their constitutional right to employment in the absence of a socially inclusive employment policy of Government since independence.

Justice BP Jeenan Reddy said in



MANAS JENA

case of Mandal judgement that "The objective of reservation is not just to give jobs to some persons belonging to certain communities but also to empower them and ensure their participation in all decision making processes of the State. It also gives certain status and power besides the means of livelihood."

It is said in the Constitution that the State will create equality of opportunity in the matter of public employment but scope of public employment has been limited to

Government and public sector jobs only which is about less than 2 percent of the total employment. The largest employment opportunities available outside Government are the private sector but the Government has not formulated any employment policy for the private sector to make it socially inclusive.

While there has been a move for disinvestment and privatisation, the private sector in India does not follow an employment policy in line with principles of equality in the Constitution of India to ensure equal participation of all in matters of public employment without discrimination and exclusion.

The private corporates in India are monopolizing the exploitation of the resources of the nation such as land, power, mineral, water, and enjoying loan, subsidy and public infrastructure, and also evicting people in the name of national interest under the plea of job creation, but when it comes to sharing of benefits of employment they are virtually turning their back and following a socially non-inclusive policy.

With the true spirit of the Constitution, the application of equal-

ity of opportunity in matters of public employment must be inclusive of all kinds of employment available in the country to all its citizens. The State should not limit its role to its own sector; rather it must enforce an inclusive employment policy for the whole country.

The constitutional duty of the Government should not be just lim-

SOCIAL CANVAS

ited to distribution of jobs; rather it should enforce a policy of equality applicable to the job market in the country.

There is no denying that the private sector in India is not following any socially inclusive employment policy in the absence of legislation. The reality is that ours is a diverse unequal society with many hierarchical divisions based on caste and ethnicity and differences based on religion, language and belief system.

For generations together a few dominant castes in India with their traditional social power, access to

education and other forms of resources such as land enjoy hegemony in business and continue their control over politics to safeguard their own resources, business and public opportunities including private sector employment by denying access to the marginalised.

Way back in the Round Table Conference, Dr Ambedkar had sug-

gested a public service commission for recruitment. Why does not the private sector also follow a policy of recruitment through the public service commission with a fair and transparent examination system? They can follow qualifying marks and set up one standard for one and all and follow policies of inclusion of different social groups as per their numerical strength of population.

The conditions and benefits of jobs can be made equal for all minimising the huge gap in public and private sector labour policies. It

has been suggested for a long time that there must be a common standard of wage rate, social security benefit and condition of working hours and leave policy for all employees of a country irrespective of their work place.

The privileges of the organised sector must be available to all employees equally without discrimination. It has been observed that the most privileged public sector employees have more bargaining power than the others. The discrimination in the private job market through monopoly in recruitment must end with a common employment policy for all sectors.

Most of the trade unions in the country believing in socialism have not raised the issue of a socially inclusive employment policy to represent diversity and the culture of working together. They have been busy in organising employees of different sectors for their immediate economic interest whether they are most well paid and overprotected public sector bank employees or most vulnerable construction workers but the issue of disparity and discrimination in the employment

market as a whole has not been prominently raised.

The continued inequality in wage, social security, and employment conditions are not being addressed.

The very specific issues relating to employment of women, Dalit and Adivasis, OBCs, religious minorities and economically poor do not feature prominently in trade union movements. These sections of workers face discrimination in the private job market because of their social identity in the absence of affirmative employment policy.

It is expected that all workers must have free and non-discriminatory access to the available scope of employment in the country. The employment market must be secular and free from gender and caste biases to allow the marginalised social groups to avail the opportunities.

The Government must soon bring legislation for a socially-inclusive employment policy to ensure inclusive representation and create scope for all to actively take part in national growth.

(manasbbs15@gmail.com)

Odisha promoting organic farming: Agri Min

'As excessive fertiliser use leads to cancer'

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Excess fertiliser use in agriculture is causing cancer and the Odisha Government is promoting organic farming at a large scale, said Agriculture Minister KV Singh Deo while replying to a question by Dibya Shankar Mishra. Singh Deo informed that at present organic farming is being done in Odisha in 10 tribal districts including Malkangiri, Kandhamal, Koraput, Rayagada, Dhenkanal, Balangir, Kalahandi and Mayurbhanj.

Punjab is using more fertiliser per hectare than the national average and now two cancer trains are running to Mumbai owing to growing cancer cases from that State. Hence, the Odisha Government has decided to promote organic farming in the State, Singh Deo said in the Assembly on Wednesday.

Mishra said Odisha has become self-sufficient in agricultural production and has grown in terms of fish production and poultry in the KBK region. "Will the Government take up organic farming on a larger scale? Will there be any subsidy for farmers as the production rate will come down?" asked Mishra.



In his reply, Singh Deo said, "The Odisha Government wants people to go for organic farming. Productivity might increase with fertilisers, but it degrades the soil whereas organic fertilisers improve the fertility of the soil. Hence, the State Government is going to promote organic farming and ensure that the produce of the farmers reaches the correct market. The linkage that will be provided will help farmers to go for organic farming."

According to Singh Deo, if any farmer wants to get their soil tested they can do it through soil card and extension officers have been deployed to take up organic farming.



An artisan of Athagarh is busy giving final touches to the images of the Lord on Thursday ahead of Ganesh Puja on Saturday. **Dinesh Das**

In Ganjam

BJP leader injured in attack by miscreants

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

A BJP leader sustained critical injuries when he was allegedly attacked by unidentified miscreants near College Square in Aska of Ganjam district. He was identified as Srinibas Bhanj.

He was rescued in a critical condition and admitted to the Aska Sub-Divisional Hospital. After preliminary treatment, he was referred to the MKCG Medical College Hospital in Brahmapur after his condition worsened.

While the motive for the attack was yet to be ascertained, Srinibas alleged that he was targeted over political rivalry.

According to sources, Srinibas was on his way home



when he was waylaid by the miscreants near College Square. The miscreants attacked him with sharp-edged weapons and iron rods, leaving him critically injured.

Hearing his shouts for help, passersby came to his rescue and admitted him to the hospital.

"I couldn't see them properly. But there were two to three youths who had come on a bike. They came from nowhere and attacked me with sharp-edged weapons. Earlier, they had threatened me on phone," alleged Srinibas.

'Provide rest shed for people visiting HC with work'

Baleswar activist writes to CM, CJ

PNS ■ BALESWAR

A social activist of Baleswar has demanded for a rest shed with all facilities including toilets and drinking water for the clients and their family members who are coming to the courts for different requirements.

Gopal Chandra Das, a resident of Mahishamunda, Baliaipal, has written a letter to the Chief Minister, the Chief Justice of Orissa High Court and several others concerned, urging them to construct a rest

shed for the convenience of the people visiting the High Court at Cuttack.

Das mentioned that clients and their known people visit the High Court for different reasons, yet in the want of a rest shed, they face a tough time. Often they are forced to take shelter in the nearby shops, mainly tea and snack shops. The miseries get amplified during the rainy season since the nearby shops get crowded.

Das, besides urging for an air-conditioned hall for the clients and others, threatened to stage dharna before the High Court if his demand was not fulfilled within a month.

Nuapada educationist gets rare honour

On Guru Divas

PNS ■ NUAPADA

Dr Kapilendra Das, a renowned educationist from Nuapada district, has been awarded the prestigious Teacher Graduate Award by the International Internship University. He is only the second recipient from Odisha to receive the honour.

Dr Das has dedicated 32 years of his career to teaching in Government higher secondary schools and secondary training schools, consistently working towards educational reforms within the district. His efforts have earned him widespread recognition at district, State, national and international levels, both as a teacher and a writer.



Over the years, Dr Das has published numerous articles in various national and international journals, covering topics ranging from education to Ambedkar's thoughts. Several of his English research articles are also awaiting publication.

Dr Das got the honour on September 5, celebrated as Guru Divas, from the International Internship University, a virtual university committed to providing quality education to young learners across the globe.

Vedanta distributes 4,000 school kits



Covers 50 schools in the 3 tribal dists

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Vedanta Aluminium distributed school kits to more than 4,000 students across 50+ schools in areas surrounding Kuraloi and Sijimali mines in tribal-dominated Rayagada, Kalahandi and Jharsuguda districts.

Each study kit includes a school bag, a water bottle, a notebook, a geometry box, and various other stationary items so that the school kit could cater to the educational needs of the beneficiary students.

In his reactions, Kathaghara High School headmaster Janmejaya Sabar, expressed, "I appreciate Vedanta Aluminium for providing the students with study materials. Most of our students encounter lack of resources that ham-

per their basic education in the long run. These kits will make a big difference by encouraging the students to pursue their schooling."

Prominent among the villages, coming under Vedanta's Kuraloi coal mine area periphery, where the school kits have been distributed are: Kudaloi in Kudaloi gram panchayat (GP); Piplimal, Liakhai, Ujalpur and Ulap in Piplimal GP; Banjari, Grindola, Chaurimahul and Bartap in Banjari GP; and Ward No. 17 in Belpahar Municipality limits.

Notably, the school children, residing in the hinterlands surrounding Kuraloi and Sijimali, lack access to proper school supplies following which their learning process gets hindered abysmally. These efforts underline the company's commitment to positively impact lives within and beyond its operational areas.

In Sambalpur

Alleged rape victim's body cremated by admn

PNS ■ SAMBALPUR

The body of a 25-year-old woman, who was allegedly raped and killed in the Rairakhol area, was cremated by police and the district administration on Tuesday evening.

The cremation took place at the Rairakhol NAC cremation centre after villagers from Sahebi and Jharbeda refused to allow the body to be cremated in their village due to superstitious beliefs.

Rairakhol Sub-Collector Rashmi Ranjan Mahanta said, "As the villagers did not allow for the cremation, we brought her body to Rairakhol NAC cremation centre and performed the last rites with her family present." He further noted that the villagers' protest has subsided and the situation has returned to normal.

The victim had gone missing on Friday last after she went to bath at a nearby stream. Her family discovered her belongings but could not find her. Two days

later, her body was discovered by villagers in the Kaunsigul jungle, 40 kilometers from her home, after foul odour led them to the spot. The body was reportedly found unclothed, sparking protests from locals demanding the immediate arrest and punishment of the accused.

The victim's family lodged a complaint, and police arrested 28-year-old Hari Behera, a neighbour of the victim, on Sunday. According to Additional SP Albinus Kerketta, the crime occurred due to a "suden provocation." Kerketta stated, "The accused asked her to share her soap, but she refused. In a fit of rage, he hit her, causing her to fall into the water where she died." The accused allegedly hid her body near the scene and later dumped it in the jungle.

Despite initial claims of rape, police have stated that there is no evidence of sexual assault at this time. "We have not found any signs of rape until now. The postmortem report will confirm the truth," Kerketta added.

Woman delivers baby girl in running bus



Doctors present in vehicle turn saviours

PNS ■ BRAHMAPUR

An expecting mother went into labour pain inside a running bus and delivered a baby girl with the help of the passengers and two doctors present in the vehicle. Both the mother and the newborn are safe and healthy.

The incident happened when the pregnant woman was on her way to Nabarangpur from Paralakhemundi. She suddenly went into labour midway at Kashinagar. Alerted to her distress, two doctors, Arun

Nayak and Sunita Mallick, present at the vehicle swiftly sprang into action and helped her deliver the baby safely.

Following the safe delivery, the bus dropped the mother and her newborn at the Gunupur Sub-Divisional Hospital before resuming its journey. All the passengers were equally supportive for proper treatment by the doctors and the mother and the newborn.

"Luckily, we were sitting in the back seat. I called my doctor friend who is a gynaecologist who advised us to take her to the nearest hospital. Fortunately, Dr Sunita Mallick was with us and she helped the patient and the newborn in the bus," said Dr Arun

Nayak. "She underwent labour pain as soon as the bus left Paralakhemundi. The passengers and the bus employees and everyone were cooperative with us. She is of short height and we feared of anaemia. However, we managed to deliver the baby safely in the bus and brought them soon to Gunupur hospital," informed Dr Sunita Mallick.

When contacted, Ramesh Sahu, Superintendent, Gunupur hospital, said, "The bus was en route to Nabarangpur from Paralakhemundi when the woman experienced labour pain. She delivered a baby girl and was brought to the Gunupur hospital."

In Jajpur

Missing youth's body found in canal Murder over love affair suspected

PNS ■ JAJPUR

A body of a youth was found on Thursday morning in a canal behind a crushing unit near Rathia under the Dharmasala police station in Jajpur district.

The deceased was identified as Rudra Prasad Behera, son of Narahari Behera of Abhayapur village. It was suspected that the youth was killed over a love affair.

Rudra was missing from Tuesday. As after a frantic search, the family members could not trace him out, they had on Wednesday filed a missing report at the Dharmasala police station.

After the recovery of the body, Rudra's family members were called. A Dharmasala police team rushed to the spot and initiated an investigation.

The father of the deceased alleged that his son had been murdered. As per preliminary investigation, the reason of death was murder over a love affair. Further investigation of the case was ongoing, said Dharmasala PS IIC Tapan Nayak

CM Majhi dissolves Development Councils

BJD govt's act discontinued

PNS ■ BHUBANESWAR

Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi has approved the dissolution of all 23 Special Development Councils (SDCs) in the State.

These councils, established by the previous BJD government in nine tribals-dominated districts and expanded to 14 more districts in 2023, aimed to preserve tribal culture. Allegations suggest BJD leaders held key positions within these councils.

Chief Minister Majhi on Wednesday approved the dissolution of all the SDCs which

were established to focus on preserving tribal culture, traditions, heritage and identity, the CMO said.

The BJD government had initially formed the SDCs in nine districts, Maubhanj, Keonjhar, Sundargarh, Gajapati, Kandhamal, Rayagada, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur and Koraput, in 2017 in order to ensure the development of the areas through its welfare schemes.

In 2023, the Naveen Patnaik government formed SDCs in 14 more districts apparently keeping an eye on the 2024 elections. It is alleged that the BJD leaders were appointed as chairmen and members of these councils.

Rs 16.71-cr SBI fraud: EOW arrests six fraudsters

The Economic Offences Wing (EOW) of the Odisha Crime Branch has arrested six persons in connection with a Rs 16.71-crore fraud in the State Bank of India (SBI).

The arrested accused were identified as Anirban Patnaik and Anupama Dash from Bhubaneswar, Tophan Rout and Satyaban Rout from Khandapada, Tukuna Mallick from Badamba and Feroz Khan from Kakatpur. They were produced before the Designated Court under OPID Act, Cuttack on Wednesday.

The EOW had registered the case on the written report of Shiba Sundara Sahoo, Regional Manager, SBI, RBO, Bhubaneswar wherein it was alleged that the accused by entering into a conspiracy availed 161 Xpress Credit Loans amounting to Rs 16.71 from Jayadev Vihar (139), Patia (5), Raghunathpur (11) and Jharpada Branch (6) of SBI during the period from



November 2022 to October 2023 by producing fake and fabricated employment records as employees of Phonepe Pvt Ltd.

As found on investigation so far, Anirban Patnaik had taken a building on rent at DLF, Patia, Bhubaneswar to run the office of his company 'Purvi Venture Pvt. Ltd.', but by entering into conspiracy with other accused the building was projected to be the regional office of Phonepe at Bhubaneswar by putting the

sign boards and stickers of Phonepe. Besides, one fake e-mail looking like that of Phonepe was created by the accused.

Later, the accused approached different branches of the SBI at Bhubaneswar for Xpress Credit Loan (Personal Loan) by filing the inflated salary slip and the forged employment certificate of Phonepe.

Investigation revealed that the accused persons were receiving 35 per cent of the loan

amount from the loanees to get it sanctioned in their favour. The loanees were being asked to submit their personal IDs like Aadhaar and PAN, and the other documents were being arranged or managed by the accused.

The fake e-mail was being used to give the false information that the accused were the employees of Phonepe. Amounts were being sent in advance for three to four consecutive months to the accounts of the loanees on a particular date of a month so as to give the impression that it happens to be the salary account of the loanees where regular salaries are being credited every month.

When the loans became stressed due to non-refund of the loan amount, fraudulent activities were suspected which necessitated an internal investigation in which the fraud came to the surface.

Rail users resent odd timings of trains at Baripada

Raise host of issues at meet with authorities

KAVI VISHNU SATPATHY ■ BARIPADA

The railway users of Mayurbhanj have raised their voice against odd timings of certain trains that pass through Baripada. They expressed their displeasure at a joint meeting of the Baripada Station Consultative Committee members and the railway authorities on Monday.

The committee members demanded that the running of Bhanjpur-Rupsa MEMU train (08076), which leaves Bhanjpur station at 8.05 am and Baripada station at 8.14 am, be extended up to Baleswar (instead of Rupsa).

Similarly, Bhanjpur-Rupsa MEMU train (08074), which leaves Bhanjpur at 3.15 am, be made to run from Bhanjpur to Baleswar (instead of Rupsa),



they demanded.

The committee members also strongly felt that Bangriposi-Puri (12891) and Puri-Bangriposi (12892) superfast trains must run on time every day, to let passengers have a hassle-free journey. Otherwise it should only ply between Bangriposi and Bhubaneswar (instead of going to and fro Puri), they opined.

These apart, the railway au-

thorities were also urged to convert the Bhanjpur-Puri (08011) and Puri-Bhanjpur (08012) weekly trains to daily ones and to attach, at least, two general compartments to it. At present, it may be noted, not even a single general compartment is there in these trains.

Some at the meeting even felt the necessity of introducing a new train to ply between Baripada and Bhubaneswar, in

view of the growing number of passengers along the route.

The railway officials assured the consultative committee members that the latter's demands and suggestions will be brought to the notice of the higher authorities.

The inconvenient timings of quite a few trains plying through Baripada have remained a cause of concern for Mayurbhanj passengers for quite some time now.

Rajnath Singh calls for evolving joint military vision at commanders meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday stressed upon the significance of evolving joint military vision and preparing for the type of challenges the country may face in future wars, while emphasising on synergised, swift and proportionate response to provocations.

He also called upon the Commanders to identify and include the right mix of traditional and modern warfare equipment in the Armed Forces arsenal. He stressed on capability development in space and electronic warfare, describing them as integral to tackle modern-day challenges.

"Referring to the ongoing Russia-Ukraine and Israel-Hamas conflicts and the current situation in Bangladesh, the Defence Minister exhorted the Commanders to analyse these episodes, predict the problems that the country may face in the future, and stay prepared to deal



with the "unexpected". "The Defence Minister made these assertions while addressing the maiden Joint Commanders' Conference in Lucknow on the second and final day of the apex-level military leadership meeting. "He commended the Armed Forces for their invaluable contribution in safeguarding national interests and advancing the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat', and appreciated the efforts being undertaken for furthering jointness and integration among the three Services. "In line with the theme of the

conference, 'Sashakt aur Surakshit Bharat: Transforming the Armed Forces', the Defence Minister stated that India is a peace loving nation and the Armed Forces need to be prepared for war in order to preserve peace. "He emphasised on the need of a broader and deeper analysis by the top military leadership in view of the situation along the Northern border and the happenings in neighbouring countries, which are posing a challenge to peace and stability in the region. "Despite global volatility, India is enjoying a rare peace divi-

dend and it is developing peacefully. However, due to the increasing number of challenges, we need to remain alert. It is important that we keep our peace intact during Amrit Kaal. We need to focus on our present, keep an eye on the activities happening around us at present, and focus on being future-oriented. For this, we should have a strong and robust national security component. We should have fail-proof deterrence," the Defence Minister said. "He called upon the Commanders to identify and include the right mix of traditional and modern warfare equipment in the Armed Forces arsenal. He stressed on capability development in space and electronic warfare, describing them as integral to tackle modern-day challenges. "The Defence Minister also urged the military leadership to focus on increasing the use of latest technological advancements in the fields of data and artificial intelligence.

PM Modi to launch water conservation scheme in Surat



PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is set to launch the "Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari" initiative in Gujarat's Surat on Friday, a step aimed at strengthening community involvement in water conservation. The initiative aligns with the ongoing "Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain" campaign, reinforcing Modi's vision of collaborative water management to ensure long-term water security, according to an official statement. "The initiative seeks to mobilise citizens, local bodies, industries and stakeholders in Gujarat to implement rainwa-

ter-harvesting structures. These efforts are expected to serve as a model for other States, promoting sustainable water-management practices and enhancing water security across the country. "The programme underscores Modi's call for a "whole-of-society" approach, urging for collective action towards turning every drop of rain into a valuable resource. The structures built under this initiative will play a pivotal role in rain-water harvesting, showcasing Gujarat's success in community-driven water conservation and encouraging Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) involvement. "Gujarat's model of water conservation, rooted in commu-

nity participation, has been a pioneering example in India. The launch of the "Jal Sanchay Jan Bhagidari" initiative is being seen as a landmark moment, designed to inspire other States to replicate these efforts, the statement said. "The Prime Minister has often highlighted water conservation as a national mission, reflecting his long-standing advocacy for sustainable water management. With the involvement of State nodal officers from across the country in this launch, the event signifies the national importance of creating a sustainable, water-secure future for generations to come. "The initiative builds on the success of the "Jal Shakti Abhiyan: Catch the Rain" campaign, which began in 2019. Despite disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the campaign has grown into an annual nationwide effort. Its current edition, launched in March, emphasises women's leadership in water management under the theme "Nari Shakti se Jal Shakti", the statement said.



Phishing fraud mimics MoD website to harvest officials credentials, NIC issues advisory

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian cyber-security agencies have detected a phishing fraud that "mimics" the official website of the Ministry of Defence to "harvest" the log-in credentials of officials to "steal" sensitive Government documents. An advisory issued this week by the National Informatics Centre (NIC) has identified two phishing links - mod.Gov.In.Aboutcase.NI/publications.Html and mod.Gov.In.Army.Aboutcase.NI/publications.Html. "The communication says both the URLs seek NIC-provided log-in credentials of Government officials through a fake e-mail that comes attached with a "fake" document titled "Hackers Targeted Defence Personnel in Mass Cyber Attack". "Once individual credentials like log-in IDs and passwords are punched, the links re-direct the users to a "login-error.Html" page. "Both the phishing URLs have mirrored the original MoD website (www.Mod.Gov.In) to lure end users into believing they are legitimate MoD websites," the communication says. "The two links are "mimicking" the Department of Defence under the Ministry of Defence and the phishing campaign is primarily aimed at harvesting the NIC credentials of Government officials to steal sensitive documents pertaining to the Indian Government, the communication says. The NIC serves as the backbone of Internet-based Government communication. "A phishing attack is defined as the fraudulent practice of impersonating reputed and official names and identities through e-mails, text messages or phone calls to trick the victims into sharing sensitive personal information like banking and credit card details and login or identity information.

Home Secretary: Global police cooperation key to tackling crime

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Criminals and fugitives should not receive safe havens by exploiting differences in international jurisdictions and they should be brought to justice, Union Home Secretary Govind Mohan said here on Thursday.

In his inaugural address at the 10th Interpol Liaison Officers (ILOs) Conference organised by the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), Mohan said the safe havens for crime, proceeds of crime and terrorism anywhere in the world pose a "serious threat to every country".

"An increasingly interconnected world needs internationally-connected policing. Criminals and fugitives from law should not receive safe havens by exploiting differ-



ences in international jurisdictions and they should be brought to justice," he said. "The conference on "Strengthening International Law Enforcement Partnerships" ahead of the upcoming UN International Day of Police Cooperation saw the participation of senior officers from all law-enforcement agencies of the Centre, states and Union territories and international police liaison officers from sev-

eral countries. "Law-enforcement personnel from across India and the member countries of Interpol, Europol and GlobE Network joined the session virtually. The Home Secretary highlighted the importance of international police cooperation in tackling the rapidly-evolving landscape of technology-enabled crimes, which transcend borders. "The international dispersal of crime and criminals has enhanced the need for investigation abroad. Prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of crime is increasingly reliant on digital evidence and foreign-located evidence," he said. "Mohan said the spectre of transnational crimes and organised crimes require real-time international police cooperation.

India's move to build toilets has saved up to 70,000 infant lives annually: Study

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

India's initiative focused on building toilets has potentially saved up to 70,000 infant lives annually, a recent study published in the British journal 'Nature' has revealed, in a testament to the impact of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi's pet project, the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM). Lauding the observations, the report was shared by the Prime Minister on Thursday stating that access to proper toilets plays a crucial role in reducing infant and child mortality. The Mission is a country-wide campaign initiated by the Central Government on October 2, 2014, to eliminate open defecation and improve solid waste management. In a social media X, the Prime Minister posted saying that improved sanitation has



become a "game-changer" for public health in India. "Happy to see research highlighting the impact of efforts like the Swachh Bharat Mission. Access to proper toilets plays a crucial role in reducing infant and child mortality," Modi said. "Clean, safe sanitation has become a game-changer for public health. And, I am glad India has taken the lead in this," he added. The report "Toilet construction under the Swachh Bharat Mission and infant mortality in

India," said toilet construction increased dramatically across India following the implementation of the SBM in 2014 adding that the post-mission period in India exhibited accelerated reductions in infant and child mortality compared to the pre-SBM years. Researchers had analysed infant and under-5 mortality data from 35 states in 640 districts and came to the conclusion that "based on regression estimates, the provision of toilets at scale may have contributed to avert-

ing approximately 60,000 to 70,000 infant deaths annually." It added that the implementation of transformative sanitation programmes can deliver population health benefits in low and middle-income countries. This significant impact underscores the crucial role of improved sanitation in reducing infant and child mortality rates, highlighting the success of the program. The research delves into data spanning two decades, uncovering a significant link between improved sanitation and reduced child mortality. By examining changes in toilet access across the states, the study demonstrates how each 10-percentage-point increase in district-level sanitation correlates with marked declines in both infant and under-5 death rates, highlighting the mission's crucial role in advancing public health and saving lives.

Parliamentary Panel apprised of Waqf properties belonging to Ministries of Road Transport

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

The Parliamentary panel examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill was on Thursday apprised of the Waqf properties in the National Capital Region and those on the land parcels belonging to the Ministries of Road Transport and Railways. Urban Affairs and Road Transport Secretary Anurag Jain and Anil Kumar Khandelwal, Member Infrastructure, Railway Board, along with the officials from the respective Ministries made presentations to the Joint Committee on the Waqf (Amendment) Bill.

"The officials of the Urban Affairs Ministry briefed the panel on the land acquisition process undertaken by the then British Government in 1911 to build the city of Delhi. "Parliamentary sources said there were heated moments during the meeting when the

officials of the Urban Affairs Ministry were unable to respond to questions from members on the land acquisition process undertaken by the British administration. "There were also attempts to suppress certain information," claimed an Opposition member of the Committee chaired by BJP member Jagadambika Pal. Parliamentary sources said DMK member A Raja pointed out that a Waqf Act was passed in 1913 and there was no mention of it in the presentation by the Urban Affairs Ministry about it. "According to the presentations by the Ministry, the Waqf Board made claims between 1970 and 1977 on 138 properties that were acquired for building New Delhi by the British Government. "A total of 341 sq km of land was acquired to build the National Capital region and due compensation was paid to the affected persons, a claim that was contested by the members.

India takes part in heads of Asia Coast Guards meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

Indian Coast Guard (ICG) participated in the 20th Heads of Asian Coast Guard Agencies Meeting (HACGAM) from September three to four at Incheon, South Korea. During the meeting, various issues of significance, such as maritime law enforcement, safety and security of life at sea, marine environment protection, illicit trafficking of drugs, weapons and humans and future cooperation were discussed, Defence Ministry said here on Thursday. On the sidelines of the HACGAM, the 12th annual bilateral meeting between ICG and the Korea Coast Guard was also held on Wednesday under the provisions of the MoU signed between the two agencies in March 2006. "The meeting focused on augmenting operational-level interaction and capacity building in the areas of maritime search and rescue, pollution



response and law enforcement. "The HACGAM primarily focuses on fostering cooperation between the Coast Guards of the member Asian states to ensure and promote safe, secure and clean seas in the region. It is an independent forum with 23-member Coast Guard Agencies and also two associate members in the form of Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP) and United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). "It comprises four Working Groups to enable a focused and goal-oriented approach towards coordinated response & synergy towards common maritime issues.



India, Saudi Arabia hold 6th defence cooperation meet

PIONEER NEWS SERVICE ■
NEW DELHI

In an effort to further strengthen their bilateral defence ties, India and Saudi Arabia conducted the sixth edition of Joint Committee on Defence Cooperation (JCDC) meeting in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on Wednesday, defence ministry said here on Thursday. Giving details, officials said the two countries discussed new avenues to further strengthen the long standing and multi-faceted defence cooperation. Detailed deliberations were held to expand the scope of engagement and cooperation in areas such as military, training, defence industry and

research and development (R&D). "India and Saudi Arabia enjoy cordial and friendly relations founded on the centuries old economic and socio-cultural ties. The MoU on Defence Cooperation provides a framework for defence collaboration between the two countries. Joint Defence Cooperation Committee is an institutional mechanism under the MoU to promote the objectives of defence cooperation. "The Indian delegation, led by Joint Secretary Amitabh Prasad, included officials from the Ministry of Defence. The meeting was co-chaired by Major General Salman Bin Awadh Al-Harbi from the Saudi Arabia delegation.

Meghalaya bans two-finger test to confirm rape

PTI ■ NEW DELHI

The Meghalaya Government has informed the Supreme Court that it has prohibited the 'two-finger test' which was conducted to determine whether a survivor of rape or sexual assault was habituated to sexual intercourse. The State Government told the apex court that a circular dated June 27, 2024, was issued by the Health and Family Welfare Department of Meghalaya prohibiting the test and disciplinary action will be taken for non-compliance. A bench of Justices J B Pardiwala and Sanjay Karol, which referred to a top court's order passed on May 7, noted that the apex court had strongly deprecated the practice of conducting a 'two-finger test'. "Amit Kumar, the Advocate General appearing for Meghalaya, has tendered a circular dated June 27, 2024, issued by the Government of Meghalaya, Health and Family Welfare Department. This circular has been issued prohibiting the 'two-finger test' and also disciplinary action for its non-compliance," the bench said in its September 3 order. The bench passed the order while dismissing a petition filed by a convict who had challenged the Meghalaya High Court's verdict delivered on March 23 last year. The high court had affirmed his conviction for the offences punishable under the provision of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act. The bench noted that the convict was sentenced to 10 years for the offence. In a judgement delivered in October 2022, the apex court deprecated the "regressive" and "invasive" practice of the 'two-finger test' on rape survivors and said it has no scientific basis and instead re-victimises



women who may have been sexually assaulted, and was an affront to their dignity. In its order passed on September 3, the top court referred to the circular issued by the Meghalaya Government. "The Supreme Court of India and the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare have prohibited the practice of conducting the two-finger test (TFT) on survivors of sexual assault. This practice is scientifically baseless, traumatising, and violates the survivor's dignity and rights," the circular said. "All Government doctors and medical practitioners in the State of Meghalaya are hereby directed not to conduct the two-finger test on survivors of sexual assault. Adherence to this directive is mandatory for all Government medical personnel," it said. The circular further said any doctor found conducting the test will be held guilty of misconduct and strict disciplinary action will be initiated in accordance with the Meghalaya Discipline and Appeal Rules, 2019. It said the survivors of sexual assault must receive compassionate, respectful and sensitive care, including psychological support and counselling services. "We hope and trust that the circular referred to above issued by the State of Meghalaya is implemented and abided in its letter and spirit. We hope that in future we may not have to once again condemn the State of Meghalaya for such a serious lapse," the bench said.

Frequent mobile phone use linked to increased risk of cardiovascular diseases: Study

ARCHANA JYOTI ■ NEW DELHI

Do you spend hours glued to your smartphone, whether for social media or work? It's better if you reassess your habits. For, a new study published in Canadian Journal of Cardiology has suggested that frequent mobile phone use is linked to an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases (CVD), particularly among current smokers and individuals with diabetes. The study is particularly relevant for India, where, as of January 2024, there were 1.12 billion mobile connections, encompassing 78 per cent of the country's population. Study author Dr Yanjun Zhang from Nanfang Hospital,

Southern Medical University, China, warned that, "Given the pervasive nature of mobile phone use, understanding its health impacts is crucial. Radio-frequency electromagnetic fields (RF-EMF) from these devices can disrupt the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, cause inflammation, and induce oxidative stress. This can affect heart health and blood vessels. However, the precise connection between mobile phone use and CVD remains uncertain." His colleague and co-investigator Dr. Ziliang Ye echoed similar views. "We found that regular users face a significantly higher risk of developing these conditions compared to those who use their phones less frequently."



The research, which analysed data from 444,027 individuals in the UK Biobank with reported mobile phone use from 2006 to 2010, defined regular use as making at least one call per week. Over a median follow-up period of 12.3 years, the study assessed incidences of stroke, coronary heart disease, atrial fibrillation, and heart failure, while also exploring the

role of sleep patterns, psychological distress, and neuroticism. Co-investigator Xianhui Qin, MD, emphasised that poor sleep patterns and mental health issues could exacerbate the risk of cardiovascular diseases through disrupted circadian rhythms, endocrine and metabolic disturbances, and increased inflammation. "Chronic RF-EMF exposure from mobile phones, combined with smoking and diabetes, may further amplify this risk." Dr Vivek Shama, Associate consultant cardiologist, Fortis Greater Noida who though not connected with the study, agreed. "Yes, we do agree that mobile phone usage can adversely

affect heart health. Excessive use of mobile phones, particularly during long conversations, exposes the body to high-frequency magnetic field waves. These waves can interfere with the heart's function, leading to symptoms such as palpitations, dizziness, headaches, and even heart arrhythmias in some cases. We've particularly observed this in individuals who frequently use devices like EarPods. Although companies claim that these devices are safe, excessive usage can still result in complications for both the heart and brain," he said. Additionally, sleeping with your phone nearby can lead to headaches, migraines, and potentially other health issues.

It is essential to minimize screen time, especially before bed, Sama warned and cautioned that excessive phone use, especially among the younger generation, can lead to insomnia, anxiety, and stress. "This is largely due to the constant engagement with virtual platforms, which can result in unhealthy comparisons with others, leading to mental health issues. Prolonged screen time also reduces physical activity, contributing to obesity, particularly in children who are often given phones as distractions," he said. "Phones should be kept away while sleeping, and screen time should be minimized, particularly first thing in the morning," he suggested.

After Mollywood, MeToo surfaces in Kerala politics

KUMAR CHELLAPPAN ■ KOCHI

The Me Too fusillade that has literally sent actors and movie makers in Kerala for cover has tightened its hold over politics. A woman senior Congress leader Simi Rosebell John who alleged that she did not get prominence in the party because of her refusal to yield to the demands of Leader of Opposition V D Satheesan finds herself expelled from the primary membership of the party. But Simi disclosed the names of a group of women leaders including Padmaja Venugopal who left the party or suffer silently by continuing in the GOP as victims of Me Too phenomenon in the State's Congress party.



Similarly, Shobhana George, a two-time MLA of the Congress party was eased out by the leadership and she had no other way but to embrace the CPI(M). The CPI(M) stands out as the party with maximum number of Casanovas and this has been stated by none other than late V B Cherian, who had served as the all India secretary of the party's trade union wing CITU. P K Sasi, the former MLA from Shornur whom the media describes as a modern day Romeo in the party is "famous" for his escapades. Many party insiders have demanded the ouster of Sasi from the post of Kerala State Tourism Development Corporation as his name figures regularly in cases of

sexual abuse. This could be the result of the Nair v Eezhava fight in the party," said a source close to P K Sasi. K M Shajahan, who had served as secretary to former chief minister V S Achuthanandan, told The Pioneer that film actor Mukesh, who is an accused in sexual abuse case filed by actresses is a notorious character. "His first wife Sarita, herself a lead artist in South India, has said in a TV interview how Mukesh had kicked her regularly when she was pregnant with his child. "Saritha was weeping uncontrollably while recounting her experiences as Mukesh's wife and she was chased out of her house by Mukesh. I feel pity for the CPI(M) leaders who could not find an effective candidate to

fight the assembly election," said Shajahan. The disclosure by Simi Rosebell is sure to dampen the prospect of Satheesan's chance of becoming the next chief minister of the State that goes to the polls in 2026. There are strong contenders like Ramesh Chennithala, Sasi Tharoor, K Muralaiah, Venugopal and K Sudhakaran. The 2001-2006 UDF Government led by A K Antony and Oommen Chandi suffered a major setback as the then Industries Minister and Muslim League leader P K Kunhalikutty came under attack for allegedly molesting a woman hailing from Kozhikode. Even BJP leaders in the State are not free from allegations of misdemeanor against young and middle-aged women. Politics and cinema make strange bedfellows but in matters of man's age old instinct, they are the same one. Former Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao had mentioned this aspect in his novel The Insider (1998), based on real life incidents faced by Rao in his political career.

Central team begins tour of flood-hit districts in Andhra

PTI ■ VIJAYAWADA

An inter-ministerial team from the Central government on Thursday began its visit of the flood-affected districts in Andhra Pradesh. The team headed by Sanjeev Kumar Jindal visited Vijayawada, the worst affected place, to estimate the losses and destruction, said an official press release. The Central team visited the State Emergency Operations Centre in the Andhra Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (APSDMA) office in Tadepalli, where officials explained about the torrential rains and floods. Later, the officials also visited Prakasam Barrage, which was recently hit by three large drifting boats, damaging a concrete beam. As the flood waters began to recede at many places here, personnel of the Vijayawada civic body are busily engaged in sanitation work and also restoring water supply, an official said on Thursday. However, Vijayawada Municipal Commissioner HM Dhyanchandra said people must refrain from drinking the restored



municipal tap water at the moment as it was not in a potable. "Today, we are focusing on municipal water resumption and sanitation. By today evening, the water supply will be restored. But they (people) cannot drink water because there will be a lot of silting," Dhyanchandra told PTI. He said the civic body will launch a campaign to dissuade people from drinking tap water. On Wednesday, Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu said water supplied by the municipality should not be used for the first two days at least as it has to be tested

for quality, considering its muddied nature due to the unprecedented deluge. He said the authorities will inform people after carrying out tests but hinted that it 'could' be used for bathing purposes. Meanwhile, drinking water is also being supplied to the flood-hit areas through water tankers and several people were seen collecting it in containers. Around 200 tankers are supplying drinking water. Further, the municipal Commissioner noted that flood water had 'receded largely' and 80 per cent of the flood-affected areas were

accessible, except some wards in and around Nunna area. "There is no more information that (water level) Budameru will increase...The Irrigation Department is also trying to close the Budameru breach," he said, adding that civil supplies could begin distribution of provisions from Friday. A resident of Ajit Singh Nagar, the worst-affected area, told PTI that many people returned to their homes as flood water had receded. As several neighbourhoods have become accessible, Dhyanchandra said sanitation work is underway at a brisk pace, supplemented by 6,000 workers from about eight districts to bolster the local effort. Excise Minister K Ravindra on Thursday visited Jakkulanekkalam village in Gannavaram mandal of Krishna district, where the swollen Budameru rivulet inundated thousands of acres. Along with Gannavaram MLA Y Venkata Rao, he toured the flooded areas on boats and tractors. Flood waters reached up to 4-ft on the road there, said an official statement.

Haryana Assembly elections: Several leaders unhappy with ticket denial

PARVESH SHARMA ■ GURUGRAM

After BJP released its first list of 67 candidates for the Haryana Assembly elections on Wednesday, dissatisfaction has intensified across the State. Some party leaders quit the party after being denied tickets. BJP State Vice President GL Sharma, along with his supporters on September 6, quits the party, claimed that only one person was distributing tickets in Haryana. Sharma is likely to join Congress along with supporters. While speaking to The Pioneer Sharma said, "Only one person in the party is distributing the ticket. I have met Congress MP from Rohtak Deepender Hooda and will soon join Congress without any promise." Sharma became angry after he failed to get a ticket as BJP had fielded Mukesh Sharma from the Gurgaon seat. Another BJP leader, Naveen Goyal, BJP's business cell's state convener along with his support, has also resigned



from all the party posts with immediate effect. Mukesh Sharma was declared as the candidate from the Gurgaon constituency, replacing sitting MLA Sudhir Singla. The saffron party declared tickets for 67 of the 90 seats, including 3 constituencies in the Gurugram district, denying nominations to two sitting MLAs — Kunwar Sanjay Singh from Sohna and Sudhir Singla from Gurgaon. The BJP has nominated former minister Rao Narbir Singh from Badshahpur seat, Mukesh Sharma from Gurgaon, and former MLA Tejpal Tanwar from Sohna, Pataudi (SC reserve), is yet to be decided. Satya Prakash Jrawata is a sitting MLA from Patudi's seat. Meanwhile, the Congress is yet to release its list for the upcoming Haryana Assembly election.

October 5 poll day, the people of Gurgaon constituency will cast their vote in my favour and allow me to Chandigarh," he told The Pioneer. Naveen Goyal said that only the love of the people will make me win and take me to Chandigarh. The party has fielded Mukesh Sharma from the Gurgaon constituency, replacing sitting MLA Sudhir Singla. The saffron party declared tickets for 67 of the 90 seats, including 3 constituencies in the Gurugram district, denying nominations to two sitting MLAs — Kunwar Sanjay Singh from Sohna and Sudhir Singla from Gurgaon. The BJP has nominated former minister Rao Narbir Singh from Badshahpur seat, Mukesh Sharma from Gurgaon, and former MLA Tejpal Tanwar from Sohna, Pataudi (SC reserve), is yet to be decided. Satya Prakash Jrawata is a sitting MLA from Patudi's seat. Meanwhile, the Congress is yet to release its list for the upcoming Haryana Assembly election.

Nation's saints always upheld its spiritual traditions: Yogi

PTI ■ AYODHYA

Governments may have changed over time, but the nation's saints have always upheld the strength and continuity of India's spiritual traditions, said Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath at the 'Pran-Pratishtha' ceremony on Ramnathaswamy Temple here on Thursday. During his address, he said that Ayodhya and Tamil Nadu share a deep historical connection that goes back thousands of years. "Thousands of years ago, when Maryada Purushottam Shri Ram set out to search for Mother Sita in Sri Lanka, he worshipped his beloved Lord Shiva after building the bridge in Rameshwaram, Tamil Nadu," Adityanath said. Adityanath participated in the grand 'Kumbhbhishek' and 'Prana Pratishtha' of the newly-renovated Ram Natha Swamy Temple in Ayodhya. After offering prayers at the newly consecrated Shivalinga, Adityanath



performed a circumambulation ritual at this South Indian-style temple. He hailed the construction of the Ramnathaswamy Temple as a significant contribution to strengthening the vision of "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat." He said, this serves as a reminder of India's unity, where spiritual consciousness continues to rise. These efforts are aligned with Prime Minister Modi's "Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat" vision, further reinforcing the idea of national oneness, the statement read. "Governments may have changed over time, but the nation's saints have always upheld the strength and continuity of India's spiritual traditions," he remarked.

19-year-old woman raped, murdered in Bidar district, three people arrested

PTI ■ BIDAR (KARNATAKA)

A case of rape and murder has been registered after the body of a 19-year-old woman was found with multiple injuries days after she went missing from her home at Gunateerthawadi village in this district of Karnataka, police said on Thursday. Three people have been arrested in connection with the incident which allegedly happened on August 29, they said. She was allegedly killed after being hit on her head with a stone and later her body was dumped in the bushes, police said, adding, they suspect she was sexually assaulted. However, investigators are awaiting medical reports for confirmation. The victim was missing since August 29 and her parents lodged a complaint at Basavakalyana police station two days later, police said. "We registered a missing case and we started investigating. On September one, her body was recovered with multiple



injuries on her body including head. We registered a case of murder initially and the accused were unknown. Then based on the technical evidence, we started searching for the accused and we found three people who were in contact with her on the day of her disappearance," a senior police officer said. One of them, who also hails from the same village, was in direct contact with her. "So, we picked the accused and during interrogation, he confessed to murdering her. During interrogation, he said that he went along with two

others who were guarding him from far away during the incident," he said. "All three accused involved in the incident have been arrested. We are waiting for the medical reports of the victim. She sustained head injuries among other injuries. On suspicion of sexual assault and based on interrogation, we have added sections of rape in the FIR," he said. The prime accused and the victim knew each other well, police said, adding her parents were unaware of it. Further investigation is underway.

Ensure leave applications of prisoners processed scrupulously as per rules: HC to TN DGP

PTI ■ CHENNAI

The Madras High Court has directed the Director General of Prisons to issue consolidated instructions to all the subordinate prison authorities to ensure that the leave applications filed by or on behalf of the prisoners were processed scrupulously in accordance with the rules and decisions were taken within a period of 28 days as contemplated under Rule 24(5) of the Tamil Nadu Suspension of Sentence Rules, 1982. In a recent order, a division bench comprising Justices S M Subramaniam and N Senthil Kumar said failure in complying with the Tamil Nadu Suspension of Sentence Rules, 1982 regarding adherence of time limit contemplated was to be construed as lapse, dereliction of duty or negligence, as the case may be and appropriate disciplinary actions were to be initiated against the officials who all were responsible for such misconduct. The bench said the writ petitions filed prematurely before expiry of the statutory time limit of 28 days as contemplated under the Tamil Nadu Suspension of Sentence Rules, 1982 were not entertainable for grant of ordinary leave. Applications for emergency leave were to be considered forthwith by the competent authority without causing any delay. An

order of rejection of leave application would provide a cause for instituting the writ petition challenging the same, the bench added. The bench gave the above directives while disposing of a petition filed by Usha, wife of Karthi, a convict prisoner confined in Vellore Prison, seeking a direction to the authorities to grant 28 days ordinary leave to her husband. The bench said in the present case, the petitioner filed an application seeking leave on June 27, 2024. The writ petition was filed on July 15, 2024, even before the date of expiry of the statutory period as per the rules to dispose of the leave petition by the competent authority under the Tamil Nadu Suspension of Sentence Rules, 1982. Thus, the present writ petition was premature on the date of filing. "However, we are inclined to take an exception in the present case, since during the pendency of the present writ petition, the statutory period expired and again remanding the matter became unnecessary", the bench added. Pointing out the submission of the Additional Public Prosecutor that the prisoner was eligible for ordinary leave for 21 days, the bench granted ordinary leave for 21 days commencing from September 6, 2024 with certain conditions to the convict prisoner.

Lightning strikes claim 1,625 lives in Odisha in last 5 years: Minister

PTI ■ BHUBANESWAR

Odisha reported 1,625 deaths due to lightning strikes in last five years, state Revenue and Disaster Management minister Suresh Pujari told the state Assembly on Thursday. Replying to a question by BJP legislator Tankadhar Tripathy, the minister said a total of 1,625 people have been killed by lightning strikes across the state during 2019-20 and 2023-24. While 372 persons were killed due to lightning strikes during the financial year 2019-20, 338 such death cases were reported in 2020-21 and 294 during 2021-22. The state has reported 334

lightning death cases in 2022-23 and another 287 such death cases during 2023-24, Pujari said in a written reply to the House. During the discussion on the question, the minister said the state recorded the highest lightning-related fatalities in the country during the period, adding that states with higher mineral deposits tend to record more lightning fatalities because minerals are good conductors of electricity. As per the statement of the minister, the lightning death cases were registered in all 30 districts of Odisha. A maximum of 151 people were killed due to lightning strikes in tribal-dominated Mayurbhanj



district, followed by Ganjam district, where 114 people lost their lives due to the natural disaster. Keonjhar, the home district of Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi and Balasore district each reported 111 lightning deaths during these five years while Boudh district witnessed 14 such death cases, which is the lowest in the state, he stated. The Disaster Management

minister further told the House that the Odisha government had declared lightning as a state-specific disaster in April 2015 as lightning has not been declared as a natural disaster by the government of India. The state has been providing an ex-gratia of Rs 4 lakh each to the next of kin of those killed in lightning strikes from the State Disaster Response Fund (SDRF), he added. The government has also made a provision for a compensation of Rs 16,000 if a person requires hospitalisation for more than a week due to a lightning strike. Moreover, Rs 5,400 is provided to a person injured in lightning and hospitalised for less than a week, the minister informed

the Assembly. Analyzing the data of the past six years, Pujari said, on an average, more than six lakh lightning strikes are reported in Odisha every year, of which, the highest 4.31 lakh lightning strikes occurred in Mayurbhanj district (approximately 72,000 each year) while it was 3.02 lakh (50,000 in a year) in Sundergarh district and 2.75 lakh times (46,000 in a year) in Keonjhar district. Moreover, districts like Ganjam, Angul, Sambalpur, Dhenkanal, Balasore, Koraput, Kandhamal, Bargarh, Rayagada, Bolangir, and Cuttack witnessed more than one lakh lightning strikes during the past six years, Pujari

said. With the help of real-time data provided by Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology (IITM), the Odisha State Disaster Management Authority (OSDMA) is providing early warning and advisory on lightning to the people through the Satark mobile app, which was developed with technical support from Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System (RIMES). Pujari said that palm trees are being planted to mitigate the effects of lightning. The Revenue Department has allocated Rs 7 crore to the Forest Department for palm tree plantation.

Six Maoists killed in exchange of fire with police in Telangana, two commandos injured

PTI ■ HYDERABAD

Six cadres of the banned SCPI (Maoist) including two women were killed after an exchange of fire between the ultras and police in Bhadradi Kothagudem district of Telangana on Thursday, police said. Two commandos of the Greyhounds, the elite anti-naxal force of Telangana Police, were also injured in the exchange of fire and were shifted to a hospital, they said. The incident happened in a forest area under Karakagudem police station limits of the district, a senior

police official told PTI. Based on inputs that a Maoists team crossed over to Telangana from neighbouring Chhattisgarh, special police parties took up combing in the area when the incident happened, he said. Bodies of the six Maoists including two women cadres were recovered from the spot and their identification was being done, police said. The dead included a senior cadre of the Maoists, he said based on preliminary investigation. Police seized six weapons including 2 AK47s, SLRs and others from the spot.

Photo emerges showing Renukaswamy pleading for life before murder

PTI ■ BENGALURU

A day after police filed a chargesheet against Kannada actor Darshan Thoogudeepa and other accused in the Renukaswamy murder case, a photograph of the victim pleading for life emerged on social media on Thursday. "Fear writ large on a shirtless Renukaswamy's face as he stared at the camera, the image is a tell-tale about the trauma he endured as he was given a torturous death," a police official said, adding, several injury marks are also seen all over his body. In another picture, the victim is seen lying on the ground near a



parked truck. According to police sources, he was beaten up with clubs, given electric shock in his private parts, and thrown against the wall leading to multiple fractures. The chargesheet filed on Wednesday has the forensic report which confirms that Renukaswamy's blood stains

were found on Darshan's clothes, the sources said. Darshan along with his friend Pavithra Gowda and 15 others, who are accused in the case, are currently under judicial custody in different prisons in the state. According to police sources, 33-year-old Renukaswamy, a fan of the actor, had sent obscene messages to Pavithra, which enraged Darshan, allegedly leading to his murder. His body was found near a stormwater drain next to an apartment in Sumanahalli here on June nine. Raghavendra, one of the accused who is part of Darshan's fan club in

Chitradurga, had brought Renukaswamy to a shed in R R Nagar here, on the pretext that the actor wanted to meet him. It was in this shed that he was allegedly tortured and murdered. According to the post-mortem report, Renukaswamy, a native of Chitradurga, died due to shock and haemorrhage as a result of multiple blunt injuries. Police sources said Pavithra, who is accused number one, was the "major cause" for Renukaswamy's murder, claiming that it has been proved from the probe that she instigated other accused, conspired with them, and took part in the crime.



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PAPER WITH PASSION

India shines at Paralympics

India puts up best-ever show at Paralympics; PM Modi lauds athletes' perseverance and talent

India's performance at the 2024 Paralympics will be etched in the annals of sporting history, as the country witnessed its best-ever showing at the Games. With a record-breaking tally of medals, the athletes' determination, grit, and sheer willpower resonated deeply with millions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, visibly elated, interacted with the Paralympic contingent, hailing their indomitable spirit as an inspiration to the nation. India sent its largest-ever contingent of 84 athletes to the 2024 Paralympics, competing across various disciplines like archery, athletics, and shooting. Among the many standout performances, Indian archer Sheetal Devi captured the world's attention, competing without hands and displaying an extraordinary level of precision and resilience. Her triumphs, alongside other athletes, served as a testament to the extraordinary abilities of differently-abled individuals who continue to defy the odds and break barriers. PM Modi, in his conversation with the athletes, expressed his deep admiration, stating,



"Your hard work and dedication have brought glory to the nation... You have shown that challenges, no matter how daunting, can be overcome with perseverance." The success of Indian Paralympians is not merely a result of their training, but a culmination of years of battling personal and societal obstacles. These athletes have defied their disabilities, proving that with determination, no hurdle is insurmountable.

Each medal won at the Paralympics tells a story of immense struggle, dedication, and the refusal to accept limitations. Take, for instance, the journey of Bhavina Patel, a para table tennis player who became a beacon of hope after her exceptional performances on the global stage. Diagnosed with polio at a young age, Bhavina's journey from rehabilitation to becoming a Paralympian exemplifies the strength of human willpower. Such athletes embody the essence of perseverance, redefining success not by their victories alone but by their unwavering resolve to overcome challenges. As India celebrates its best-ever Paralympics performance, the spotlight on para-athletes has intensified, garnering widespread support from all sections of society. What makes these athletes stand apart is their ability to transform adversity into strength. Despite the physical and emotional challenges, they face, they continue to push boundaries, proving that talent knows no bounds. For every medal India wins at the Paralympics, there are countless hours of practice, numerous setbacks, and a tireless pursuit of excellence. As India celebrates the achievements of its Paralympic athletes, their stories remind us that greatness is often born out of struggle. Their success is a beacon of hope for millions, showcasing that with determination, talent, and an unbreakable spirit, anything is possible. India's Paralympians have made the nation proud, and their stories will inspire generations to come. As they continue to rise and break records, their message is clear: Perseverance, dedication, and talent can overcome even the greatest of challenges.

PICTALK



Nuns offer prayers during observance of the death anniversary of Mother Teresa, in Kolkata

IC-814: Lessons beyond the binary



BHOPINDER SINGH

The web series 'IC-184: The Kandahar Hijack' has reignited debate over the moral and strategic dilemmas faced during hostage crises

Web series IC-184: The Kandahar Hijack, has triggered debate on the complexities and 'greys' that accompany such incidents. Beyond obvious things like the lack of coordination, responsiveness or even allowing the flight to take off from Amritsar — one important query is if India did wrong in negotiating with terrorists. Given the handiwork of these released terrorists in the subsequent terror attacks, the question acquires even gravity. However, beyond the simplistic and binary 'yes' or 'no' position that is often postulated in the argument, lies the necessity of nuance in attempting to answer the same. It is universally agreed that negotiations with terrorists are a bad idea, however, sometimes, the consequences of not negotiating can have far more debilitating and costly consequences.

Sifting the wheat from the chaff of the supposed 'no-negotiation' stance of some countries (as often banded) is important. It is frequently argued that countries like Israel or the United States of America do not negotiate with terrorists. It is further claimed that because of such an unbending posture, the Israelis and Americans avoided being taken as hostages. But such beliefs are untrue, misplaced, and belie the wheels-within-wheels of the American or Israeli reality, beyond the publicly stated position of 'no-negotiation'.

It is the worst-kept secret that such countries have funnelled money through proxies, 'friendly countries', or even masked the same as 'aid' to secure their citizens, whilst maintaining the official stance. The Iran-Contra affair (1981-86) during the Reagan era wherein American hostages held by the Lebanese group, Hezbollah, were exchanged for weapons for Hezbollah itself, exemplifying the deals cut beyond the public gaze. As recently as 2014, the Americans had released five Taliban prisoners from Guantanamo, to secure an American hostage.

Last August, the United States is believed to have unfrozen \$6 bil-



lion of Iranian funds in South Korean banks to secure the release of five US citizens. It is now argued that the same money could have been invaluable for the cash-strapped Iranians (widely believed benefactors of Hamas) in launching the subsequent '7th Oct' attack on Israel. Israelis themselves are the masters of the backdoor negotiations, irrespective of the belligerent stand adopted for public consumption. In the Gilat Shalit (Israeli prisoner) exchange of 2011, it is believed that Israelis released 1027 prisoners who were held in jails. Even now as the bludgeoning of the Gaza Strip continues, the Israelis in parallel (and in support of the Biden administration) are still negotiating with Hamas for the release of their citizens held hostage. Often, the aggrieved government can end up losing a lot of leverage and lives when they refuse to engage with bad actors. Negotiations help immediate outcomes, buy crucial time for alternate reactions, and most importantly, help establish critical information and 'leads' about the captors that could be invoked, productively. Lastly, a well-managed ransom payoff (with 'marked' bills and telltale trails) can also lead to discovering broader networks and bases to take down the terror infrastructure, subsequent-



THE CALCULATION AND OPPORTUNITIES WOULD HAVE BEEN FAR MORE CREATIVE WITH POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS, HAD IC-814 BEEN HELD UP IN AMRITSAR, AS OPPOSED TO KANDAHAR

ly. Negotiations or engagement does not have to be tantamount to surrender or even a 'bad deal', necessarily. From the post-released activities of the three terrorists in the IC-814 case, it was a costly 'deal' — but was there an alternative? The hijacked plane was parked in the backyard of Pakistani ISI's supported Afghan base (at least then) with 158 precious lives (not including the 5 terrorists). The terrorists in this case (under the direct supervision of the ISI and Taliban) were not exactly known to be reasonable, and if anything, had given a glimpse of their intent with the brutal and fatal stabbing of passenger, Rupin Katyal. Even an Entebbe-like commando operation using Indian Special Forces was impractical and fraught with additional risks. With the clear intention of harming Indian interests without an iota of any fear of getting caught (given the location) — the risk to the lives of all passengers and crew of IC-814 was not possible, but imminent. The calculation and opportunities would have been far more creative with possible solutions, had IC-814 been held up in Amritsar, as opposed to Kandahar. Could India have forsaken the lives of its citizens? Has any other country ever forsaken lives in similar circumstances? Did the USA attempt negotiating with the Iranian

authorities when its Embassy staff was held hostage or did it steadfastly hold the 'no-negotiation' posture? The 'no-negotiation' is more of an ideal, but a fuzzy line, practically. It is a deterring policy but has never been an ironclad law, anywhere in the world. However, countries like Israel (or even India) do convey behaviorally is the guarantee of serious reprisals and redeeming their losses.

For example, 'Operation Hot Pursuit', the cross-border operation against NSCN-IM in Myanmar 'normalised' the expectation for bad actors, hereinafter — this, when done systematically, surgically and purposefully conveys solid sovereign intent. So, there is no silver bullet or inviolable guardrails in tackling terror, except adapting and responding according to the situation, whilst ensuring the overall objectives are not lost to inflexibility, weakness, or indecision. IC-814 was indeed a lapse of immense proportion but the complexities of the eight-day ordeal necessitated negotiations in that specific case, as insisting any other way is easier said than done, as instructed by history anywhere in the world. (The writer, a military veteran, is a former Lt Governor of Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Puducherry. The views expressed are personal)

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

SOCIETAL ATTITUDE CHANGE A MUST

Madam — Nirbaya's case and Abhaya's cases caught the attention of the public and attracted stir. The Bollywood case got the importance of retired judge's involvement and submission of a report which, with four year's dust got released last week and the different associations rather than taking action on the perpetrators crime abdicated their responsibility and resigned. A woman from Hyderabad came out in to the streets and complained that she was sexually assaulted promising her roles in movies.

The exploitation of the fairer sex has been happening every where and every day. The fast track courts which PM was talking about in the SC's 75th year celebrations is not a solution to the problem and President calling it "enough is enough" is not an answer. It is not long ago when the then CJI in 2019 was accused of sexual torture and victimization by a staff member. Since then four CJI's have changed. Still there has been neither an institutional response nor a fair investigation and due process in case of a sexual-harassment allegation against a CJI.

These allegations illustrate a structural issue with the judiciary; the question of sexual harassment should not be dismissed as harming judicial independence. Similarly when there was a similar complaint against a sitting Governor, police was not allowed to investigate in the matter citing the immunity enjoyed by the constitutional head. The same logic or the thought process goes in the minds of the people who are decision makers in these cases for they try to protect the image of the household or the institution where the exploitation is reported.

Law and judiciary can come in to play only when the matter is brought out but when the same is suppressed for whatever reason the women who are addressed as fair sex suffers with an unfair treatment. We need an attitudinal change to address the problem!

Gopalaswamy J | Chennai

Bengal passes Aparajita bill



Proposed news report "WB Government passes anti-rape Aparajita bill" published on 4th September, here is my response. West Bengal government must be applauded for passing Anti rape bill and seeking death penal-

ty for rape convicts. Hope Governor and President of India give their go ahead to this bill. It is also a welcome step for creating a special task force which is expected to complete the probe in 21 days. This horrific rape and murder case must become a watershed moment to turn things around for women for the better in future in our society.

But merely having a law to award death penalty to rape convicts may not suffice as unfortunately rapes incidents both in West Bengal and elsewhere in the country have not stopped even after this tragic RG Kar Hospital rape and murder case on 9th August. What is required is strict and unbiased implementation of the rule and law at the ground level. Because we have had tough laws in our country but what we lack is serious implementation which defies the whole purpose of framing a law.

Bal Govind | Noida

TEACHERS DAY CELEBRATION

Madam—As we celebrate yet another teachers day to commemorate the birth anniversary of our great teacher president Dr S Radhakrishnan and to honour the architects, the creators and producers of tomorrow's citizens a look into the world's noblest profession goes to show that it's not all well in the teaching field in the present fast paced global scenario. According to the 2018 Global Teacher Status Index India ranks eight in the top ten countries where teachers are held in the highest esteem. Though it is a matter of pride it is not all smiles for the teaching community. Exploitations, coercion and threats loom above the teaching fraternity. Thousands of teachers get very poor salaries in spite of the hard work they do. Poor working conditions, continuous work, discrimination, pressure from the higher ups and regulatory bodies have driven many teachers to leave the profession. Time has changed and this is not a society that once not long ago revered the Guru next to the father and the mother.

M Pradyu | Kannur

J&K ELECTIONS

Madam — In Jammu & Kashmir, political parties must prioritize growth and avoid revisiting the legacy of Article 370, as its abrogation is irreversible. They should instead highlight how this move will drive development, curb terrorism, and strengthen national security along the Pakistan and China borders, where POK, Aksai Chin, and Shaksgam Valley remain under illegal control.

Avoiding conflicts with the Central Government is crucial, given J&K's strategic location and heavy reliance on central financial aid. Campaigns focused on regional, caste, or religious divides will only harm Kashmir's political future. The era of the 1990s must not return, and a Pakistan-centric approach will be disastrous, as seen in POK's decline. Parties should honestly work for unification and the betterment of the state.

Vinod Johri | Delhi

Send your feedback to: letterstopioneer@gmail.com

Childhood trauma and its lasting impact on adult relationships

Recognising the impact of childhood trauma on adult relationships is crucial. By seeking therapy individuals can heal emotional wounds and foster healthier relations

Childhood trauma, a deeply distressing experience that occurs before the age of 18, can have a profound and lasting impact on an individual's life. One of the most significant areas where this influence is felt is in adult relationships. Understanding the connection between childhood trauma and adult relationships can help individuals recognize the patterns that may be affecting their lives and seek appropriate support.

When a child experiences trauma, it can disrupt their development and create a sense of insecurity and fear. This can lead to difficulties in forming and maintaining healthy relationships in adulthood. Individuals who have experienced childhood trauma may struggle with trust, communication, and emotional intimacy. They may also be more prone to attracting or engaging in toxic relationships. One of the most common ways that childhood trauma can manifest in adult relationships is through difficulties with trust. Individuals who have been betrayed or abused as children may find it chal-



lenging to trust others, even in seemingly harmless situations. This can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as well as difficulties forming deep connections with others. Communication can also be a challenge for individuals who have experienced childhood trauma. They may struggle to express their emotions or be overly sensitive to criticism. This can lead to misunderstandings and conflict in relationships. Additionally, individuals who have been traumatized may be more likely to engage in unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as substance abuse or avoidance, which can further hinder their ability to communicate effectively.

Emotional intimacy is another area where childhood trauma can have a significant impact. Individuals who have been traumatized may find it difficult to open up to others and share their feelings. They may fear rejection or abandonment, and may instead withdraw from relationships. This can lead to feelings of isolation and loneliness, as well as difficulties forming deep and meaningful connections with others.

Another way that childhood trauma can manifest in adult relationships is through the attraction to or engagement in toxic relationships. Individuals who have been traumatized may be more likely to attract or engage in relationships that replicate the abusive or neglectful dynamics of their childhood. This can be a way of unconsciously reliving past trauma and seeking to resolve it. It is important to note that not everyone who experiences childhood trauma will develop these patterns in their adult relationships. However, understanding the connection between childhood trauma and adult rela-

tionships can help individuals recognize the patterns that may be affecting their lives and seek appropriate support.

If you are struggling with the impact of childhood trauma on your adult relationships, it is important to seek help. Therapy can be a valuable tool for understanding and addressing the underlying issues affecting your relationships.

A therapist can help you develop healthy coping mechanisms, improve communication skills, and build stronger, more fulfilling relationships. Additionally, support groups can provide a safe and supportive space to connect with others who have experienced similar challenges. By understanding the connection between childhood trauma and adult relationships, individuals can take steps to heal from past wounds and build healthier, more fulfilling relationships.

(The author is Dubai-based award-winning Poet, Novelist, Writing Retreat Curator and Founder of TheWriteScene.com. Views expressed are personal)



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INDIA BOLSTERS 'ACT EAST' POLICY

PM Modi's Brunei visit highlights India's commitment to strengthening ties in Southeast Asia



KUMARDEEP BANERJEE

Prime Minister Modi is wasting no time in walking the talk as far as his foreign policy goals are concerned. This week, with a clear focus on Look East policy the Indian PM was in Brunei and Singapore. The Brunei visit was the first state visit by an Indian PM, after establishing diplomatic relations in 1984. The Indian Mission in Brunei came nearly a decade later in 1993. PM Manmohan Singh had visited Brunei Darussalam in 2013 to attend multilateral meetings of ASEAN and East Asia Summit. Highlighting the importance of the first bilateral visit to Brunei, India's High Commissioner Alok Amitabh Dimri, told news agency ANI "In our four decades of diplomatic relationship, this is the first bilateral official visit by the Prime Minister of India to Brunei Darussalam. It is a historic moment in our bilateral relationship and also for the Indian community in Brunei Darussalam that high-level bilateral engagement between Prime Minister Shri Modi and His Majesty the King is going to take place. This visit is historic in many ways that Brunei and India have been civilizational neighbours as you know that India shares deep historical roots and bonds with Southeast Asia. The Malay tradition of this geography which is located in the Borneo Island of Southeast Asian Seas derives deep linkages be it, linguistic, anthropological, ethnic, architectural, religious motives, customs and traditions, norms from India, South India." Defence relations between the two countries have been on an upward trajectory since the establishment of formal diplomatic ties.



There have been several official-level defence exchanges and visits of navy, coast guard ships and joint exercises. India has MoU in defence sector with Brunei till 2026. Several Indian Navy ships and coast guard ships such as INS Rana, INS Airavat, INS Shivalik & INS Kadmat, and Samudra Pahereda to name a few, have been in Brunei waters, given the maritime security concerns. The trade relations between the two countries are not what one can boast of, however, it is of strategic importance.

The recently concluded Brunei trip by the Indian PM has enhanced and deepened the partnership between the two countries. The joint statement issued after the leader's meeting stated "Both leaders held discussions for enhancing cooperation on a wide range of issues including defence, connectivity, trade and investment, energy including renewables, space, ICT, health and pharmaceuticals, education and capacity building, culture, tourism, youth and people-to-people exchanges, as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest." However, the real area of cooperation would be in maintaining international rules of law deep in the Indian Ocean. Brunei is located in the South China Sea region, where China has a significant presence and has been increasingly threatening the bordering countries with its coercive tactics. These issues were raised by the Indian PM in his meeting with his Counterpart in Darussalam. The joint statement read, "Both leaders reiterated their commitment to work closely together in mutually beneficial areas to further strengthen the ASEAN - India Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Both leaders reiterated their commitment to maintaining and promoting peace, stability, maritime safety and security, as well as respecting freedom of navigation and overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce, consistent with international law, notably the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) 1982. The leaders also urged all parties to resolve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, particularly UNCLOS 1982."

The first state visit by an Indian PM to Brunei just months after taking charge for a third time is a long-term strategic move to secure India's interests for the future.

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

Unified pension scheme: Balancing the old and new



UTTAM GUPTA

Modi Government unveils unified pension scheme to bridge old and new, aiming to satisfy Central and State employees



On August 24, 2024, the Union government announced the new Unified Pension Scheme (UPS) for central government employees. In fact, what looked like a well-orchestrated action plan, on the following day the BJP-led government in Maharashtra approved the implementation of the Scheme for its employees. Madhya Pradesh government is likely to implement the UPS soon. The above announcements are in response to the earlier decisions of Opposition-ruled States, including Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh (before the November 2023 elections), Jharkhand, Himachal Pradesh (HP) and Punjab to revert to the old pension system (OPS) which it felt tilted the electoral pendulum towards those parties, particularly in HP. Fearing a repeat during the upcoming elections and Congress having already announced its intent to revert to OPS in Maharashtra, Modi seems to have gone for a preemptory move. Generally, employees of both the central and State governments who joined service after January 1, 2004, and are covered under the national pension scheme (NPS) have been uncomfortable with it. They have been demanding the restoration of the OPS which opposition-ruled states promised. Now, the Centre and BJP-ruled states have come up with the UPS hoping this will satisfy them. Will it? Under the OPS, retired employees received 50 per cent of their last drawn salary as a monthly pension. Just as the government offers its employees an adjustment in dearness allowance or DA to offset the increase in the cost of living, the monthly payouts of pensioners also increase to provide for DA. A government employee under OPS could not have got anything better. He was entitled to a decent 'pre-determined' monthly amount; the pension was fully protected against inflation and got it as long as he lived. After death, his wife gets the same amount for seven years and thereafter the family pension is around 60 per cent of this amount till she is alive. However, from the perspective of the government, the arrangement could not have been worse. Under OPS, there was an inherent tendency for pension liabilities to balloon



A GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEE UNDER OPS COULD NOT HAVE GOT ANYTHING BETTER. HE WAS ENTITLED TO A DECENT 'PRE-DETERMINED' MONTHLY AMOUNT; THE PENSION WAS FULLY PROTECTED AGAINST INFLATION AND GOT IT AS LONG AS HE LIVED

due to the addition to the pensioners' club every year, higher salaries of those joining, inflation indexation, increased longevity and so on. In 1990-91, the Centre's pension bill was Rs 3,272 crore. By 2020-21, it had jumped 58 times to Rs 190,886 crore. For all states, it shot up from Rs 3,131 crore in 1990-91 to Rs 386,001 crore in 2020-21 or 125 times.

Financial prudence requires that every year, the government set aside capital which together with return accruing thereon would create a growing corpus sufficient to pay for the pension liabilities on a sustainable basis thus avoiding any stress on the budget. But, that was never done. Instead, both the Centre and states have followed what in jargon is known as 'pay-as-you-go'. This has made the present generation of taxpayers bear the continuously rising burden of pensioners.

To deal with these pitfalls, the then UPA dispensation introduced the NPS for government employees joining service from January 1, 2004. Unlike OPS where the employee doesn't contribute anything, NPS is a contributory pension scheme under which employees contribute 10 per cent of their salary (Basic + DA). The government also contributes 14 per cent towards the employees' NPS accounts. The money is invested in multiple investment avenues i.e. equity, government bonds etc where it grows into a sizeable corpus by the time an employee reaches retirement age. On retirement, she is allowed to withdraw 60 per cent of the corpus (this is tax-free), and buy an annuity from the remaining 40 per cent. NPS offers a self-financing and fully funded arrangement for discharging pension liabilities in which the state knows 'how much it has to contribute'.

There won't be any major stress on the budget even as the employ-

ee gets a good pension depending on the contribution made, the age of joining, the type of investment, and the income accruing from that investment. The NPS is good for the fiscal health of the government. However, from the pensioner's angle, it doesn't match the OPS. Modi has brought a new UPS to bridge the gap between the two. Does it? Under UPS, which kicks in from April 1, 2025, employees who joined the service after January 1, 2004, and have worked for 25 years or more, after retirement, will be given 50 per cent of their basic average salary of the last 12 months as pension every month. However, employees who have served less than 25 years will get proportionately less or Rs. 10,000 per month minimum pension to employees who have served for a minimum of 10 years. If an employee dies on or before retirement, then the husband or wife will be given a pension, but the pension amount will be 60 per cent of the pension received by the employee immediately before her or his demise. Employees who have already retired or retiring on or before 31 March 2025, with arrears, will be eligible under UPS. The Scheme offers an adjustment in DA on assured pension, assured family pension and assured minimum pension. The DA will be calculated based on the All India Consumer Price Index for Industrial Workers (AICPI-IW) as in the case of service employees. How will the government fund it? It will build a pension corpus out of the employee contribution of 10 per cent (of basic pay plus DA) and the government's contribution of 18.5 per cent. The pension corpus will be divided into two portions: an individual pension fund (IPF) to which the employee's contribution of 10 per cent and matching government contribution will be credited; and a pool corpus created out of the

remaining 8.5 per cent contribution of the government.

The employee can exercise an investment choice for the IPF alone. The employees looking for higher pensions will have the option to get their pension monies (from IPF alone) invested in high-risk instruments for better returns. However, they will have to forego the UPS guarantees viz. monthly pension payouts of 50 per cent of the final service year's monthly pay, with full inflation adjustment. UPS guarantees will only be for those who opt for the "default investment option" which means an employee should leave it entirely to the government to manage the IPF besides the 'pool corpus'. The former has anyway no claim. Needless to say, the 'pool corpus' will be used to make up for the shortfall in the returns generated from the investment of the IPF to ensure a 50 per cent pension.

Under UPS, there is no provision for the return of capital to the heirs of the pensioner in the event of her death. This makes perfect sense as one can't have the cake and eat it too. The shift to UPS is a good move. It gives what the OPS gave even while preserving the good features of NPS like self-financing for discharging pension liabilities. It puts a little extra burden on the taxpayers being the extra 4.5 per cent of the government's contribution (18.5 per cent under UPS against 14 per cent under NPS). One wonders whether this will fully satisfy the employees. The answer is 'Yes' if they see reason. It will be 'No' if they don't. For instance, they could still argue under OPS, they were getting a 50 per cent pension without having to contribute even a Rupee whereas under UPS, an employee has to contribute 10 per cent of basic pay plus DA every month.

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

Cloud seeding, climate change, and agriculture: A call to action

While cloud seeding holds promise for supporting agricultural livelihood, this intervention also raises questions about its sustainability

The increasing severity of climate change makes it all the more urgent to consider creative ways to lessen its effect, particularly in vulnerable sectors like agriculture. One of the current alternatives is cloud seeding, a technical intervention designed to increase precipitation. While cloud seeding has the potential to alleviate drought, it also raises important considerations about sustainability, effectiveness, and long-term influence on agriculture. It is now up to us to investigate this developing practice and decide whether or not to incorporate it into our fight against climate change. Cloud seeding, which involves introducing compounds such as silver iodide



RACHNA LAKHPATRI

or even plain salt into the sky to increase cloud condensation and thus precipitation, is becoming a more popular practice in water-scarce places. The highest ideal that cloud seeding can achieve is increasing rainfall to replenish reservoirs and rivers, as well as soil moisture, all of which feed agriculture. However, cloud seeding has shown to be a vital weapon in combatting long-term

droughts, rescuing crops, and sustaining livelihoods in agriculture-dependent countries such as the United States, China, and the United Arab Emirates. Yet, cloud seeding will provide short relief, so climate change and its far-reaching effects on agriculture require a comprehensive adaptation and resilience strategy. Climate change is more than just a temperature rise; it includes changes in precipitation patterns, increasing frequency and severity of meteorological events, and variations in growing seasons. These changes pose serious threats to global food security, necessitating an integrated approach to adaptation and resilience building. This is where the challenge of

relying on cloud seeding for a solution arises. Though it seems like a quick answer for severe water shortages, its long-term viability and environmental impact are unknown. If not properly managed, the chemicals used in cloud seeding can hurt soil fertility, water quality, and even human health. This approach is unpredictable and dependent on meteorological circumstances, therefore it is not a fixed cure. Furthermore, cloud seeding doesn't address the underlying reasons for climate change. Agriculture is one area that is deeply connected with climate systems and cannot be solved just through technological means. Other key modalities for achieving cli-



mate change resistance include sustainable farming, which can be improved by effective irrigation systems, soil conservation, crop diversification, and the introduction of drought-resistant crop types. Furthermore, the topic of cloud seeding must address

a variety of ethical concerns. Who gets to pick where and when the clouds are seeded? What are the geopolitical consequences of influencing the weather? Seeding clouds over one location may inadvertently create adverse circumstances in another.

Determining these multifarious problems will necessitate a free and open worldwide conversation to ensure that this technology is used equitably and by justice values. Negotiating the tumultuous currents of climate change, and cloud seeding serves as both a beacon of hope and a warning lesson.

It demonstrates our ingenuity—the ability to think up something new when confronted with a challenge—while also conveying a message about our need to proceed with caution and planning. Agriculture is the lifeline of many communities around the world, particularly in developing countries, and its resilience is crucial to our shared future. While cloud seeding may serve

as a temporary solution to the impending problem of water scarcity and its impact on agriculture, it cannot replace truly effective techniques for combating the bigger challenge posed by global warming. If we want to ensure a future in which the Earth and all of its people thrive, we must make prudent investments in long-term mitigation methods centred on resilience, sustainability, and international collaboration. Let it be viewed as a severe challenge that requires immediate attention; it should raise consciousness and move us beyond symptomatic solutions to create a world that is robust and sustainable.

(The author is a freelance writer and a motivator; views are personal)

Hasina must stay silent in India till B'desh seeks her extradition: Yunus

PTI ■ DHAKA

Muhammad Yunus, the head of Bangladesh's interim government, has said that former prime minister Sheikh Hasina making political remarks from India is an "unfriendly gesture", asserting that she must remain silent to prevent the discomfort to both countries until Dhaka requests her extradition.

India for nearly four weeks has fuelled speculation in Bangladesh. When asked whether Bangladesh has communicated its stance to India, Yunus said it has been conveyed verbally and quite firmly that she should keep quiet.

India for nearly four weeks has fuelled speculation in Bangladesh. When asked whether Bangladesh has communicated its stance to India, Yunus said it has been conveyed verbally and quite firmly that she should keep quiet.

Top poll officials resign amid political transition

Dhaka (PTI): Bangladesh's entire five-member election commission, headed by Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal, resigned on Thursday, amid a massive political transition, marking the first time the country's Election Commission has stepped down before the completion of its scheduled term.

she has to be tried in front of everyone here," he emphasised. Discussing the future of the India-Bangladesh relationship, Yunus expressed a desire for good ties with India but insisted that New Delhi must abandon the narrative that only Hasina's leadership ensures the country's stability.

This is just an excuse. "The issue of trying to portray the conditions of minorities in such a big way is just an excuse," he said. The minority Hindu population has faced vandalism of their businesses and properties, as well as the destruction of Hindu temples, during the student-led violence that erupted following the ouster of Hasina.

improve the Indo-Bangla relations, Yunus said both the countries need to work together and it is on a downhill presently. "We need to work together to improve this relationship, which is now at a low," he said.

Suspect killed in Munich shootout was Austrian teen, police say

AP ■ MUNICH

The man killed in a shootout with police in Munich Thursday was an 18-year-old citizen of neighboring Austria, police said. Authorities believed he may have planned an attack on the Israeli Consulate in the city.

else was hurt, spokesperson Andreas Franken told reporters. There was no immediate information on the suspect's identity or on any motive, Franken said. The man, who was carrying an old make of firearm with a repeating mechanism, died at the scene.

to the incident. They increased their presence in the city, Germany's third-biggest, but said they had no indication of incidents at any other locations or of any other suspects. Five officers were at the scene at the time the gunfire erupted. Police later deployed to the area in force.

Pope, mosque imam make joint call to fight violence, protect planet

AP ■ JAKARTA

Pope Francis and the grand imam of Southeast Asia's largest mosque vowed Thursday to fight religiously inspired violence and protect the environment, issuing a joint call for interfaith friendship and common cause at the heart of Francis' visit to Indonesia.

that are officially recognized in Indonesia: Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism. Francis and the grand imam, Nasaruddin Umar, stood at the ground-level entrance to the "Tunnel of Friendship," an underpass which connects the mosque compound with the neighboring Catholic cathedral, Our Lady of the Assumption, Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, has held out the tunnel as a tangible sign of its commitment to religious freedom, which is enshrined in the constitution but has been challenged by repeated instances of discrimination and violence against religious minorities.

International noted on the eve of Francis' visit. Approaching the elevator to the tunnel, Francis said it was a potent sign of how different religious traditions "have a role to play in helping everyone pass through the tunnels of life with our eyes turned towards the light."

11-day, four nation journey through Southeast Asia and Oceania, to encourage it to combat religiously inspired violence and pledge the Catholic Church's commitment to greater initiatives of fraternity. The meeting at the mosque showed the personal side of the policy, with Francis and Umar — the 87-year-old pope and the 65-year-old imam — showing a clear affinity for one another.

papacy and prioritizes travel to majority Muslim nations to further the agenda. During a 2019 visit to the Gulf, Francis and the imam of Al-Azhar, the 1,000-year-old sect of Sunni learning, launched a "Human Fraternity" movement calling for greater Christian-Muslim efforts to promote peace around the world.

NDP's Jagmeet Singh pulls out of deal with Trudeau government

PTI ■ OTTAWA

Alleging that the Liberals are "too weak, too selfish and too beholden to corporate interests," NDP leader Jagmeet Singh has said he is terminating the supply-and-confidence agreement his party made with Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's Liberal government in Canada.

on. I'll let others focus on politics," Trudeau said. "I really hope the NDP stayed focused on how we can deliver for Canadians, as we have over the past years, rather than focusing on politics," the CBC News quoted Trudeau as saying.

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Foreign inflows lift markets high

PTI ■ MUMBAI
Benchmark equity indices Sensex and Nifty surrendered early gains to close lower for the second straight day on Thursday, tracking losses in the most valuable firm Reliance Industries, Bharati Airtel and L&T amid a sluggish trend in global markets.
The 30-share BSE Sensex failed to hold on to initial gains and declined 151.48 points or 0.18 per cent to settle at 82,237.29. During the day, it dropped 222.2 points or 0.26 per cent to 82,130.44. The NSE Nifty dipped 53.60 points or 0.21 per cent to 25,145.10 despite a positive beginning of the trade.
"Markets ended weak in a volatile trading session led by profit-taking in Reliance Industries. Globally, most of the equity indices were sluggish to mixed and are awaiting key US data on Friday, which would provide some hint on the Federal Reserve chief's likely stance on the interest rate in this month's policy announcement," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Reserve chief's likely stance on the interest rate in this month's policy announcement," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

Mahindra were other big laggards. In contrast, Titan, ITC, Infosys, HCL Technologies, Tata Steel and State Bank of India were among the biggest gainers.

declined 0.95 per cent, capital goods (0.61 per cent), industrials (0.38 per cent), power (0.37 per cent) and oil & gas (0.30 per cent). Healthcare, commodities, consumer discretionary, telecommunications, consumer durables, IT and tech were the gainers.
"Global stocks were largely muted on Tuesday as traders prepared for data releases that will offer insight about the health of the US economy and the Federal Reserve's interest rate path," Deepak Jasani, Head of Retail Research, HDFC Securities, said.
Asian markets, Seoul, Tokyo and Hong Kong settled lower, while Shanghai ended higher. European markets were trading mostly lower in mid-session deals. The US markets ended on a mixed note on Wednesday.
"The benchmark indices continued to trade with minor losses due to concerns of a slowdown in the US and Chinese economy.



Among the 30 Sensex firms, Reliance Industries declined over 1 per cent. Tata Motors, Nestle, Bharti Airtel, Bajaj Finance, Larsen & Toubro, JSW Steel and Mahindra &

In the broader market, the BSE smallcap gauge climbed by 0.56 per cent, and the midcap index rose by 0.27 per cent. Among the indices, realty

Rupee rises four paise against US dollar

PTI ■ MUMBAI
The rupee traded in a narrow range and settled for the day higher by 4 paise at 83.97 (provisional) against the US dollar on Thursday, on weakening of the American currency in the overseas market and an overall drop in crude oil prices.
Forex traders said the domestic unit witnessed a slight negative bias on weak global equities and concerns over global economic growth. Moreover, dollar demand from importers also dented investor sentiments.
At the interbank foreign exchange market, the local unit opened at 83.98 and witnessed an intraday high of 83.97 against the American currency.
The domestic unit finally settled for the day at 83.97 (provisional), higher by 4 paise over its previous close. On Wednesday, the rupee breached the crucial 84-mark for the second time within a



month and settled 3 paise lower at 84.01 against the American currency.
"The Indian rupee which continued to drop to a record low witnessed a range-bound trading session as it stayed wedged between negative global cues and intervention from the central bank," said Maneesh Sharma, AVP - Commodities & Currencies, Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers.
Sharma further noted that the rupee was pressured by dollar demand from importers for meeting their immediate and futures payments. There have been several instances since last month wherein the Reserve Bank defended the

rupee near 84 levels. According to Sharma, data from RBI also showed foreign exchange reserves hit a record high of USD 681.69 billion at the end of last month revealing the central bank has been buying dollars amid expectations of rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve.
With rising interest rate differentials from the US due to rate cuts to take place starting the current month, Indian rupee is expected to strengthen further in coming months. Overall we anticipate rupee to slightly strengthen in tomorrow trade to 83.90 - 83.85 sub levels amid expectations of rate cut to persist ahead of crucial non-

farm payrolls due to be released on Friday," Sharma said.
Meanwhile, the dollar index, which gauges the greenback's strength against a basket of six currencies, was down 0.15 per cent to 101.20 points.
Brent crude, the international benchmark, gained 0.74 per cent to USD 73.24 per barrel in futures trade. Forex traders said crude oil levels of USD 73 per barrel will act as a support for the domestic unit as India, the world's third-largest oil importer, stands to benefit from cheaper oil. In the domestic equity market, the 30-share BSE Sensex declined 151.48 points, or 0.18 per cent, to close at 82,201.16 points, while the Nifty was down 53.60 points, or 0.21 per cent, to 25,145.10 points.
Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs) were net buyers in the capital markets on Wednesday, as they purchased shares worth Rs 975.46 crore, according to exchange data.

Raymond Lifestyle shares slump on market debut

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Shares of Raymond Lifestyle Ltd got listed on the stock exchanges on Thursday following the demerger of retail and lifestyle businesses. The stock got listed at Rs 3,000 on the BSE. Later, it climbed 3.33 per cent to Rs 3,100 from its opening price. At the NSE, shares of the firm began the trade at Rs 3,020. However, the stock later hit the lower circuit level at Rs 2,850, down 5 per cent on the BSE.
At the NSE also, it hit the lower circuit limit of Rs 2,869, down 5 per cent.
The company's market valuation stood at Rs 17,363.23 crore during the morning deals. In a release on Tuesday, the company said it will get listed on the stock exchanges on September 5.



Following the demerger of its retail and lifestyle businesses, Raymond will have two listed entities.
The company plans to add 900 new outlets over three years. The Raymond Group's lifestyle business entity is eyeing a 15 per cent CAGR (Compound Annual Growth Rate) to attain around 7 per cent market share in the fast growing mens-wear wedding market by 2027, the release said.
"The demerger aims at unlocking shareholder value

by creating a focussed lifestyle business entity. Raymond Lifestyle will sharpen strategic focus in this fast-growing sector to become among the top three global fabric suppliers by the end of this year.
"The global scenario presents significant opportunities, particularly the challenges in China and Bangladesh and trade agreements with the UK, EU and Australia," Raymond Group Chairman and Managing Director Gautam Singhania said.

SAIL offers support for Critical Mineral Mission

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
SAIL, the country's largest Steel player, is willing to participate in the Critical Mineral Mission, which aims to secure the country's critical mineral supply chain by ensuring mineral availability from domestic and foreign sources, the company's Chairman Amarendu Prakash said on Thursday.
The Union Budget 2024-25 had proposed launching a Critical Mineral Mission for domestic production, recycling of critical minerals, and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets.
"FM Nirmala Sitharaman announced the Critical Mineral Mission. In that mission a lot of things will be discussed, all possibilities will be discussed. So we will be watching this and seeing what opportunities are there.
"As the Critical Mineral Mission expands and things get discussed, we will be watching and seeing if there are opportunities for exploring something on SAIL's part," the Chairman



told reporters on the sidelines of ISA Steel Conclave.
The Critical Mineral Mission aims to secure the country's critical mineral supply chain by ensuring mineral availability from domestic and foreign sources.
It also aims at strengthening the value chains by enhancing technological, regulatory, and financial ecosystems to foster innovation, skill development, and global competitiveness in mineral exploration, mining,

beneficiation, processing, and recycling.
So far, SAIL has been looking at minerals which are used for steel making, the Chairman said, adding that the critical minerals segment is a separate area. "We are not into that space (critical mineral) till now but since the government has announced a Critical Mineral Mission, we will just explore. We will look at it," he said. Critical minerals, such as cobalt, copper, lithium, nickel and rare earths, play a crucial

role in the production of clean energy technologies, from wind turbines to electric cars. The government had earlier said that it plans to provide financial incentives for development of critical minerals, including lithium. There will also be an emphasis on securing loans from multilateral financial institutions for the development of the sector.
The government will focus on global R&D collaboration across the critical minerals value chain.
To encourage the participation of Indian public and private sector companies in the acquisition of assets abroad, the government will provide targeted subsidies for mining, and for setting up evacuation infrastructure.
Besides, there are plans to ramp up the capacity of ICVL from current 2 million tonnes per annum (MTPA) to 4.5 MTPA in three to four years. Mozambique-based ICVL is a special purpose vehicle of SAIL, RINL, NMDC, CIL and NTPC for acquiring coal mines and assets overseas.

Meesho hires 8.5 lakh for festive season

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
E-commerce platform Meesho on Thursday said it has enabled 8.5 lakh seasonal jobs within its seller and logistics network ahead of the festive season, mostly in tier-3 and tier-4 regions. This marks a 70 per cent increase from the number of seasonal hiring last year, according to a company statement.
"This festive season, we are particularly thrilled to have enabled 8.5 lakh seasonal jobs, especially in tier-3 and beyond cities. Empowering SMBs, local manufacturers and logistics providers to scale their business is resulting in meaningful economic opportunities that is driving financial inclusion in these regions," said Sourabh Pandey, CXO, Fulfilment and Experience, Meesho. Meesho's sellers have hired 5 lakh seasonal workers as part of their requirements.

Mercedes eyes India as top luxury market

PTI ■ PUNE
German luxury car maker Mercedes-Benz India on Thursday said India has the potential to become one of the top five markets for its Maybach brand of cars in sales volume.
Launching the electric version of its first-ever all-electric Mercedes-Maybach in India, the company's managing director and CEO Santosh Iyer said the launch of the new car models Mercedes-Maybach EQS 680 SUV manifests the firm's ambition to lead in digital and electric mobility with a focus on ultra-luxury segment.
The Maybach EQS 680 SUV starts at Rs 2.25 crore onwards (all India ex-showroom).
"We have got into the top 10 markets in the world (in terms of sales numbers). We are the fastest growing. We would have done (sold) more



than 1,500 Maybach's across models," Iyer said.
Calling the brand very strategic and important for the company, Iyer said, "We would like India to further grow in this space. We would like to come in the top five for sure it is (only) a matter of time, we see the growth

potential for Maybach in India".
Stating that Mercedes-Benz is leading the charge in luxury electric mobility, he said the company's Battery Electric Vehicle (BEV) portfolio in the country is witnessing steady growth and increased sales.

Mercedes-Benz in India now offers five BEVs in its portfolio, including EQA, EQB, EQE SUV, EQS sedan and Maybach EQS 680 SUV.
"With the Mercedes-Maybach EQS SUV, we redefine automotive excellence in the age of electromobility.
The new launch manifests our ambition to lead in digital and electric, with a sharp focus on bolstering our top-end luxury offering.
"With the Mercedes-Maybach EQS SUV, we continue to hone our BEV portfolio further in India, offering a diverse choice for our discerning customers.
We strongly believe there can be no luxury without sustainability and Mercedes-Benz will continue to create the BEV ecosystem for transitioning to electromobility in the future," Iyer said.

Gold, silver prices surge

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Gold prices climbed by Rs 500 to Rs 74,100 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday due to fresh demand by jewellers amid a strong trend in the overseas markets.
The precious metal had closed at Rs 73,600 per 10 grams in the previous close on Wednesday.
Tracking gold, silver also rallied by Rs 1,000 to Rs 84,600 per kilogram on Thursday due to increased offtake from industrial units and coin makers, according to the All India Sarafa Association.
It had finished at Rs 83,600 per kg in the previous trade. In addition, gold of 99.5 per cent purity jumped by Rs 500 to Rs 73,750 per 10 grams from Rs 73,250. Domestically, traders



attributed the rise in gold prices to a strong trend in the international markets, which influenced the market sentiment to an increased buying from local jewellers.
On the overseas front, Comex gold rose 0.82 per cent higher to USD 2,546.80 per ounce. "The bullion advanced on Thursday following weaker-than-expected US job data,

which bolstered bets on steep rate cuts that provided support for non-yielding metals like gold," Saamil Gandhi, Senior Analyst of Commodities at HDFC Securities, said.
According to Manav Modi, Senior Analyst, Commodity Research, Motilal Oswal Financial Securities, Post the jobs data, market participants

have raised the odds of a Fed rate cut on September 18. The ADP employment report, a reading on the US services industry, and jobless claims data due later on Thursday are also on the radar, Modi added. Silver also trading higher at USD 29.07 per ounce in the international markets.
"Beige book survey released overnight on Wednesday showed economic activity was flat or declining across most regions in the US in recent weeks dousing any recession worries in the near term," Maneesh Sharma, AVP of Commodities & Currencies at Anand Rathi Shares and Stock Brokers, said.
Traders are placing their bets cautiously amid the upcoming non-farm payrolls report on Friday, which could provide more clarity on the size of interest rate cuts, Sharma added

India-EFTA trade deal moves forward

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Switzerland's federal cabinet has adopted the ambitious trade pact between India and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and placed it before Parliament as part of the ratification process.
The ambitious trade pact, signed in March between India and the European bloc comprising Norway, Switzerland, Iceland and Liechtenstein, aims at expanding trade across a range of areas, including pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, new technologies and machinery. Under the mega trade deal, the four European countries are looking at making an investment of USD 100 billion in India over the next 15 years. Each of the signatory countries will have to ratify the pact for its roll out. On Wednesday, the Federal

Council adopted a dispatch on the free-trade agreement between the EFTA states and India, the Swiss government said in a statement.
The Federal Council, which is the Swiss federal cabinet, is the highest executive authority in the country. The Swiss Parliament is expected to debate the dispatch in the upcoming winter or spring sessions, according to the statement.
"The agreement strengthens the competitiveness of Swiss exports in the world's most populous country," it said, describing the firming up of the trade pact with India as a significant milestone in Swiss trade policy. "In its dispatch, the Federal Council commends and sets out the content of the agreement and places it in the overall context of Switzerland's relations with India," the Swiss government said. It also explained the



significance of the trade pact. "India is now the world's most populous country. In particular, the growing middle class means that there is significant potential for growth. However, India still levies very high import duties on most products," it said.
The trade deal provides for eliminating custom duties for almost 98 per cent of the imports from India.
"After 16 years of negotiations, Switzerland and the other EFTA states have succeeded in becoming the first European partners to conclude an FTA with India," the Swiss readout said.
"When the agreement comes into force, 94.7 per cent of Switzerland's current exports to India will enjoy tariff relief, in some cases with transitional periods. This will strengthen the competitiveness of Swiss exports in India," it said. The agreement includes a

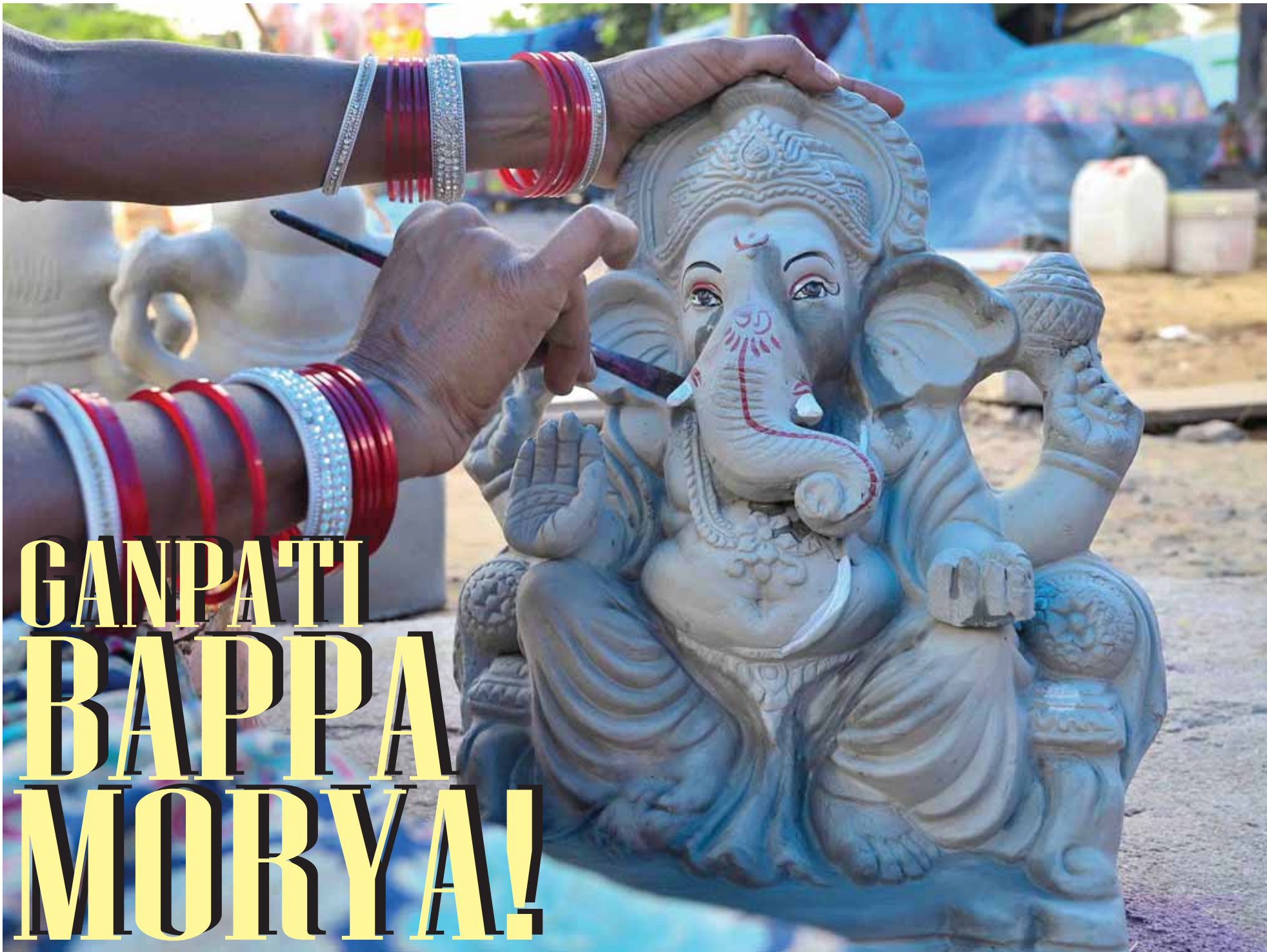
chapter on investment promotion and cooperation.
"For the first time in a free-trade agreement, the EFTA states are committing themselves to various promotional activities with the aim of increasing investment in India and thereby creating jobs," the readout said.
"India, for its part, is endeavouring to ensure a favourable investment climate," it added.
The statement said the EFTA is also the first partner with which India has agreed on a comprehensive and legally-binding chapter on trade and sustainable development.
"This chapter includes, among other things, a commitment not to deviate from applicable environmental and labour standards. It also establishes a specific sub-committee on trade and sustainable development," it said.



Suresh Prabhu nominated to WAF Board

PTI ■ NEW DELHI
Former Union Minister and Rajya Sabha member Suresh Prabhu on Thursday nominated to the World Agriculture Forum (WAF) Board. In a communication, Rudy Rabbinge, Chairman of WAF Board, said that Prabhu's expertise would be invaluable to the discussions that shape the future of the agri sector. "Given your role and respected position in the global food and agriculture arena, I believe you would be invaluable to the WAF Board.

Your insights and experience could greatly contribute to the forum's objectives," he said. The forum aims to function as a global body dedicated to advancing agricultural development on a worldwide scale. This initiative aims to bring together prominent thought leaders, innovators, policy-makers, business CEOs and heads of global institutions in the agricultural sector to address critical issues related to food and nutrition security, sustainable practices, and policy and trade agenda.



GANPATI BAPPA MORYA!

THE EXQUISITE ARTISTRY AND JOYOUS SPIRIT OF THE FESTIVAL



Experience the vibrant spirit of Ganesh Chaturthi in Pratap Bagh, Delhi, where artisans like Mohini and Rekha dedicate their craft to creating beautiful Ganesha idols. Witness the blend of artistry and devotion that transforms the streets into a festive haven, brimming with colour and celebration says **SAKSHI PRIYA**

Photos: Pankaj Kumar

Ganpati Bappa Morya! Ganpati Bappa Morya! The joyous chant fills the air, marking the arrival of Ganesh Chaturthi. This festival, dedicated to our beloved Lord Ganesha, transforms every corner into a lively celebration of devotion and creativity. Ganesh Chaturthi is a cherished Hindu festival that celebrates the birth of Lord Ganesha, the revered deity known for his wisdom and ability to remove obstacles. Observed with great enthusiasm across India, it turns streets and homes into vibrant centres of devotion.

FESTIVAL PREPARATIONS

Taking place in the Hindu month of Bhadrapada, usually in August or September, the festival's preparations begin well before the actual day. Homes are thoroughly cleaned and beautifully decorated and pandals are set up to welcome Lord Ganesha. These pandals, often adorned with colourful decorations, become the heart of the celebrations. Tomorrow, as the celebrations officially begin, the city will once again echo with the joyous chants of "Ganpati Bappa Morya!" On the day of Ganesh Chaturthi, people bring home clay idols of Lord Ganesha. These idols vary in size and style, from small, simple ones to large, elaborate figures. Each idol is carefully placed on an altar and decorated with flowers, fruits and other offerings, creating a sacred and festive atmosphere. A key part of the celebration is the daily puja or worship performed by devotees. This involves chanting prayers, offering modaks and flowers and seeking blessings from Lord Ganesha. The air is filled with the sounds of devotional songs, the scent of incense and the colours of vibrant decorations, all contributing to a sense of joy and community. As Ganesh Chaturthi draws near, Delhi's streets, especially in Pratap Bagh, come alive with joyous and vibrant energy. Street vendors and stalls overflow with intricately designed idols of Lord Ganesha, along with festive decorations and offerings. The air is filled with excitement as the community prepares for the celebration. In the heart of Pratap Bagh, preparing for Ganesh Chaturthi is not just a task but a heartfelt tradition. For months, artisans have dedicated themselves to crafting exquisite murtis (idols), each one a



labour of love and devotion.

In Pratap Bagh, the preparation for Ganesh Chaturthi is nothing short of a labour of love. For months, skilled artisans have poured their heart and soul into creating the most beautiful murtis of Lord Ganesha. Each idol is more than just a statue; it symbolises the devotion and creativity of its maker, embodying the rich cultural heritage of this cherished festival. The process begins with moulding clay into the shape of Lord Ganesha, a task requiring both skill and patience. Artisans like Mohini and Rekha have dedicated themselves to this craft, ensuring that every detail - from the delicate folds of Ganesha's trunk to the intricate patterns on his attire - is perfect. The clay idols are left to dry, a crucial step demanding precision, especially during the monsoon season when high humidity can pose a challenge. Once the base of the idol is ready, the real artistry begins. The idols are painted with vibrant colours and adorned with elaborate designs. Each brushstroke and embellishment

reflects the deep reverence the artisans hold for Lord Ganesha. The final touches, including beads and decorative fabrics, bring the idols to life, making them a feast for the eyes and a joy for the soul.

THE ARTISAN'S DEDICATION

The artisans of Pratap Bagh, like Mohini, Rekha, Sonu and Kamla, bring a unique blend of dedication, skill and devotion to their craft. Despite facing challenges such as rising costs of materials, intricate designs and financial uncertainties, they continue to pour their hearts into creating beautiful idols of Lord Ganesha. Their passion is truly inspiring, driven by both their love for their work and their deep devotion to the deity. Mohini's approach to her work is remarkable. She sources plain murtis from Kolkata and transforms them with her own hands, turning them into vibrant, beautifully decorated idols. "I personally select the pearl necklaces from Chandni Chowk," she explains, and her years of experience

allow her to complete each one in just 15 minutes. The transformation from a plain clay figure to a colourful deity, embellished with pearls and intricate designs, is a tribute to her expertise and devotion. Mohini's work reflects not just artistic skill but also a deep spiritual connection, infusing each idol with a unique sense of reverence and love. The prices of her creations range from as little as ₹300 to as much as ₹30,000 with most people opting for smaller idols for their homes, while larger ones are chosen for community pandals.

Rekha, an artisan from Pratap Bagh, has been dedicated to idol-making for many years, a tradition she proudly continues. She explains that it takes them about "4 to 5 months" to prepare these beautiful idols, highlighting the dedication and effort involved in each piece. "Everything is done by hand," she emphasises. From moulding the clay to carefully painting and decorating each idol, the entire process is meticulous and labour-intensive.

Walking through the lanes of Pratap Bagh, one cannot help but feel a deep sense of admiration seeing women like Mohini and Rekha leading their stalls. Every stall is filled with the bustling energy of women hard at work, their hands moving with practiced precision as they shape and paint the idols. It is a powerful sight, reflecting not just the artistry involved but also the empowerment of these women who bring beauty and devotion to life through their craft. The dedication of these artisans stands out as a remarkable example of resilience. They face many hardships, yet their pride and joy in their work remain evident. Their craft is more than just a job; it is a calling, a deep-rooted part of their identity that connects them to the community and the divine. Their work becomes a symbol of hope and strength, capturing the very essence of Ganesh Chaturthi - the celebration of new beginnings, perseverance and devotion.

THE BUSINESS AND THE CHALLENGES

For many artisans, Ganesh Chaturthi is not just a period of celebration but also a crucial time for their business. Crafting idols is a complex and costly process and the financial pressures can be intense. One artisan remarks, "The cost of materials and the time

invested in creating each idol is significant. We hope that the sales will cover these expenses and bring some profit." Sonu adds, "We often face challenges in selling the larger and more elaborate idols. Most customers prefer smaller ones, which are more affordable." Despite these financial hurdles, the artisans of Pratap Bagh persist, driven by their passion and commitment to their craft.

A FESTIVAL OF TOGETHERNESS AND JOY

The lively streets of Delhi transform into a canvas of vivid colours, resonating with the joyful sounds of celebration. The artisan's meticulous work infuses the festival with an atmosphere of joy and festivity. This festival is a time when families unite to welcome their idols into their homes, decorating them with care and participating in daily pujas with reverence. The sense of community is palpable as neighbours, friends and even strangers come together in shared devotion to Lord Ganesha. Ganesh Chaturthi forwards a spirit of togetherness, forging bonds that extend beyond the festivities and celebrating the unity and collective joy of the community.

WISHING YOU A JOYOUS GANESH CHATURTHI !

As the vibrant celebrations of Ganesh Chaturthi come alive with every chant of "Ganpati Bappa Morya," we send you our warmest wishes for a festival filled with joy, prosperity and divine blessings. May Lord Ganesha, with his benevolent presence and loving guidance, bring happiness and success into your life. This is the perfect time to embrace the spirit of the festival by indulging in the sweet delights of modaks - Lord Ganesha's favourite treat! As you savour these delicious offerings, let them symbolise the sweetness of life and the fulfilment of your deepest desires. May your home be filled with the sound of laughter and the spirit of togetherness and love. Celebrate with family and friends and may the blessings of Ganesh Chaturthi illuminate your path, dispelling any obstacles and guiding you towards new beginnings. Here's to a Ganesh Chaturthi that's as joyful and lively as the festivities themselves. *Ganpati Bappa Morya!* Enjoy the celebrations, the sweets and the company of loved ones.

Dharambir smashes Asian record for gold, Pranav takes silver in Paralympic

PTI ■ PARIS

Dharambir shattered the Asian record to win the gold medal while compatriot Pranav Soorma clinched the silver as Indian club throwers dominated the men's F51 event at the Paralympics here.

After four fouled attempts, the 35-year-old world champion Soorma bagged the bronze, courtesy a 34.18m throw in his second attempt. The F51 club throw event is for athletes who have movement affected to a high degree in the trunk, legs and hands. All the competitors compete while seated and rely on their shoulders and arm to generate power.

From paralysis to Paralympic glory, Dharambir faced a life-altering accident when a misjudged



diver into a canal left him paralyzed from the waist down. Para-sports gave him a new direction in life when he was introduced to it by fellow para-athlete Amit Kumar Saroha.

Within two years, Dharambir qualified for the 2016 Rio Paralympics, marking the beginning of a successful career. He has since earned multiple medals for India, including a silver at the 2022 Asian Para Games.

A cricket and roller hockey enthusiast, Soorma too was just another teenager when a cement sheet fell on his head when he was 16, leaving him paralyzed after causing a severe spinal cord injury. Support of his family and a positive mindset helped him to turn to meditation and academics, where he excelled with 91.2 per cent in his 12th board exams.

He then pursued a postgraduate degree from the Delhi School of Economics and secured a job as an Assistant Manager at the Bank of Baroda.

Pranav rediscovered his love for sports through para-athletics and soon received success as he won a silver medal at the 2019 Beijing Grand Prix, a gold medal at the Serbia Open 2023, and both gold and silver medals at the Tunisia Grand Prix 2022.

He also produced a record-setting throw at the Asian Para Games 2023, where he won gold in the men's club throw F51 event.

India's focus will be on self improvement: Rishabh Pant



PTI ■ BENGALURU

Wicketkeeper-batter Rishabh Pant warned against taking Bangladesh lightly in the upcoming two-Test series, and stressed on the need for India to keep improving themselves to stay ahead of the competition.

Bangladesh, who recently blanked Pakistan 2-0 at Rawalpindi, will face Rohit Sharma's side in the first Test at Chennai from September 19 before moving to Kanpur.

India will play a total of 10 Tests within the next five months as the series against Bangladesh will be followed by three Tests against New Zealand at home in October-November before moving to Australia for the five-Test Border-Gavaskar Trophy.

"Asian countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka perform well in Asian conditions because they are accustomed to the wickets," Pant told Jio Cinema.

"As the Indian cricket team, we focus solely on our own standards and how we can improve. Regardless of the opposition, we strive to play with the same intensity and give our 100 per cent every single day," he said.

Pant said no series can be taken lightly with the margins between the teams decreasing in international cricket.

"Pressure will always be there because in international cricket, you can't take any series lightly. The margin between winning and losing is very small, and nowadays, the gap between international teams isn't much either," he said.

Pant said playing in the

Jannik Sinner beats Daniil Medvedev to reach the semifinals

AP ■ NEWYORK

Top-ranked Jannik Sinner reached the U.S. Open semifinals for the first time by getting past 2021 champion Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 1-6, 6-1, 6-4 on Wednesday night. Sinner, who took over as the title favorite after Week 1 exits by Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz, is the only man remaining in the field with a Grand Slam trophy.

He won his first at the Australian Open in January by beating Medvedev in the final in five sets after dropping the first two.

As reflected by the accurate-as-can-be score, this matchup was unusually topsy-turvy as they took turns dominating a set at a time. First, it was Sinner who



was superior. Then that role was played Medvedev. Then Sinner regained the upper hand in the third. In the fourth, from 3-all, Sinner surged, saving a pair of

break points, then breaking Medvedev to lead 5-3. Sinner - a 23-year-old from Italy who was cleared in a doping case less than a week before the U.S. Open started after testing positive twice for trace amounts of an anabolic steroid in March - will go up against No. 25 Jack Draper of Britain on Friday for a berth in the title match.

That day's other semifinal will be No. 12 Taylor Fritz vs. No. 20 Frances Tiafoe in the first all-American men's matchup at this stage at a major in 19 years. The women's semifinals Thursday night are Jessica Pegula vs. Karolina Muchova, and Aryna Sabalenka vs. Emma Navarro. Pegula eliminated No. 1 Iga Swiatek 6-2, 6-4 on Wednesday. The 22-year-old

Draper reached his first Grand Slam semifinal - and became the first British man to get that far at Flushing Meadows since Andy Murray won the 2012 trophy - by overwhelming No. 10 Alex de Minaur 6-3, 7-5, 6-2. Draper has won all 15 sets he's played so far, but things figure to get tougher against Sinner.

This is not kind of like an overnight thing for me. I've believed for a long time that I've been putting in the work and doing the right things, and I knew that my time would come," said Draper, whose upper right leg was taped by a trainer after he felt something at the end of the first set. "I didn't know when it would be, but hopefully from here, I can do a lot of amazing things."



Buttler out of T20 series against Australia, could miss ODIs

AP ■ LONDON

England white-ball captain Jos Buttler was ruled out of the Twenty20 series against Australia because of a right calf injury on Thursday and might also miss the one-day series between the teams, too.

Buttler has been replaced in the T20 squad by Jamie Overton, while Phil Salt will take over as captain.

The three-match T20 series begins on Wednesday.

The five-match ODI series starts on Sept. 19 so Buttler has two weeks to recover. Batter Jordan Cox has been added to the ODI squad as cover in case Buttler doesn't make it.

England T20 squad: Phil Salt (captain), Jofra Archer, Jacob Bethell, Brydon Carse, Jordan Cox, Sam Curran, Josh Hull, Will Jacks, Liam Livingstone, Saqib Mahmood, Dan Mousley, Jamie Overton, Adil Rashid, Reece Topley, John Turner.

England ODI Squad: Jos Buttler (captain), Jofra Archer, Gus Atkinson, Jacob Bethell, Harry Brook, Brydon Carse, Jordan Cox, Ben Duckett, Josh Hull, Will Jacks, Matthew Potts, Adil Rashid, Phil Salt, Jamie Smith, Reece Topley, John Turner.

Kapil Parmar to compete for bronze in judo



PTI ■ PARIS

India's Kapil Parmar lost to Iran's S Banitaba Khorram Abadi in the 60kg (J1) men's para judo semifinals of the Paralympics and will now compete for the bronze medal, here on Thursday.

The 24-year-old Parmar was beaten 0-10 in semifinals A by his Iranian opponent here at the Champs-de-mart arena.

The J1 class in para judo is for the athletes who suffer from no to very low visual activity. Athletes in this category wear red circles to indicate that they may need guided support before, during and after a contest.

Parmar, who won the silver medal at the 2022 Asian Games in the same category, had ear-

New Zealand arrive in India for one-off Test against Afghanistan



PTI ■ NEW DELHI

New Zealand arrived here on Thursday ahead of their one-off Test against Afghanistan, scheduled to be played in Greater Noida from September 9.

The one-off Test, the first red-ball fixture between the two nations, will be held at the Greater Noida Sports Complex Ground.

The BlackCaps have named a strong side for the Test against Afghanistan. Veteran pacer Tim Southee will lead the team which includes the likes of former

I was trying to play close to my body to counter swing and cut: Centurion Musheer



PTI ■ BENGALURU

After underscoring his talent with a robust hundred, Musheer Khan on Thursday said he centred his batting strategy around playing close to the body to nullify the pronounced movement of the ball in overcast conditions. Musheer's unbeaten 105 rescued India B after India A bowlers reduced them to 94 for seven on the first day of the Duleep Trophy match at the Chinnaswamy Stadium. India B finished the day at 202 for seven. "I wanted to play as many balls as possible without thinking too much about runs. I

wanted to bat the whole day, and I was taking it session by session. The ball was swinging and cutting when I came to bat," Musheer said in the post-day press meet.

"So, I was trying to play the ball as close to my body as possible, and was looking to avoid those risky shots. I knew runs would eventually come," he added.

But Musheer was not alone in his rescue mission as late-order batter Navdeep Saini helped him add 108 runs for the unbroken eighth wicket alliance. "When wickets were falling at the other end, I told myself to play intelligently and look for a partnership. Then Saini bhai gave me a lot of confidence saying he will play whether it is two balls or six balls in an over, and just keep faith in him."

ONE ARROW AT A TIME

Making of paralympic champion archer Harvinder Singh

PTI ■ PARIS

Dealing with the unexpected, whether in archery or life in general, is no big deal for Harvinder Singh. He has aced the anticipation game thanks to the hard lessons that came his way.

The 33-year-old from Haryana, who scripted history by becoming the first Indian archer to win a Paralympic gold, has impaired legs owing to a dengue treatment gone wrong when he was just one year old but instead of lamenting his fate, he chose to become bigger than his circumstances.

Harvinder's journey to Paralympic glory began with a bronze three years back in Tokyo, which made him the first Indian to finish on the Games podium.

On Wednesday, he showed neither fatigue nor nerves to secure five back-to-back wins in a day to bag his second successive Paralympic medal in recurve open category, bettering the previous performance by quite a mar-



gin. All his achievements are a first in Indian archery. And when he is not shooting down medals, Harvinder is busy pursuing a Ph.D in economics. "In the last few months, I was shooting very well in practice, more than the world record in qualification. Here, I finished ninth (in the ranking

round), and my confidence went a little bit down. Anyway, I focused on the matches because anything could happen," Harvinder was quoted as saying by 'World Archery'.

"Archery is a game of unexpected. Everything can happen. I focused on every arrow. Only the next arrow

counts," said Harvinder, who reserved his best for the final, nailing three 10s in his last four arrows to knock out his 44-year-old opponent from Poland Lukasz Ciszek 6-0 (28-24, 28-27, 29-25). His was India's second medal in archery at the ongoing Games after Sheetal Devi and Rakesh Kumar combined for the compound mixed team bronze.

Harvinder what works best for him is to stay in the moment and think too far ahead.

"I was just focusing on my next match. Only that way, I could move to the next round, and one by one, I moved to the final. And eventually won gold," he broke down the process. Three years back in Tokyo, Harvinder who hails from Ajitnagar in Kaithal district of Haryana, could not realise his dream of a gold.

He said his teammates had a role to play in instilling belief in him that he could aim for the top podium finish. "In Tokyo, I won bronze, so I'm happy I could change the colour of my medal.

Before the (Paris) Games, everybody told me I had a chance to reach gold, and I'm happy I was able to," said Harvinder, who comes from a farming family. Harvinder's consistency and his monk-like demeanour ensured that he lost no more than three points in each of his matches.

The archer, who started taking interest in the sport after watching the action on TV during London Olympics, said that he felt "blessed". "It feels fantastic. I'm just blessed to achieve this fold for India," he said after the medal ceremony.

Harvinder's mantra is to always aim for a '10' with his final arrow, something he says, helped him achieve his goal in Paris.

If you have confidence, you can learn the arrow. Sometimes it can slip to nine, but you always have to finish with a 10, because it's your last arrow. In my matches and many situations, I landed my last arrow in a 10. I focused on my last arrow," he said.

OFFICE OF THE PANCHAYAT SAMITI, PODDA
A-118
No. 2474
TENDER CALL NOTICE No. 02/2024-25 DATED 03.09.2024 / Date: 03.09.2024

The Block Development Officer, Podda invites Percentage Rate bids in Single cover System for the civil work as detailed in the following table, from eligible class of contractors as mentioned under column-8 (eight) registered with the State Governments and Contractor of equivalent Grades/Class Registered with Central Government / MES / Railways. The proof of registration from the appropriate authority shall be enclosed along with the Bid. If successful, the bidder who has not registered under State Government has to register under the State PWD in appropriate class of eligibility before signing of the agreement for the following works eventually to be drawn up in the P.W.D. P-2 forms in conformity with the Detailed Tender Call Notice.

Sl. No.	Name of the G.P.	Name of the Work	Amount paid to Tender (in Rs.)	Cost of Tender Paper (in Rs.)	E.M.D. (in Rs.) (1%)	Work Completion Period	Class of Contractor
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1	Similimbachha	Construction of GPF office Building with Market Complex at Similimbachha	22,22,548.00	6,000.00	22,225.00	04(four) months	'C' & 'B'

Sale of tender paper: The tender documents can be seen from the Govt. website malkangiri.odisha.gov.in only from 06.09.2024 to 21.09.2024 (upto 05:00 PM). No Tender paper will be sold by the Block Office, Podda or any other offices. Interested bidders will download the bid documents from the same web site only <http://malkangiri.odisha.gov.in>.

Place and date of receipt of tender Paper (Panchayat Samiti), Podda from 06.09.2024 to 21.09.2024 (upto 05:00 PM) through Registered/Speed post only (office hour from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM, Except Sunday and public holidays).

Place and date of opening of tender paper (Panchayat Samiti), Podda on 23.09.2024 at 11:00 AM.

Mode of receipt of tender paper : Registered/Speed post only (India Post)

For details of schedule of rates, Tender documents, terms & conditions and corrigendum can be seen from the Govt. website www.malkangiri.odisha.gov.in only from 06.09.2024 to 21.09.2024 (upto 05:00 PM). No Tender paper will be sold by the Block Office, Podda or any other offices. Interested bidders will download the bid documents from the same website online i.e. www.malkangiri.odisha.gov.in.
ODPW-193811100042425

GOVT. OF ODISHA, e-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
DEPARTMENT OF WATER RESOURCES
E-PROCUREMENT NOTICE
A-269
E-mail: eesddivision@gmail.com, Phone : 0674-2395390
BID IDENTIFICATION NO.-02/2024-25

The Executive Engineer, Support Services Division, Bhubaneswar on behalf of Govt. of Odisha invites bid in Single Cover system in ONLINE MODE from eligible manpower service provider as detailed below :

- Number of Works : Engagement of Office Assistant (Skilled) & Service Personnels (Skilled & Semi-Skilled) through service provider on outsourcing basis for O/o the Executive Engineer, Support Services Division, Bhubaneswar for the year 2024-25 (01.10.2024-29.03.2025).
- Estimated Cost (excluding Service Charges & GST) : Rs. 9.70 Lakh (Approx.)
- Paper Cost : Rs. 4,000.00
- E.M.D. : Rs.10,000.00
- Class of Contractor : Human Resources Supply
- Date & Time of availability of Bid Documents : 07.09.2024 to 16.09.2024 up to 05.30 PM in the Portal
- Last Date & Time of Online Bidding : 16.09.2024 up to 05.30 PM
- Date & Time of Opening of Bid : 17.09.2024 at 04.00 PM
- The Bidders have to participate in ONLINE bidding only and required to send uploaded hard copy to this office after opening of bid. Further details can be seen from the website: <https://tender.odisha.gov.in>. Any addendum/ corrigendum/ cancellation of tender can also be seen in the said site.

Sd/-
Executive Engineer,
Support Services Division
Bhubaneswar.

OIPR-32447/11/0004/2425